

Good morning, everyone. Welcome on this very special day. We've had a few technical issues for the microphone, but luckily you've got a very loud person here, so hopefully you can hear what I'm saying. This is the unveiling ceremony of the Consett Steelworkers Memorial. My name is John O'Connor, I'm a third generation Consettarian, for my sins and a third generation steelworker. I attended the Billet Mill Finishing School in 1977 and graduated without honours. However, I do have the honour of being Chairman of Project Genesis Trust. The Trust was established in 1994 to regenerate the Company's 700 acre site. The project was supposed to last seven years, and here we are 26 years later. However, we have made some progress as you can see, but we have a fair way to go as well.

We're being videoed today on the right and obviously we have Look North here today, so I'll have to be careful what I say or shout for the benefit of posterity. And also, to clarify when I refer to Consett, I really mean Consett and district. So please, irate of Shotley Bridge, do not write to me. I told my wife, who's over there I would mention her, from Shotley Bridge.

It's a very special day today in the history of Consett, not only are we commemorating the 40th anniversary of the closure of the Company, we are unveiling the Consett Steelworkers Memorial. Remarkably, in 140 years of iron and steel making in Consett, this is the first ever memorial to the people who tragically lost their lives during that period. And of course today we remember specifically the 11 men who were killed on the 1st of July 1950, and we extend a special welcome to the family of the 11 men who are here today or viewing the video. Could I have a round of applause for the families that are here.

Always with any project, there was a lot of people involved and it's the right thing to say thank you for their work. They say recreating history is like putting together a jigsaw when you do not have a picture on the box. So any mistakes that are made, I accept full responsibility with others. We are indebted to a whole host of people and the list is long. The researchers, Consett and District Heritage Initiative, Leadgate History Club, and they are both presenting a week of online activities regarding the history of the steelworks, and there's a presentation in Tesco's today, Tom Gorman, who also assisted with the research, Liane Horder from the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust and Fiona Robertson, who is the Chair and Gillian Taylor, the Chief Executive, who've driven down from Scotland today and they have been invaluable in the information that they've given us, and we will publish all of that information from Carnegie on the Visit Consett website and that will link to the Carnegie website. And they are marvelous people who are really enthusiastic about helping any of the families to answer any questions that they may have had. You'll hear from them very shortly.

The funders, this project cost £35,000, and the funding came from seven counselors, which are Owen Temple, Alex Watson, Derek Hicks, Stephen Robinson, Watts Stelling, Alan Shield and Peter Oliver, most of which are here today, the Derwent Valley Partnership with Corinne Walton and of course, Project Genesis.

And I've got a category here called the workers, the people who put it together. And they include Kevin Fenley from contractors Absolute Civil Engineering, the designer. So Simon Auton, Tesco's Gary Ewart, who's somewhere today, and Mark Short and Morris Muter, who again gave invaluable support.

I must mention Mike Clark. He has worked tremendously hard to pull all this together and he's responsible for the maintenance and when the planting comes through and everything else. So his job will continue well after today's event. But, my special thanks to Ernie over here, known to his friends, hopefully I might be one of them, as Jeff who made a fantastic video and gave us a unique insight into the impact of the disaster in 1950. Jeff will open the Memorial shortly.

And also just to say, I've received lots of inquiries from other families of people who sadly lost their lives at other times during the 140 years. So we can't remember everyone, even though we do say here, the

Memorial is dedicated to all those who died, we can't remember all of them, but we can remember some. And what we're going to do is we're going to publish an 'in memoriam' page on the Visit Consett website. So any families that wish to write about their loved ones with photographs, simply send them to me and they will go on the Visit Consett website.

As I said, it's a fantastic honour to remember these people. I know 70 years is an awful long time for those people, but for those people today, it was probably the major incident in their lives and we must remember that. So that's my bit. I'm now going to introduce you to Liane and Fiona from the Carnegie, I'll get this right because I said the Carnegie Trust Fund but that has a different connotation, from the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust ladies.

Thank you very much, John. And good afternoon. Good morning. Sorry. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, we are so honoured and delighted to be here with you today at this very special event. And before we pay tribute to the heroism of the nine men who died trying to rescue their fellow workers at Consett Ironworks in 1950, I thought it appropriate to tell you a little bit about Andrew Carnegie and the Hero Fund that he founded.

So Andrew Carnegie was actually born in Dunfermline, Scotland in 1835. When he was 12 he and his family emigrated to America, to Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. He foresaw the importance of the railways and he invested in steel in 1901. He sold his Carnegie Steel Company and became the richest man in the world, at least twice as wealthy as Bill Gates in today's terms. He was known as the King of Steel and so it's fitting that his legacy forms part of this special event today.

Having accumulated such enormous wealth, Andrew Carnegie became a great, a great philanthropist and gave away 90% of his fortune before his death in 1919 and of the many institutions and trusts that he set up, the Hero Fund was the one he was most proud of. He understood the random consequences of heroism and knew that with the loss of their breadwinner, a family could struggle to survive. There are 11 Hero Fund Trusts across the world. And the UK hero fund was founded in 1908. It's aim to recognize civilian heroism and give financial assistance when necessary to people who've been injured or to the dependence of people who have been killed in the attempt to save another human life in peaceful pursuits.

And the recognition doesn't stop there because the Trust currently supports over a hundred families affected by the death or serious injury of their loved one. Our relationship with any one beneficiary or family lasts as long as it's needed and it can be for as long as 60 years. Since 1908, over 6,000 individual heroes have been recognised and today we honour nine of these heroes. And I now ask Liane Horder, who is our Hero Fund Manager to read the citation about their actions that was drawn up at the time of their recognition in 1951.

