

New exhibition tells story of Teesside's steelmaking history

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Opening today (5 April) at Kirkleatham Museum in Redcar, Steel Stories brings together local voices for the museum's "best exhibition yet".

The steel and iron industry has shaped lives, livelihoods, landscapes and communities in the region for 170 years.

But in 2015, Teesside's last remaining blast furnace closed in Redcar.

The closure sparked Steel Stories, a year-long exhibition at Kirkleatham Museum. The project brings together the reminiscences and memorabilia of former steel workers and their families, ensuring they will not be forgotten.

“We’ve put together what we think is the museum’s best exhibition yet,” said Steel Stories Project Officer Leo Croft. “We’ve designed it to be informative and fun for both adults and children.

It’s interactive, noisy and will make for some brilliant photos. About the only thing we can’t recreate is the heat from the furnaces.”

170 years of history

From the mid 19th century, iron, and then steelmaking, were synonymous with the Tees Valley. Blast furnaces first appeared along the banks of the River Tees in the 1850s. Steel was made in Redcar for nearly a century.

Until the 1980s, steelmaking was the primary employment and generations of families relied on the industry for lifelong work.



Redcar steelworks

Some of the famous structures produced and built by local companies included:

- Sydney Harbour Bridge

- Tyne Bridge
- Wembley Stadium
- Angel of the North

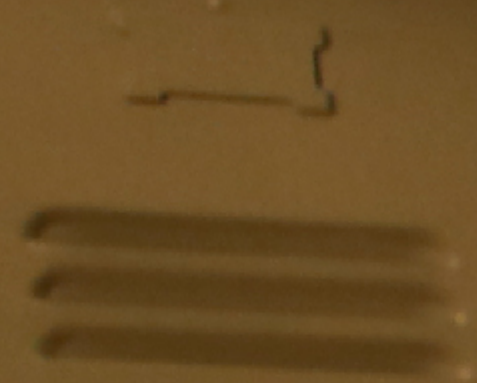
Labour of love for generations

Steel Stories has brought together generations of people across Teesside, from those sharing first-hand stories to apprentices creating exhibition centrepieces.

The National Lottery-funded project is led by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council in partnership with Teesside University.

Leo Croft said: “Over the past year we've had amazing support from local people who have taken the time to share their Steel Stories with us.

CLEVELAND
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WATER



1850 - 1900

With these furnaces and their works, steel-making and iron-making spreading rapidly on both banks of the Lake Erie basin in the west and including the very great rolling mill of Westport, it was an industrial plant that like all such had not been mentioned in Wilson's description of the work generally.

Butcher and Wagner and other firms furnished both ironing or steel to their works in quantity. These firms received their iron from the Lake Erie basin, including, however, a large amount of pig iron as the product of the Lake Erie basin, many of these works being located in the conditions which have been described in the preceding pages. There was no official inspection of the quality of iron produced at the time and great care was necessarily exercised in selection of the best quality and in large quantities of high physical quality in dangerous and unhealthy conditions.

“Ex-steel workers and their families have told us some incredible stories and donated items, including a section of an iron pole used by the first woman, Nancy Lewis, to light a foundry furnace back in 1942. Nancy brought the pole in herself and told us all about her experiences, describing working in the furnace as ‘hell’s kitchen’.”

Amy Howsden and Cameron Wright, apprentice design engineers based at Primetals Technologies Ltd in Stockton, were tasked with creating a model of the iconic Redcar Blast Furnace.

Amy said:

"To know that we are honouring the legacy of an industry which has been, and still is, central to Teesside and its people has brought great pride and a sense of purpose to me in the last few months.

““Bringing traditional drawings to life using modern technology is quite significant, I believe, and this fusion of “old” and “new” is what the exhibition is all about.”

See Amy and Cameron talking about their project on [YouTube](#).

Year of Steel

The free interactive exhibition will run from 5 April 2019 - 31 March 2020.

Find out more on the [Enjoy Redcar Cleveland website](#) and share your own stories using #SteelStories.