

The Wells-Brimtoy factory in Somers Rd, Walthamstow Vestry House Museum

A project engaging young people with learning disabilities with the toy-making heritage of Walthamstow is set to get underway, thanks to an HLF grant of £48,500.

The Fun Factory project, run by The Limes Community and Children's Centre, will explore the rich local history of the Wells Brimtoy toy factory in Somers Road, Waltham Forest, by recording oral histories, creating a film and holding hands-on toy-making workshops.

A world-leading manufacturer

Alfred Wells began manufacturing tinplate toys in 1919 and established the factory in Somers Road in 1924. The acquisition of Brimtoy in 1932 created one of the UK's largest toy firms, producing some of country's best-loved children's toys.

When the factory closed in the 1980s, the loss had a profound effect on the local area, which lost a huge source of employment and local pride.

Capturing memories

The memories of local residents who worked at or remember the factory will be recorded and used to create a film to be shown in local schools. It is hoped that this will boost modern-day residents' understanding of factory life and its impact on the area, as well as giving young people with learning disabilities the chance to learn new skills and build relationships.

[quote=Stuart Hobley, Head of HLF London]"We all remember those must-have toys of childhood, but did you ever think about who made the toys?"[/quote]

Each participant will be 'buddied up' with people from local youth forums and a host of volunteering opportunities will be opened up for other residents. Participants will even get a chance to try making toys themselves, inspired by original Brimtoy models, many of which are now collectibles.

Young people will also experience behind-the-scenes visits to Vestry House Museum where they can study and research the Wells Brimtoy exhibits in their collection. Another partner of the project, Age UK, will help to facilitate lunches with older residents, hosted by young people, where they can voice and share their experiences.

Stuart Hobley, Head of HLF London, said: "We all remember those must-have toys of childhood, but did you ever think about who made the toys? Walthamstow was once home to one of the UK's largest toy firms and the industry employed thousands of local people. Thanks to National Lottery players, this project will engage young people with the area's significant toy-making heritage through a range of immersive activities and preserve these important memories for future generations."

Find out more on The Limes Community and Children's Centre website.