



Tuesday 19 March 2013

PRESS RELEASE

Museum Fundraising Floats Birchills Boat

- £62,000 raised to restore historic boat
- Last surviving wooden joey with day cabin

Black Country Living Museum in Dudley is celebrating raising £62,000 which will be used to recreate history at the award-winning destination. Birchills, one of the UK's last surviving wooden joey boats as listed on the National Register of Historic Ships, has been thrown a lifeline with a cash boost that ensures vital restoration work gets the go ahead.

Donations from The Headley Trust, PRISM (Preservation for Industrial and Scientific Materials) Fund, William A Cadbury Charitable Trust and the Rowlands Trust, as well as individual donations will breathe new life into the historic vessel which was built in 1953 by Ernest Thomas of Walsall and worked on the run to nearby Birchills Power Station.

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Carolyn Sankey, Director of Development at Black Country Living Museum said: "The generosity of our donors will allow the Museum to preserve another fascinating piece of Black Country heritage. The money will allow us to repair damage to the stern end and conserve the hull in general, so that floating can be maintained and it can actively be used for the public to learn from and enjoy, allowing us to further engage our visitors through our wonderful collections."

Jo Temple of the Headley Trust said: "The Headley Trust is delighted to support this project. Birchills is an important part of the UK's industrial and maritime heritage and once restored will help provide an exciting array of activities depicting the working boats and canal traditions of the Black Country."

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A substantial programme of work will commence later in the spring and will involve stabilisation, some reconstruction, restoration and cosmetic work. Given the specialised nature of the work, the majority of the project will be undertaken by external experts experienced in the construction and restoration of wooden canal boats and traditional cabins, although Museum volunteers will also work alongside them to acquire basic skills in wooden boat conservation.

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Jo Moody, Senior Curator, Black Country Living Museum said: "Preservation of the region's heritage is an important part of what we do at the Museum. Visitors will be able to see first hand the restoration work undertaken on the cabin and paintwork. "

Once restored to its former glory Birchills will join the Museum's general exhibitions and a costumed demonstrator will illustrate life aboard the traditional boat. Birchills will feature in Museum events such as the Boaters' Gathering as well as other local boat shows thus ensuring that a long-forgotten way of life and authentic part of Black Country's industrial history is preserved for future generations.

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Photo Opportunities

Image attached. **Note to Editors:**

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About the Museum

Black Country Living Museum is one of the UK's leading open air museums. Attracting over 290,000 visitors each year to an astonishing 26 acre site just two miles from the town centre of Dudley, it captures and admires the achievements and culture of the region's past and the extraordinary impact this had on the wider world. With its thriving village spanning 170 years of history from c1770 to the 1940s, canal, tram way, school, public park and fairground, alongside the energy of an industrial landscape of mining, steam power, heavy metalwork and lime kilns, the Museum offers a visitor experience that few others can match. We also have one of the best fish and chips shops for miles around!

For further information please contact:

Fiona Carding, Media Relations Executive Tel: 0121 521 5692 Mobile: 07901 575995 Fiona.carding@bclm.com

