Official launch of Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

22/01/2011

Liz formally opened the museum ahead of Burns night.

The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) is the first major museum to open in Scotland in three years and was generously supported by the Scottish Government, the Heritage Lottery Fund, South Ayrshire Council and Scottish Enterprise in addition to thousands of private donors who contributed towards its creation.

Watch a video tour of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (link to YouTube).

Commenting on officially opening the new museum, Liz, said: “It is a huge pleasure to officially open the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, which is such an asset to the further popular enjoyment of our so well-loved national poet. His work is, was, and ever shall be, the greatest monument to him; but his life of passion, pleasure, poverty and contradiction will never fail to fascinate, infuriate, challenge and engage with us, whether we're young or old, scholar or ordinary enthusiast, Scot or citizen of somewhere else.”

The First Minister, who announced at the event that STV has commissioned Kenny Hunter to create a new piece of art for the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, said: “Burns is an international cultural icon, loved the world over. The new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum allows us the opportunity to celebrate his influence on the modern world and his contribution to Scotland’s culture and creativity.

“This major tourist attraction will bring a wealth of economic and cultural benefits to South Ayrshire and Scotland and bring to life the work of Robert Burns for this and future generations.

“The world renowned collection of important artefacts, including the Burns family Bible, original manuscripts and a miniature volume of verse that travelled 5.7 million miles to space, brings to life the story of the Bard using a variety of cutting edge techniques.

“The museum is a lasting legacy of our year of homecoming which proved to be an enormously successful celebration of Burns and some of Scotland’s other great contributions to the world shaping science, innovation, energy, technology and culture.”

Kate Mavor, Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland, said: “We are delighted to officially launch the new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum and hope the public will join us in our celebrations and take advantage of free entry to the museum tomorrow (22 January). This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about the life of Robert Burns as we join millions around the world in celebrating his life on the 25th of January.”

Director of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Nat Edwards, said: “It is fitting that a museum to mark the life and works of one of Scotland’s most loved poets is opened by another. Having Liz Lochhead perform her first official duty as Makar makes this historic occasion even more memorable. Both this opening and her appointment are clear signals of the fantastic energy of Scottish poetry today.”

Access to the museum will be free to the public on Saturday 22 January 2011 when visitors are invited to come along to explore the new state of the art museum which houses the world's most important Burns Collection and enjoy a lively programme of entertainment.

The museum's 500m2 exhibition space is made up of four areas – 'Identity', 'Inspiration', 'Fame' and 'Creative Works' - addressing every aspect of Burns' life through an innovative and thought-provoking interpretation that has been designed to appeal to visitors of all ages.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "Robert Burns is one of the most celebrated figures in Scottish culture. His enduring legacy and humanitarian values have introduced people in all corners of the world to Scotland's heritage, the Scots language and to the unique living tradition of the Burns Supper. This is a proud day for all of us in Scotland as this wonderful new museum allows Alloway to take its proper place on the world's stage as the focus for the understanding and celebration of the man.

"As a significant tourist destination that will bring visitors and income to the Scottish economy, the Burns Birthplace Museum is set to shed new light on our appreciation of a great national hero. We are delighted to have been able to support this important project."

South Ayrshire Provost, Winifred Sloan, said: "This wonderful museum is the largest and most ambitious project the National Trust has ever undertaken and, when South Ayrshire Council was approached for support in this venture, we had no hesitation in committing to help drive it forward by donating land with a value of almost £3 million.

"The museum is a stunning achievement and is testament to the visionary thinking, enthusiasm and commitment of everyone involved. It refreshes the legacy of Robert Burns for the 21st century and brings him to life for millions of people who can enhance their knowledge or simply learn about Burns for the first time – and all within a few yards of where he was born."

The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum replaces what was formerly known as the Burns National Heritage Park to bring together all of the Alloway sites with a connection to Burns including the new 1,600m2 museum, the Burns Monument, Alloway Auld Kirk, Burns Cottage, an education pavilion and Auld Brig O'Doon. A new footbridge will also be created to link key sites to the new museum to make accessibility as easy as possible for visitors.

From the initial planning stages of the RBBM, the Trust was keen to ensure the Scots language would feature predominantly throughout the museum; aiming to position it as the leading museum destination for those looking to learn about the 'mither tongue'. From Scots words engraved on the wall of the museum exterior to the descriptions of artefacts which are given in Scots in the exhibition – RBBM is the first museum to feature the language in this way and hopes to enrich each visitor's understanding of the language.

www.burnsmuseum.org.uk

Notes to editors

The Trust's Robert Burns Birthplace Museum project is the largest, most ambitious project the charity has ever undertaken. It will cost in the region of £21m and this includes generous contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and South Ayrshire Council.

The National Trust for Scotland is currently involved in a range of fundraising activities to support the project. www.nts.org.uk/burns/

The official opening of the new Burns Museum today is the first in a year which will see four national institutions re-open their doors after major transformations made possible by Heritage Lottery funding. In Spring, the Riverside Museum will open its doors, bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors to see the country's transport collection in its stunning new setting on the banks of the Clyde, in the summer, the National Museum of Scotland will have completed its state-of-the-art interior and doubled the number of items on display and at the end of the year the National Portrait Gallery will open up its new contemporary gallery space to visitors. An investment of £47million from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled these projects to happen, with a total cost in excess of £160m; a scale of investment in Scotland's cultural infrastructure that is unprecedented.

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. To date it has invested over £520million in Scotland's heritage.

Scotland's Winter Festivals:

Scotland's Winter Festivals begin with celebrations for St Andrew's Day from 25 November, include Hogmanay on 31 December and culminate with Burns Night on 25 January.

There are more than 60 Scotland's Winter Festivals events taking place across Scotland this year. Full event information.

More information about Scotland's culture, including ideas for hosting your own St Andrew's Day event or Burns Supper, to the origins of Hogmanay.

Robert Burns Humanitarian Award

The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award is supported by EventScotland, Scotland's Winter Festivals, South Ayrshire Council and VisitScotland.

The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award Ceremony will take place on Saturday, January 22nd 2011 in Ayrshire.

The winner will receive the equivalent of 1759 guineas, a sum which signifies the year of the bard's birth and the coinage then in circulation, as well as a specially commissioned award by Scottish artist Scott Irvine.

Information on previous winners including biographies.

The Robert Burns Humanitarian Award is part of Scotland's Winter Festivals. www.scotlandswinterfestivals.com

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