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PRESS RELEASE

Trade Union Heroines Remembered at Chainmakers' Centenary Festival Saturday 18 September

The pioneering work of a formidable group of Black Country women will be honoured at the Women Chainmakers' Festival held at the Black Country Living Museum on Saturday September 18, 2010. The event celebrates the 1910 Women Chainmakers strike –100 years after the women, led by Mary Macarthur, marched for better pay and shaped industrial relations in Britain. The main speaker at the TUC organised event will be former cabinet minister the Right Honourable Tony Benn.

Benn, who is the longest-serving Labour MP in the history of the party, retired from the House of Commons in 2001 after 50 years in Parliament to 'devote more time to politics'. He said:"The Chainmakers' dispute, 100 years ago this year, was a classic trade union battle led by women who inspired the whole trade union movement. This year we will be remembering that battle and honouring those who fought it."

Cheryl Pigeon, TUC Regional Secretary said: "The Chainmakers struggle for a minimum wage marked a turning point in the campaign for better pay for women workers. The lessons from the Chainmakers are still with us today in campaigns to improve pay and working conditions for all workers."

In 1910 the Women Chainmakers of Cradley Heath won a fight to establish the right to a fair wage following a bitter 10 week dispute. This landmark victory changed the lives of thousands of workers who were earning starvation wages. The employers and unions agreed to a minimum wage of two-and-a-half pence an hour - an amount which equaled a 150 percent pay increase for the poorest of workers

Andrew Lovett, Director and Chief Executive of the Black Country Living Museum commented: “It has been said that the Cradley Heath Workers’ Institute – now part of the Black Country Living Museum – is the last physical reminder of the Women Chainmakers’ Strike of 1910. That may be so – but the more important legacy is the fairer treatment of working people and the development of a more respectful and tolerant society – one that isn’t built on a kind of semi-slavery of others.”

The story of Mary Macarthur and the Women Chainmakers will be brought to life through stirring speeches, historic re-enactments, theatre and music. The highlight of the day will be a re-creation of the strike march when the women walk to victory once more!

Photo Opportunities

Image attached

Caption: Museum costumed guides ‘strike out’ for women’s working rights.

Note to Editors:

About the Museum

The Black Country Living Museum is one of the UK’s leading open air museums. Attracting over 300,000 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 150 years of history from c1770 to the 1920s, 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!

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