Newcastle groups celebrate £180,000 National

Philip Astley subway art

2018 marks the 250th anniversary of the invention of the modern circus ring by Philip Astley, born in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1742.

In 1768, Astley performed feats of trick-riding and equestrianism in the round, and brought together clowns, jugglers, tightrope walkers and musicians in one place for the first time, to form the first modern circus. His show was so popular that in 1772 he was invited to Versailles to perform in front of Louis XV of France.

While Astley is famous around the world, his story is not well known in his home town. Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has earmarked a sum of £166,600, including a development grant of £28,600, for a consortium led by Staffordshire University to plan and deliver an exciting project to allow people in Newcastle to explore the worldwide phenomenon of circus and their community's significant impact on its creation.

[quote=Catherine Ralph, Staffordshire University Enterprise Development Manager]"We're delighted to be working alongside local and national partners to raise Astley's profile."[/quote]

This project will collaborate with the Victoria & Albert Museum, whose circus collections include significant items relating to Philip Astley and his heritage. Project activities will include exhibitions, talks and film screenings and will culminate in

a large-scale heritage learning event to coincide with the 2018 anniversary.

Catherine Ralph, Enterprise Development Manager at Staffordshire University, said: “We’re delighted to be working alongside local and national partners to raise Astley’s profile and increase pride in Newcastle-under-Lyme’s heritage.”

This award, in addition to significant HLF investment in Newcastle last year, will add to the cumulative impact of HLF’s ongoing commitment to Newcastle’s fascinating heritage, and allow many more people to learn about and engage with the fascinating history of their local surroundings.

Also celebrating this week are St Luke’s Primary School in Silverdale and Moseley Railway Trust in Apedale.

- **St Luke’s** secured £5,600 to allow its pupils to explore Silverdale’s rich coal mining heritage, and preserve the community memory of this history for future generations
- **Moseley Railway Trust** will use a £10,000 grant to explore the role of horses in the First World War, create a demonstration horse-drawn trackway, and provide a cavalry display for a public event in May 2016

Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: “Newcastle has a rich heritage waiting to be unearthed. These awards come hard on the heels of last year’s £1.7million award to transform the derelict Maxine’s nightclub into the Belong Heritage Gallery, and show HLF’s commitment to Newcastle. There is more funding available and we urge groups with ideas for new projects to get in touch.”

Newcastle-under-Lyme is a priority area for HLF support. It has a designated officer to support local groups to submit funding applications. Frequent funding surgeries are held and all groups are invited to the next on 29 March. To book a slot call Elise Turner on tel: 0121 616 6883 or email: elise.turner@hlf.org.uk.

Further information

- HLF: Felix Gott, Communications Manager, on tel: 020 7591 6138
- Staffordshire University: Katherine Evans, External Projects Coordinator, on tel: 01782 294644
- St Luke’s Primary School: Jill Carey, Home School Link, on tel: 01782 297445
- Moseley Railway Trust: Simon Lomax, Press and Publicity Officer on tel: 0845 094 1953

efyd mewn ...

Philip Astley subway art

The Philip Astley story – exploring circus heritage in Newcastle-under-Lyme