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**Russell Watson launches new artwork at Irlam Station**

**The Celebrity Express – Irlam celebrates famous figures connected with the area**

World-famous tenor Russell Watson has launched a colourful artwork at Irlam Station which celebrates the famous pioneers, industrialists, artists and entertainers who have shaped the Irlam and Cadishead area over the years.

Russell himself, along with actress Michelle Keegan, ‘The Father of the Railways’ George Stephenson and Manchester Ship Canal designer Sir Edward Leader Williams are among the 29 movers and shakers pictured in the mural, which has been named The Celebrity Express – Irlam.

The group, who have been connected with the Irlam and Cadishead area over the past four centuries, are portrayed as passengers on one of the trains which typically travelled on the Manchester to Liverpool line via Irlam Station in the first half of last century.

The artwork has been mounted on the station’s Liverpool platform. It was the brainchild of Neil McArthur, the founder of local charity the Hamilton Davies Trust (HDT), and was painted by local artist Rachelle Cleary, with help from local volunteers.

Both Neil and Rachelle are also pictured in The Celebrity Express – Irlam – though Neil didn’t know beforehand that Rachelle was going to include him.

Mr McArthur said “As part of our programme of urban art, HDT has commissioned a number of beautiful artworks around the local area, of which this is the latest example.

“The Celebrity Express – Irlam aims to celebrate the economic, industrial and cultural history of Irlam and Cadishead over the last four centuries and recognise the figures who have helped our town become what it is today.

“It has been thoroughly researched, so this is both an informative, historical piece as well being a great-looking mural for commuters and local people to enjoy.

“Irlam Station has been transformed in recent years and The Celebrity Express – Irlam is one of a number of new heritage, art and community facilities which have helped make the station a pleasure for people to use and visit.”

Living celebrities pictured in the mural, along with their families and relatives of the deceased, were invited to the opening event at Irlam station on November 7.

Russell Watson, who is originally from Irlam and lived there until his mid-20s, said: “I am truly honoured to launch this brilliant piece of art – and to be featured in it.

“It is fascinating to see so many famous and historical figures have been connected with Irlam and Cadishead over the years.

“This piece of art really brings the history of the area home to you. It’s a real asset to the station, which is already such a lovely place to visit.”

Speaking after the event, Michael, father of Michelle Keegan, said: "I feel privileged and proud that the local community have honoured Michelle and given her a seat on the Celebrity Express - Irlam. The artwork is remarkable. Great work by Rachelle and her team."

The importance of the railway and canal to Irlam and Cadishead is reflected by the presence of many of the pioneers involved in their creation in The Celebrity Express – Irlam, such as George Stephenson and Sir Edward Leader Williams.

The Cheshire Lines Committee railway opened in 1873 and was a catalyst for the industrialisation of Irlam and Cadishead and the town developed further after the Manchester Ship Canal was opened in 1894.

The full list of passengers includes:

* Russell Watson
* Michelle Keegan
* Neil McArthur MBE
* Rachelle Cleary and her dog Jess
* Sir Edward Leader Williams.
* George Stephenson
* Sir Edward Baines Junior
* George Thomas
* Robert Stannard Senior
* William Roscoe
* Emma Lowndes
* Peter Whitfield
* Lesley Nichol
* Ray Lowry
* Cliff Twemlow
* Max Shacklady
* Bill Dulson
* Ben Hopwood
* Cameron Brannagan
* Scott Andrew Hogan
* Frank Hulme MBE
* Sir Edward Watkin
* James J Royle
* Thomas Steers
* Thomas Patten Senior
* James Brindley
* Josiah (Joe) Lane
* And Thomas Knowles.

For more information on the Celebrity Express – Irlam or its passengers, please visit [www.hamiltondavies.org.uk](http://www.hamiltondavies.org.uk).

**Notes for editors**

**The Hamilton Davies Trust**

HDT was founded by Neil and Anne McArthur in 2004 with the aim of supporting the local communities of Irlam and Cadishead in Salford, with additional support given to Rixton-with-Glazebrook (Warrington). Neil is a founder of the Talk Talk group.

With a strong leadership with local roots and working closely with local people, it has invested £7m of private funds to date into the area.

This includes distributing over 550 grants to local organisations and projects and, with partners, funding a number of major, high-quality infrastructure projects such as the building of a new sixth form college, the refurbishment of the local leisure centre and the transformation of Irlam Railway Station.

A key partner is NC Developments Ltd (NCD**)**, a property company owned by Neil McArthur which delivers building and public realm projects part - or full funded by HDT to improve life in Irlam and Cadishead.

According to a 2014 report by Commission for the New Economy, the work of the HDT and partners is supporting significant social and economic improvements in the area, and local people identify the charity as the key driver of regeneration.

<http://neweconomymanchester.com/media/1468/irlam-cadishead-report.pdf>