

Thanks to a grant of almost £55,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF); the council, its partners and community groups are now on track to mark the bi-centenary of the young Stephenson's first steam locomotive built in Killingworth.

A full programme of community activities is planned for this anniversary year with one of the highlights being the refurbishment and installation of the iconic steel sculpture of the Blucher on a prominent roundabout in the town.

The artwork by Charles Sansbury was first erected in Killingworth town centre in 1971 to symbolise the town's association with George Stephenson who lived there from 1804 and designed the Blucher – his first locomotive – in 1814. The sculpture was removed and put into storage during the regeneration of the town centre in the 80s and has not been on public display since.

Welcoming the re-instatement, the Elected Mayor Norma Redfearn said: "Here in North Tyneside we are immensely proud of George Stephenson; the lad from a poor background who worked as a brakesman at Killingworth Pit and went on to become a railway pioneer and industrialist renowned as the 'Father of Railways.'

"I'm delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has approved our bid for almost £55,000 to celebrate the bi-centenary of the Blucher and must express my great thanks not only to the HLF but to members of the Killingworth Local History Society who have worked tirelessly over the years to make this project happen.

“The council will be working closely with these and other community groups and schools and to make this a very special year-long celebration of Stephenson’s life and achievements. Many exciting events are being planned and they’ll involve the whole community. I’m particularly pleased that the famous steel sculpture will be removed from storage, cleaned and erected on the Southgate roundabout where it will provide a wonderful gateway feature to Killingworth evoking the legacy of the great man.”

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “George Stephenson’s vital role in shaping the railways and his contribution to the industrial revolution is an integral part of North East heritage that everyone should know about and be able to appreciate. Through these community events, exhibitions and the reinstatement of the sculpture to celebrate the bi-centenary of Blucher’ Steam Locomotive, this project will ensure his legacy lives on for many years to come.”

Other activities made possible by the HLF funding include:

- installation of a new heritage trail interpretation board telling the story of the Stephenson’s time in Killingworth and the history of the sculpture and its relationship to the development of the Killingworth township
- a programme of educational activities aimed at engaging local schools and promoting learning about the Stephenson legacy
- publication of a new book compiled by the Northern Voices Community Projects that tells the story steam locomotion in North Tyneside
- production of a touring exhibition that will be available for display in community and educational venues

Notes to editors

The ‘Blucher’ 200th anniversary is on 25th July 2014

George Stephenson – at the age of 20, George Stephenson began the construction of his first locomotive. Every part of the engine had to be made by hand, and hammered into shape just like a horseshoe. John Thorswall, a coal mine blacksmith, was George Stephenson's main assistant.

After 10 months' labour, George Stephenson's locomotive 'Blucher' (named Blücher after the Prussian general Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher) was completed and tested on the Killingworth Railway on July 25, 1814. The track was an uphill trek of 450 feet. George Stephenson's engine hauled eight loaded coal wagons weighing 30 tons, at about four miles an hour. This was the first steam engined powered locomotive to run on a railroad and it was the most successful working steam engine that had ever been constructed up to this period, this encouraged the inventor make further experiments.

In all, Stephenson built 16 different engines which established his reputation as an engine designer and laid the foundations for his subsequent pivotal role in the development of the railways.

An imposing monument to was unveiled outside Newcastle Central Station in 1862 14 years after his death aged 67, on 12 August 1848.

Further information

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