

Stage production telling the story of the 'Wigan Girls' showing ... in Gloucester



Curtain rises on life of pit brow lasses

THE BRAVE story of Wigan's pit brow lasses is taking to the stage ... in Gloucester!

A thriving am-dram outfit is currently rehearsing an ambitious musical production which will bring these tough and pioneering Lancashire women to life in the theatre for the first time.

Even if it's approaching 200 miles from the mines or pit villages in which they toiled.

'The Wigan Girls' is a true community production in the West Country with a cast of 300 performers, plus nearly 200 behind the scenes. It's part of a campaign in Thornbury, 15 miles north of Bristol, to build their own £6m 500-seater theatre and arts centre.

The production is a revived version of a musical penned more than two decades ago by a schoolgirl from the market town as an exam piece for her drama A-level.

The production tells of the battle for work and dignity by the women whose back-breaking toil sparked a national debate about women's work in the 19th century, with their

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job becoming a test case for women's outdoor manual employment.

Director Barbie Davies, whose husband has scored the songs for orchestra, has been working with Wigan's History Shop and the borough archivists to make the costumes and dialogue as historically accurate as possible.

Some of their photographs, along with pit artefacts from the South Gloucester Mines Research Group, form the basis of a window display to advertise the production, which will run from July 7-10 inclusive at Thornbury Leisure Centre.

It features numerous real life characters from the time, including campaigner Arthur Mumby, who battled the Wigan pit bosses of the time, including Lord Crawford, to win new rights for women on the pithead screens.

Now there are hopes that some of Wigan's surviving pit brow lasses, or their relatives,

may be able to attend.

Spokeswoman Lyn Bedford says that the story of the pit brow lasses is such an inspirational one she is surprised that no writers from our borough have ever considered bringing it to the stage.

She said: "This is a huge community event for us and we would be delighted to welcome some genuine Wigan folk to what is going to be a truly memorable experience."

"We help to tell the story of the fight by the pit brow lasses for proper recognition in the workplace and hope to reveal, in words, song and dance, the lives of the mining families in Wigan of that period."

"There's terrific tension between the women and the mine employers because they knew that they weren't getting a fair crack of the whip but at the end of the day they needed the jobs to feed their families."

"The fact that it is based on the real lives of real people makes it all the more of a passionate and moving experience."

● Further details and tickets are available from 01454 416291 or see the ACT website at www.ACTthornbury.org.uk



BACK IN TIME: In rehearsal for *The Wigan Girls*.