

World's first iron-hulled boat comes home to the Monkland Canal

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The full scale replica of the Vulcan, the world's first iron-hulled boat, arrived at Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life in Coatbridge today (Thursday 27 March) and will soon capture the imaginations of visitors as a major heritage attraction. Named for the Roman god of forge and fire, the design of the 63-foot long vessel was considered revolutionary when it was launched on the Monkland Canal in 1819, inspiring the development of iron riveted ships and transforming Scotland's shipbuilding industry.

Following an extensive internal refit, the vessel will take up its new role as an innovative and interactive educational exhibit. Utilising a range of media and artefacts, the attraction will celebrate the history of the canals, ironworking in North Lanarkshire, and the Vulcan's role in revolutionising shipbuilding when it is formally opened in the summer.

The £300,000 Vulcan project is the centrepiece of the second phase of the award-winning restoration of the Monkland Canal which is led by Scottish Canals, the Scottish Waterways Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, CultureNL, Sustrans and Calderbank Conservation Society.

The community-led project has already seen a number of developments to the area, including landscape and access improvements, a new footbridge and viewing platform and the creation of a number of artworks. These include designs by local schoolchildren and a six-metre high steel archway at Blair Bridge – created by Andy Scott, the designer of the Kelpies, and inspired by the work of renowned comic book creator and film producer Mark Millar, who was born in Coatbridge. The work of the Monkland Canal Renaissance project was recognised with a Commendation in the UK-wide Waterways Renaissance Awards in 2012.

Richard Millar, Director of Heritage, Enterprise and Sustainability at Scottish Canals, said: "It's fantastic to see the Vulcan back home on the Monkland Canal. The vessel played a huge role in the history of both the canals and local area and, with its revolutionary design, is an enduring symbol of the part the waterways played in stoking the fires of the industrial revolution. Now, thanks to the support of our partners, it will celebrate that heritage as an interactive learning centre and hopefully encourage even more people to engage with the rich history of the canals, the area and Scotland itself."

The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Museums Galleries Scotland, Viridor, WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Limited), Sustrans (the UK's leading sustainable transport charity), the Environmental Key Fund, North Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Canals and saw the Vulcan lovingly restored using traditional techniques by Arbroath-based boatbuilders MacKays.

Heather McVey, Chair of CultureNL, said: "The return of the Vulcan canal barge is another milestone in the development of Summerlee as Scotland's leading museum for our social and industrial heritage. Thanks to the work of MacKay's Boatbuilders in Arbroath, we now have another tremendous asset for visitors to enjoy, along with our heritage tramway, mine tours and working machinery. The Vulcan's new exhibition space will tell of working life on Scotland's lowland canals, with volunteer guides in the period costumes really bringing the story alive."

Built in Calderbank on the Monkland Canal, the horse-drawn Vulcan plied her trade on the Forth and Clyde Canal following her launch in 1819, ferrying passengers along the waterway until she was scrapped in 1873. A replica of the famous vessel was constructed for the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1986 before being brought to Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life following the event.

The replica, which closely follows the design and construction of the original, is significant in its own right as the last boat built on the Clyde using traditional riveting techniques. Its construction marked the end of a trade that had flourished for the intervening 160 years since the original was built.

Karen Moore, Chief Executive of the Scottish Waterways Trust, said: "The return of the Vulcan to Summerlee marks a major milestone in the Monkland Canal Renaissance project. Working with the local community and an array of dedicated partners, we've already accomplished so much – celebrating and improving access to the rich heritage of the two hundred year old canal and encouraging volunteers from all walks of life to get involved in its on-going renaissance.

"The new interactive learning centre in the Vulcan is a fitting venue to celebrate the rich heritage of North Lanarkshire and the contribution of the canal, and should encourage even more people to enjoy and help conserve the waterway for generations to come."

Notes to editors

Scottish Canals is responsible to the Scottish Government for the management and development of five Scottish canals as well as the surrounding estate and The Falkirk Wheel.

The Forth and Clyde, Union, Monkland, Caledonian and Crinan canals are recognised as Scheduled Monuments and attract 22million visitations per year.

The Scottish Waterways Trust creates brighter futures for people, wildlife and communities along Scotland's canals. By connecting people with the heritage, wildlife and green open spaces of Scotland's canals through innovative projects, SWT inspires people to get active, improve their health and mental well-being, employment prospects and community life.

Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life attracts 160,000 visitors a year, includes the excavated remains of the former Summerlee Iron Works and features a unique collection of engineering machinery, material relating to iron and steel production and other items reflecting Scotland's industrial heritage.

WREN is a not for profit business that awards grants to community, environmental and heritage projects across the UK from funds donated by FCC Environment to the Landfill Communities Fund.

Museums Galleries Scotland manage and award Scottish Government investment to support the sector through main and small grants and funding to the 37 Recognised Collections of National Significance.

Sustrans is the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today.

Viridor Credits Environmental Company distributes funding through the Landfill Communities Fund. Funding is available for community and environmental projects within 10 miles (priority to projects within five miles) of an active Viridor Waste Management Landfill site. Since 1996 Viridor Credits has allocated over £60m to over a thousand projects across the UK.

The Environmental Key Fund is an incorporated company established in 2004 to distribute Landfill Community Fund (LCF) monies to environmental and community based projects.

Further information

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