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PRESS RELEASE
Museum puts the Accent on Dialect!

Professor Henry Higgins may have helped Eliza Doolittle to lose her cockney accent but language experts at the Black Country Living Museum will ensure the region's voice is in fine fettle with a series of dialect workshops on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 August and Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 August, 2010.

Aston University Research Associates, Dr Esther Asprey and Brian Dakin, will be putting the accent on dialect as they teach Museum visitors 'owe we spake'. The just-for-fun drop-in sessions will introduce phrases and sayings unique to the region, highlight the history behind different words and explain why there is so much variety in the English language.

Word games will reveal the often unexpected meanings behind a phrase or saying and visitors can help researchers map the development of language across the country by sharing their own stories, words and sayings.

The workshops form part of a wider research project based at Aston University under the direction of Dr Urszula Clark. The West Midland Speech and Society projects are thought to be the first of their kind to look at Birmingham and Black Country dialects in this way.

The projects will document and investigate the way that people speak within Birmingham and the Black Country through the analysis of imaginative performance texts such as poetry, comedy and live music.

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Photographic Opportunity:

Image attached: Caption: Black Country Living Museum guides “cantin” (gossiping).

Note to Editors:

About the West Midland Speech and Society projects

The projects, one funded by the Leverhulme Trust and one by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), will document and investigate the way that people speak within Birmingham and the Black Country through the analysis of imaginative performance texts such as poetry, comedy and live music.

The Aston researchers will look at the way in which performance contributes to people’s sense of the kinds of uses for which dialect use is appropriate and those for which it is not and also investigate how stylised performance can help to create and maintain a sense of place, identity and imagined community among audiences.

The projects will be managed by Dr Urszula Clark, who is a Reader in English and Deputy Director for the Aston Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Language and Diversity (InterLanD), Dr Esther Asprey, who completed a PhD in Black Country English and Black Country Identity, and Brian Dakin, himself a performance poet and musician from Oldbury, who is currently working on a PhD entitled ‘The Social History of the Black Country Dialect 1870-1939’. All three are based within the School of Languages & Social Sciences at Aston University.

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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