Women & Theatre share the stories of First World



Women in a Small Heath factory during the First World War

Women's Work will bring together women aged from 18 – 65 to carry out heritage research using archive and oral history techniques focusing on the Small Heath area of Birmingham, home of First World War Birmingham Small Arms (BSA) factory. Project participants will develop and be part of a new piece of theatre, creating a touring exhibition and a digital archive connecting modern audiences with the stories of female factory workers during the conflict.

Women interested in taking part, and those with stories to share about their female ancestors during the First World War, are invited to attend an Inspiration Day at Small Heath Library on 21 January between 10am and 3pm. During the day Women & Theatre will share artefacts including oral recordings and documents from Birmingham archives and local historian Dr Chris Upton will deliver a talk about the history of the BSA factory and the inclusion of women in the workforce.

The Inspiration Day will be followed by an Oral History Drop In Session which will take place at Small Heath Baptist Church on 24 January giving members of the public another opportunity to share stories about their female ancestors working in Birmingham factories.

Janice Connolly, Artistic Director of Women & Theatre, said: "It is exciting to be embarking on a First World War centenary project which will bring the female voice into focus, particularly with such strong connections to the work of

female factory workers in Small Heath during the First World War. We look forward to uncovering stories that tell us more about life in the factories and the impact the conflict had on the women on the home front."

Reyahn King, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: "The impact of the First World War was far reaching, touching and shaping lives on both the Western Front and the Home Front. We're pleased to support this project which will see a number of volunteers gain heritage skills and put the lives and stories of Small Heath's female wartime workers in the spotlight."

During the project, participants will visit the BSA factory site, carry out oral history interviews with relatives of factory workers and access the Library of Birmingham's First World War collections working with a professional archivist. Following the research process, participants will collaborate with theatre professionals to produce a new performance piece which will depict a day in the life of a female factory worker.

Women's Work is a sister project to successful 'The Chocolate Soldiers' which Women & Theatre created in 2013/14 with funding from HLF. This involved young men carrying out research into the lives and experiences of men like them who lived 100 years ago and were recruited to fight in the First World War.

Women's Work is funded by HLF as well as by Birmingham City Council, The Roughley Trust, The Grimmitt Trust and The Cole Charitable Trust.

For further information on the Inspiration Day and how you can get involved visit the Women and Theatre website or contact Women & Theatre on tel: 0121 449 7117.

Notes to editors

Women's Work – Inspiration Day
Date: 21 January 2015, 10am – 3pm.
Small Heath Library, Muntz Street, Birmingham, B10 9RX
The Inspiration Day is an opportunity for interested women to come along and find out more about the project. Women & Theatre will share artefacts including oral recordings and documents from Birmingham archives. In the afternoon, local historian Dr Chris Upton will deliver a talk about the history of the BSA factory and the inclusion of women in the workforce.

Women's Work - Oral History Research Drop In Session
Date: 24 January 2015, 2pm – 4pm
Small Heath Baptist Church, 14 Jenkins Street, Small Heath, Birmingham, B10 0QH
Members of the public are invited to share stories of female ancestors working in Birmingham Factories.

Key project dates
Sunday 29th March 2015: theatre performances take place in Small Heath – more details to follow.
April – June 2015: A touring exhibition about the project and its findings will be launched at Small Heath Library before touring to 3 other local community libraries in Birmingham. Details to be confirmed.

Women & Theatre
Women & Theatre is an award-winning Birmingham-based company and registered charity which has been pioneering new ways of addressing contemporary issues through performance since 1983. The company creates engaging drama, which promotes the spiritual, social, physical and mental wellbeing of the whole community. Women & Theatre aim to

reflect the language and lives of ordinary people, giving voices to those not usually heard.