Stoking the fires of social justice

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded a grant of £58,700 for an 18-month project to archive and celebrate the life and work of George Garrett (1896-1966). Garrett was a Liverpool-born ship's stoker and writer championed by George Orwell and left-wing literary journalists in the 1920s and 30s.

The project will be run by Writing on the Wall (WoW), a Liverpool-based community organisation that runs writing projects, competitions and festivals.

The project aims to highlight the importance of Garrett's work as a political organiser and activist and to bring his writing, which included short stories, essays, autobiographical fragments and plays, to a wider audience.

Garrett was radicalised by his first-hand experience of poverty and unemployment both in his early years in Liverpool and abroad. He ran away to sea, but used his gift for writing to highlight social injustices, particularly in the United States and Argentina, where he joined the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the Wobblies, in 1918. He was blacklisted as a Communist and struggled to find work thereafter.

WoW will explore Garrett's life and writings with Garrett's family and volunteers, through a series of workshops and field trips, supported by archive and conservation staff from Liverpool Records Office. Participants will learn digital, conservation and oral history skills and techniques to help create a physical and web-based digital archive and a Wikipedia page.

The material archive will have a permanent home at the newly-refurbished Liverpool City Library, with selected manuscripts and items on permanent public display and an accessible archive for researchers and writers. A mobile display will tour festivals, schools and colleges. The project also aims to produce a ten-minute film of Garrett's life, and the first-ever staging of one of his plays.

"Garrett is now rightly regarded as one of the most notable working class writers of his time," says project director, Mike Morris. "The archive will provide a significant body of material that links Liverpool's literary, cultural, political, theatrical and maritime history, including possible new material we may discover as part of the project. It's exciting to be rediscovering his incredible life and achievements, and we hope the project will inspire a new generation of writers."

Helping to announce this good news today is Tiffany Hunt, who has just been appointed as the new Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund North West Committee. Tiffany said: "Saving our historic archives is important as they provide such a valuable resource for anyone wanting to explore their past. The George Garrett archive is bursting with stories and pictures that give us clues about what Garrett's life and work and how he helped shape Liverpool into the great place it is today."

Notes to editors

Members of HLF's Committee for the North West are chosen for their wide range of experience and local knowledge. Responsible for making decisions on regional applications to the fund from £50,000 to £2million, the committee are supported by the regional HLF team for the North West, who operate from Manchester based offices.

Tiffany Hunt, Lancastrian by origin, studied history at the University of Kent and completed a postgraduate course in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at the University of Manchester before becoming the Deputy Curator of the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum. In 1982, Tiffany joined the National Trust, and in the course of her career with the trust held various regional and national roles based in Yorkshire, London, Northumbria and the North West. She now lives in Cumbria. Tiffany is an Associate of the Museums Association, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Leeds graduate of Common Purpose.

Further information

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