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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Stagestruck Museum Appeals for Memories and Photographs**

The Black Country Living Museum is hoping that readers can shine the spotlight on a missing link in the historic story of the Cradley Heath women chainmakers. The Museum which began reconstruction work on the Workers' Institute in July of this year, would like to find out more information about the Institute's auditorium stage.

During its early years the Institute stage had various uses. For example, it was used for political meetings, theatrical productions and as a cinema. The cinema, which was known as Pictureland, proved particularly popular. Between 1915 and 1933 it would have cost just 1 penny to watch a moving picture show. Children of the day could attend Saturday morning picture shows and enjoy cowboy films, as well as cinema greats like Charlie Chaplin and Laurel & Hardy.

Dr. Lynn Sinclair, Women's History Curator said: "We're hoping that some of these former cinema-goers and amateur-dramatics enthusiasts may have memories or even photographs of what the stage looked like. This would help ensure an accurate reconstruction of the stage itself."

The opening of the Majestic Cinema in Cradley Heath was the beginning of the end for

Pictureland and the 'stute closed its doors to cinema-goers in 1933. It re-opened as a venue for boxing and snooker. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s theatre groups such as the Curtain Players and amateur operatic societies continued to 'tread the boards' on the auditorium stage.

Dr. Lynn Sinclair, Women's History Curator said; "It's possible there may be in existence newspaper reviews of some of the plays and operas which show the cast performing on stage. People may even have cut them out and pasted them into scrapbooks as keepsakes."

The Museum would like to hear from anyone who has any recollections of what the building was used for between 1933 and 1955, where a gap appears in the Institute's history. In 1956 The General Post Office took over the ground floor of the building when, it is believed, the stage may have been removed. The Museum would also like to hear from anyone who might have photographs of the interior of the Workers' Institute building in order to gain an idea of how rooms and offices might have looked during the building's history.

The Workers' Institute was built in 1912 from the surplus proceeds of the strike fund originally set up in support of the women chainmakers during their famous ten week 'lock out'. A £1.535 Million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund secured the reconstruction of the 'stute at the Black Country Living Museum where it will become the second largest building on the 26-acre site.

Dr Lynn Sinclair, Women's History Curator said: "The building's 450 seater auditorium will

become a new learning and activity space. The 'stute will finally achieve Mary Macaurther's original vision as being a 'centre of social activity, education and entertainment'."

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