Arthur Briggs, 53, blast furnace labourer, John S Craggs, 54, blast furnace labourer. Both of Castleside, County Durham.

Francis Crawley, 30, locomotive fireman, Thomas C Easten, 45, blast furnace labourer, Thomas Heslop, 32, blast furnace labourer, Andrew A Kirby, 25, locomotive fireman. All of Blackhill, County Durham.

John Jeffrey, 46, blast furnaceman, Arnold W Ross, 54, blast furnace keeper. Both of Leadgate, County Durham.

And Joseph E Humble, 44 blast furnace slagger of Consett, County Durham, lost their lives on the 1st of July, 1950, while attempting to rescue fellow workman, who had been overcome by gas in an iron works at Consett.

The men on the night shift were about to commence work, when there was an escape of carbon monoxide gas from an open gas seal on one of the blast furnaces. Two workman, at the time employed in or near the furnace engine house, approximately 30 yards from the escape of gas and were

overcome. Other workman, regardless of their own safety went to that assistance when the alarm was given and in their attempt to remove the two men from the danger area, nine of the rescuers lost their lives. Each of the nine widows was awarded a Memorial certificate and a grant, together with a supplementary allowance.

Thank you, Leanne. All nine names have been beautifully inscribed in the Hero Fund Roll of Honour, which is kept in the Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum in Dunfermline. We hope that the families who have these heroes will come to visit us and see the entries in the Role of Honour for themselves.

On a personal note, I was very moved when I saw the name of the Hero Fund Chairman who had signed the nine certificates for those brave men. It was a WB Robertson who was my husband's grandfather. A poignant link for me to the events today.

In closing, I would like to share a quote from Andrew Carnegie when he spoke about those recognised by the Hero Fund and which could, well describe these nine men. He said, True heroes think not of reward. They are inspired and think only of their fellows, endangered, never of themselves.

Marvellous words. So we now have saved the best till last. And if you like to come forward, this ladies and gentlemen is Ernest, Jeff to his friends, Jeffrey. A remarkable man, paratrooper shoe repairer, it's like This Is Your Life, son of a hero and to my mind a hero too. The best of Consett.

Thank you. This is an honour and a privilege to be here today, to open this Memorial, which acknowledges those men who lost their lives serving in the steelworks. The Memorial is of particular importance to me as it also commemorates the 11 men who were killed in the disaster in 1950, one of whom was my father John Jeffrey. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to making this possible by providing a place for current and future generations to visit, reflect, and be remembered the tragedies suffered by our forefathers. The men who went to work and never came home. The pain and devastation that this must have caused to their families and loved ones. Thank you.

I will now ask Ernie to open the Memorial.

[Applause]

Just to conclude matters, if the families would just stay in their seats because the lovely people from Carnegie have brought packs for each of the people. They mentioned the Role of Honour, some people that may not be able to see the Role of Honour. So they've brought copies of the Role of Honour to you, the mountain doesn't come to Muhammad, Muhammad goes to the mountain!

So for everybody else, that's the end of the ceremony, thank you very much for coming. And if the family's just stay there, we'll bring you the packs. As I say, a special day for the town. Thank you.

I think this is absolutely it's massive for Consett because 70 years ago, you know, 11 men died here. Nine of those died trying to save their comrades in arms in the, in the steelworks. I think it's, it's such an important part of the history here to remember that this wasn't a walk in the park of a job. This was a difficult job where there were real physical dangers to so many people. And it means so much to Consett. The history of the steelworks and remembering 40 years this year since it closed, 70 years since this disaster, many years. Actually, there are very few years throughout where men weren't either severely injured or died working in the steelworks. So this is also a Memorial to all those who worked here at the company and really served and built the community here for over a hundred years.

So you can see around us the huge former steelworks site, slowly being redeveloped, but it was such an iconic, all those old pictures you see of Consett, the 700 acre site here, three and a half thousand men at the end, who worked here at the steelworks and it really built the town. The entire basis of the town is so much part of that historic identity. And as we slowly seeing the redevelopment of the site with new jobs and housing and infrastructure coming, I think that's the, that's what we need to now take forwards

is that what we're seeing is a redevelopment of the major, major heart of it. And it's good that there are still things like this Memorial here today, which are real reminders of that, because that's what Consett was built on, because it was built for that, and started the, basically almost a worldwide steel making industry, and it's an important part of their history, but it's reflected in everything we do today.

Clearly the steelworks was a huge part of Consett for many decades and it still means a lot to the people of Consett as we can see today as we can see on this site, as we can see from the Memorial that's been launched today this is still something that is hugely important to residents across this part of County Durham, Consett and the towns around. And it's very special to be part of this unveiling this morning.

My name is Patrick Crawley. I'm here at the Memorial today, representing the whole family and my dad Francis Crawley, who was killed in 1950. My dad was on his way to work and heard shouts of help. So he went in and he got some of the men out, dragged them out by the scruff of the neck. Then went in and came out, went back in and didn't come out. So he was killed. I'm very proud for everybody of Consett and district for what they've done today.

Well, this Memorial, I'm very, I'm very proud they've done something like this today after, after all these years, 70 years. But I'd just like to say whoever's been involved with it, they've made a marvellous job of it. It's quality, you know, and I hope people, well not enjoy it, but reflect when they come and see it, you know, the families and all my family's here today and they did didn't know anything about this but now people in the district will know. And I just don't know what to say, I'm just very proud it's happening. Not just for me, for all these people and the relatives.

It's an emotional idea. I'm just pleased. It's happened after all this time. And there's been a lot of people involved with people doing knew about, and I just like to thank them people, people that wouldn't ever get mentioned and things like that. It's been a lot of work put into it on the quiet and not, you know, so I'm pleased about that.