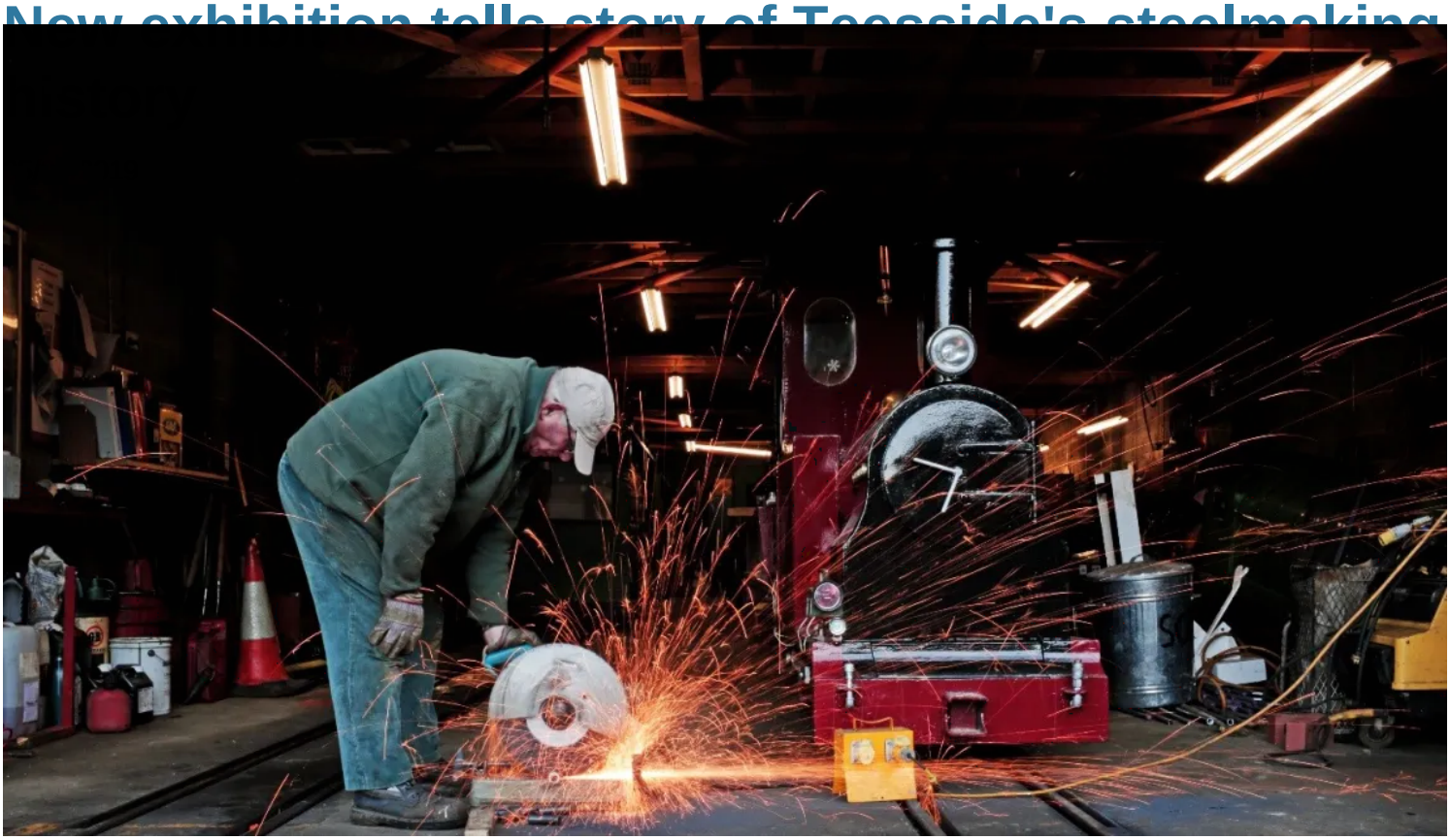
New exhibition tells story of Teesside's steelmaking



Opening today (5 April) at Kirkleatham Museum in Redcar, Steel Stories brings together local voices for the museum's "best exhibition yet".

The steel and iron industry has shaped lives, livelihoods, landscapes and communities in the region for 170 years.

But in 2015, Teesside's last remaining blast furnace closed in Redcar.

The closure sparked Steel Stories, a year-long exhibition at Kirkleatham Museum. The project brings together the reminiscences and memorabilia of former steel workers and their families, ensuring they will not be forgotten.

"We've put together what we think is the museum's best exhibition yet," said Steel Stories Project Officer Leo Croft. "We've designed it to be informative and fun for both adults and children.

> It's interactive, noisy and will make for some brilliant photos. About the only thing we can't recreate is the heat from the furnaces."

170 years of history

From the mid 19th century, iron, and then steelmaking, were synonymous with the Tees Valley. Blast furnaces first appeared along the banks of the River Tees in the 1850s. Steel was made in Redcar for nearly a century.

Until the 1980s, steelmaking was the primary employment and generations of families relied on the industry for lifelong work.



Redcar steelworks

Some of the famous structures produced and built by local companies included:

- Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Tyne Bridge
- Wembley Stadium
- Angel of the North

Labour of love for generations

Steel Stories has brought together generations of people across Teesside, from those sharing first-hand stories to apprentices creating exhibition centrepieces.

The National Lottery-funded project is led by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council in partnership with Teesside University.

Leo Croft said: “Over the past year we've had amazing support from local people who have taken the time to share their Steel Stories with us.



“Ex-steel workers and their families have told us some incredible stories and donated items, including a section of an iron pole used by the first woman, Nancy Lewis, to light a foundry furnace back in 1942. Nancy brought the pole in herself and told us all about her experiences, describing working in the furnace as ‘hell’s kitchen’.”

Amy Howsden and Cameron Wright, apprentice design engineers based at Primetals Technologies Ltd in Stockton, were tasked with creating a model of the iconic Redcar Blast Furnace.

Amy said:

> "To know that we are honouring the legacy of an industry which has been, and still is, central to Teesside and its people has brought great pride and a sense of purpose to me in the last few months.

“"Bringing traditional drawings to life using modern technology is quite significant, I believe, and this fusion of “old” and “new” is what the exhibition is all about.”

See Amy and Cameron talking about their project on YouTube.

Year of Steel

The free interactive exhibition will run from 5 April 2019 - 31 March 2020.

Find out more on the Enjoy Redcar Cleveland website and share your own stories using #SteelStories.