



Russell Watson with Neil McArthur at Irlam station

WATSON WENT FROM A BOLT CUTTER IN IRLAM TO NATIONAL FAME IN 2000

# Tenor sings praises of hometown

By NEAL KEELING

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RUSSELL Watson's career is well and truly back on track.

And the tenor could soon be a permanent fixture on his home town's revived railway station.

Russell went from a bolt-cutter in an Irlam factory to national fame in 2000 with his classical crossover album *The Voice*.

But six years later a brain tumour caused his career to stall, a condition which came back a year later.

Now fully recovered he has a new album, *True Stories*, and he performed in Trafalgar Square, London, on Remembrance Sunday.

After school the 'People's Tenor' went on a YTS (youth training scheme) when he received £25 a week, then at 17 was working in the factory.

He may now live in Wilmslow, Cheshire, but the 49-year-old father-of-two has not forgotten his roots.

Russell lived in Irlam until he was in his mid-20s and still has relatives living there.

He visited his home town to see the transformation of the old Station House building at the local railway station. He met Neil McArthur, a founder

of the Talk Talk telecoms group.

Neil and his wife, Anne, founded the Hamilton Davies Trust (HDT) in 2004 to help support the local communities of Irlam and Cadishead in Salford, and nearby Rixton-with-Glazebrook.

After it was derelict for more than 25 years, the trust contributed towards the extensive £2m renovation of Station House, which has become a busy cafe, community facility, and heritage centre.

Russell said: "It was a real pleasure to meet Neil and see the work that the Hamilton Davies Trust is doing in Irlam. I remember the station building as a real eyesore and I was astonished by the transformation."

"I also couldn't believe how my school had changed with the old building replaced with a new one, partly with funding from the trust. I wish Neil and the charity well and I've asked him to keep me updated on all its future activity."

Neil McArthur says: "It's wonderful that Russell took the time out of his schedule to see what we are doing in Irlam."

"We are keen to honour the famous sons and daughters of the town with some new artwork murals as part of the continuing improvements around the Station House, and we will be revealing these soon."

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