

Snapshots show life through the decades

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FROM school dinner ladies holding a protest to youngsters climbing trees – an array of snapshots offering a nostalgic look back into Sandwell’s past are going on display.

Volunteers have spent hours pouring over the negatives, slides and hand-printed photographs from the Jubilee Arts Archive.

A pop up exhibition has now been created using the pictures, which all date back to between 1974 and 1994.

The group has been working with photographer and Sandwell College lecturer Helen Sweeting to create the exhibition, available to view at Smethwick Library until the end of March.

They have had the opportunity to explore an archive of more than 20,000 images documenting the life and times of Sandwell during monthly meetings at Sandwell Community History and Archives Service at Smethwick Library.

Photographs of youngsters heading out on a boat on the pool at Dartmouth Park, and school dinner ladies protesting over cuts in services outside Cradley Heath Council House are among those on display.

Celebrations

Others capture celebrations and activities taking place as part of play schemes and projects around the borough, including a horror party in 1979.

The group will be holding an open event at the library tomorrow at 2pm.

At the event, archivist Maureen Waldron will present a special guide to Sandwell archives.

She said: “The volunteers all had an interest in photography, and as adult learners had undertaken courses at Sandwell College.

“They were drawn towards certain photographs and themes in the work, whether images of protest or play.

“These either triggered their own memories and personal interests or inspired them to go out to find these places and take contemporary photographs in response to the original materials.”

Ms Sweeting added: “Some photographs really stand out from the collection for myself.

“Particularly the collection of colour transparencies that were taken around tower blocks, brightened with large painted murals across the playground areas, and other photographs that show large groups of children playing and dressing up.

“These photographs have an ‘age’ to them, a time-bound quality, tied up in the bold, vibrant colours of the slides themselves.

“They remind me of my early childhood; they seem very familiar.

“Although I didn’t grow up in Sandwell, they trigger fond memories of play. One



Unhappy school dinner ladies protest over threatened cuts in services outside Cradley Heath Council House in 1982



Getting dirty in Dartmouth Park, 1978

photograph features a girl of around seven years old and I recognise her outfit as one I had that was almost identical.

“I’m not sure if it is the style of the clothing that transports me back to this time, or if my own memories have been shaped by the photographs and slides that my parents took at the time.”

Brendan Jackson, from Jubilee Arts Archive, said: “Nostalgia and memory certainly play a huge part in the interpretation of an archive.

Social documentary photographs conserve appearances; express feelings of the time and trigger memories in the viewer.

“This rich heritage is one that can be



Youngsters climb among the trees in Langley in 1980 as they play outside

mined by generations to come for inspiration.”

In October, another collection of photographs from the Jubilee Arts Archive went on show in Oldbury as part of the Heritage Lottery-funded project Unseen Sandwell.

Play

The Reminiscence Group, which meets at Round Green Library, collected donations of photographs and stories. Members also looked at news cuttings and photographs of play schemes and projects from the 1970s and 1980s from the Jubilee Arts archive.

They included celebrations for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977 and street

theatre performances in Langley. Together they collected local snapshots and memorabilia from the period to supplement the existing photographs in the archive.

Their exhibition aimed to show community occasions and activities not normally reflected in the official archives of this period, as well as recording some of the changing places and faces in the borough.

Among the photographs is a shot of children at St James Church playgroup in Rounds Green and wedding photographs of residents.

The Unseen Sandwell project has been made possible thanks to a £42,500 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.