The Philip Astley story – exploring circus heritage



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.

Although Astley is famous around the world, his story is not well known in his home town. Now, thanks to National Lottery players, Astley's story will be celebrated and explored in a series of high-profile events, coordinated by Staffordshire University.

The Philip Astley Story will collaborate with the Victoria and Albert Museum, whose circus collections include significant items relating to Philip Astley and his heritage, to allow people in Newcastle to explore the worldwide phenomenon of circus, and their community's significant impact on its creation. 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.

Investment in Newcastle-under-Lyme

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.

[quote=Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF West Midlands]"Newcastle has a rich heritage waiting to be unearthed. There is more funding available and we urge groups with ideas for new projects to get in touch."[/quote]

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."



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Newcastle groups celebrate £180,000 National Lottery jackpot