Full steam ahead for Bellingham’s railway history

17/01/2011

Founded in 1994 by volunteers, the Bellingham Heritage Centre seeks to preserve the history and heritage of the North Tynedale and Redesdale valleys. Based in Bellingham’s former railway station, the Centre focuses on the diverse rural, industrial and railway heritage of the area.

A main element of the project will be refurbishing and installing two Mark 1 railway carriages in the station yard - one will be used as a new learning and exhibition space, the other as visitor facilities. This will vastly improve the visitor experience and make the centre an even better day out.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said: “The Heritage Centre, Bellingham provides a great insight into the varied heritage of the local area and is a hugely important resource. This project, especially the education programme, means its fascinating collections will be available for more people to appreciate and learn about. The Heritage Lottery Fund is pleased to support this worthwhile project and everyone who has worked hard to make it happen.”

To encourage more people to come and enjoy the Centres wide range of collections and bring them to life, a three year education programme will be introduced aimed at local schools. Existing and new volunteers will receive conservation and curatorial training, enabling them to really get involved with the Centre and provide them with valuable skills.

Terry Bragg, Chairman of the Heritage Centre, said: “We are delighted with the news. This Heritage Lottery Fund grant is coming at a crucial time in our development. We have twice as many visitors coming to the Heritage Centre as we did three years ago with visitor numbers for 2010 up by more than 25% over 2009. The railway display is a huge attraction and the new railway carriage will give us more exhibition space as well as a learning space for children and young people. The North Tyne and Redewater area is full of history and culture and magnificent landscapes. Thanks to this grant, more people will be able to enjoy some of the rich heritage of the area”.

The Heritage Centre has permanent exhibitions on the Border Reivers, local coal pits, stone quarries and ironworks, Border Counties Railway, and Bellingham photographer, W P Collier. Visitors to the Centre can access over 2,500 local photographs and a database of names of people connected to the area, and hear recordings of local people talking about life in the ‘old days’. The Heritage Centre is also home to the Bellingham Tourist Information Office.

Notes to editors

* A confirmed award means that money had already been earmarked by HLF for the project in question and that the full amount has now been secured.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK with £209 million in the North East alone.

The Heritage Centre at Bellingham, Northumberland is a volunteer-run local history museum for North Tyne and Redewater. The museum was opened in 1994. It was relocated to its present site in 2000. The inspiration for the

museum came from the success of a local exhibition of old photographs and postcards. The prime mover, Dorothy Bell, was awarded an MBE in the 2009 News Year's Honours List.

In 2008 an extension was built to house a farming gallery and the Stannersburn smithy.

The Heritage Centre at Bellingham is accredited by MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) and uses approved cataloguing and conservation methods. It holds 'quality assured visitor attraction' status from VisitBritain. It has full disabled access as well as a hearing loop for visitors with impaired hearing.

The Heritage Centre at Bellingham is a registered charity (The Heritage Group Bellingham), number 1041300.

Displays

• Border Counties Railway 1862-1958 (the railway comprised 42 miles of track from Hexham on the River Tyne to Riccarton, across the Scottish border).
• The Reivers (a term used for robbers in the troubled Border area in the 16th century).
• A Mining Heritage (relics and memories of the coal mines, iron works and quarries that were once busy industrial features of the area).
• The Photographs of W P Collier (a definitive picture of rural life in Northumberland between the two World Wars).
• The Stannersburn Smithy (operated locally until the 1970s).
• The Farming Gallery houses a small grey Ferguson tractor as well as farming tools and mementoes.
• It also hosts temporary historic and art exhibitions.
• In July 2010 it was one of the venues which hosted poet Simon Armitage in his Pennine Way walk.

Family Names Database

The database, accessible by the public, contains over 50,000 from the area.

Photos Database

A computerised display of more than 2,600 historic photographs, including 800 from the W P Collier Collection.

Further information

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