Ironworks of pioneer industrialist ‘Iron Mad Jack’



Gweithwyr dur Brymbo yn y 19ed ganrif Ymddiriedolaeth Treftadaeth Brymbo Heritage

Brymbo Heritage Trust has received a National Lottery grant of more than £800,000 to develop its vision to revive the former Brymbo Iron and Steel Works and Brymbo Fossil Forest, near Wrexham.

Built in the late 1790s by prominent industrialist and cast iron pioneer John ‘Iron Mad Jack’ Wilkinson, and producing steel from 1884 onwards the works ceased operation in 1990. The remaining buildings on the site currently lay derelict but if successful in securing a full grant of £5million from HLF, the Trust aims to transform them along with the nearby Brymbo Fossil Forest into a major visitor attraction, learning centre and vibrant local space known as Brymbo Heritage Area.

John ‘Iron Mad Jack’ Wilkinson pioneered the manufacture of cast iron during the Industrial Revolution. He invented a precision boring machine that could bore canon and cast iron cylinders, such as those used in steam engines of James Watt and Matthew Bouton - his boring machine has been credited as being the world’s first machine tool. He also improved the efficiency of blast furnaces, and led the early development of the world’s first metal single span bridge - the ‘Iron Bridge’ - in Shropshire.

Brymbo Fossil Forest was discovered in 2005 and contains a wealth of fossiled trees, stems, seeds, roots from the late carboniferous period 280 to 320 million years ago. These were found within 100 metres of the iron works and show how

the botany and climate of the time combined to lay the coal seams that led directly to the UK's industrial growth.

Along with Wilkinson's story and the plant fossils, Brymbo Heritage Area will tell the story of the later steelworks and its impact on the local area. From fossils to coal, iron to steel, closure to regeneration, Brymbo has a rich story to tell.

John Glen, UK Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, said: "This exciting project will tell the story of Brymbo's illustrious industrial past and boost the local economy through a new cultural tourist attraction. It is a fantastic example of how the National Lottery is helping to preserve and celebrate the unique heritage of Wales."

Richard Bellamy, Head of HLF Wales, said: "In its heyday, Brymbo was at the centre of Britain's engineering prowess. Its coal was medal winning and its iron and steel fuelled the expansion of steam and the railways. This project will regenerate Brymbo's historic buildings and boost the local economy but it will also revive this powerful story and a sense of local pride in what was achieved here."

This grant award will now enable the Trust to grow and to engage the full range of design, engineering and legal professionals needed develop fully costed proposals, ahead of a second stage application in late 2019. If that application proves successful the building work will get underway in 2020 with the facilities opening a year later.

Nick Amyes, Chair of Brymbo Heritage Trust, said: "We faced tough competition to secure this funding, and we're absolutely delighted with this news - it came 27 years to the day after Brymbo Steelworks closed its doors on 27th September 1990. Thank you to all of the National Lottery's players up and down the country for helping us bring a big part of our community back to life."

Notes to editors

About Brymbo Heritage Trust

Brymbo Heritage Trust has been set up by members of Brymbo Heritage Group to take the project forward, and it gained charitable status in August this year. The Trust has been working hard to secure the future of this site and has already been awarded nearly £2m by another of the National Lottery's arms - the Big Lottery Fund- to develop a series of ex-industrial landscapes in and around Brymbo. It has also just submitted a bid for £1.1m to progress the refurbishment of its steelworks Machine Shop building next year.

Before the Trust was created the Group had secured more than £350,000 of grants since 2013, including three smaller grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (£97,500 from the Our Heritage programme in 2013, £9,900 from the Start-up programme in 2016, and £78,000 from the Resilient Heritage programme in 2017).

Throughout this period the group - and now the Trust - have bene?tted from mentoring support from leading regeneration charity the Prince's Regeneration Trust ('PRT'), through their Building Resources, Information and Community Knowledge 'BRICK' programme, which is also funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Further information

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