

## Stockton Heritage Plaques Scheme

1. As in other towns and cities around the country, Stockton-on-Tees is committed to the celebration of its history and achievements through memorials, plaques and commemorations of its famous residents, events and locations. The adoption of a Heritage Plaques Scheme for the Borough is an integral part of the strategy to celebrate our rich background.
2. There are a number of possible aims and intentions for plaques and plaque schemes, which are by no means mutually exclusive. In Stockton we believe that they will enhance a local community by generating interest in the history of the area and adding to and encouraging a sense of local pride. The promotion of our heritage through plaques will help us attract visitors.
3. We expect that plaques will stimulate interest not only in a specific building, achievement, event or person but in a particular realm of endeavour or period of history, such as that of our railway heritage or our industrial strength in the mid nineteenth century. Raised awareness of such topics will therefore have an educational and motivational role.
4. Plaques can also draw attention to elements of history that are not widely known or appreciated, and to people and groups whose contribution has been unfairly overlooked. In this way, as in others, they can provide a sense of recognition and inclusion, appealing to people of all ages and from all walks of life and backgrounds, and reflecting the historical and modern make-up of local communities.
5. The figures, events and historical associations named on Stockton plaques may not all be positive; although the majority of plaques will aim to be celebratory, others may take a moral stance on the people, occurrences and practices of the past, highlighting that they took place to learn from them and educate people in order to prevent such a thing happening again.
6. It should be noted, however, that the general perception is that plaques seek to honour the subject to which they draw attention. As is reflected by the term 'commemorative plaque' and the name applied to a number of early plaques – 'memorial tablets' – they seek to commemorate and perpetuate the memory of people, events or associations, and bring an element of the past into the present and the future.
7. Plaques relate not just to the subject commemorated, but also to the structure to which they are affixed – where someone may have lived or died, or where something of note may have taken place. When a building is selected, terms will need to be agreed to cover any permissions such as listed building consent, and liabilities such as maintenance, and its removal and possible relocation should the building to which it is affixed be radically altered or demolished.
8. The target audience of the plaques is another important practical consideration. Almost invariably, this will (and should) be the general public, and thus it is vital to install plaques in positions which will be readily visible and legible to passers-by.
9. The aims of the Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme are as follows

- Raise awareness of our local history and heritage
- Stimulate pride and aspiration
- Highlight particular achievements or periods, including those that are less well known
- Connect people and events of the past to the buildings and sites that remain in place today

### **Plaque design and content**

10. The English Heritage scheme is well known and enjoys an international reputation. When a visitor sees a blue round plaque attached to a building they assume it provides information about the significance of that site, and that it is part of a much wider set of such plaques. The blue that is used is distinctive and establishes a quick visual association.
11. It is recommended that Stockton's plaque scheme should adopt the same basic form and colour in order to be seen by visitors as being part of the national heritage collection, benefiting from the strong promotion of the EH scheme by association.
12. In consideration of material, many schemes use ceramic discs with a high glaze finish which is very durable and requires little or no maintenance. The most common alternative is cast metal (bronze, steel, iron or aluminium), in some cases including enamel treatment rather than paint. Stone, slate and marble plaques or tablets have obvious precedents. Fibreglass, resins and plastics are now sufficiently durable and resistant to weathering to be worthy of consideration and some schemes do use these materials.
13. Feasibility has now been undertaken with a view to durability of materials, overall suitability and costs. Surface mounted ceramic roundels offer the most durable and easiest to fit approach with good value for money. This will be preferred option for Stockton's Heritage Plaque scheme with the exception of individual instances where this approach is not appropriate to the building or environment concerned.
14. Costs for the procurement and installation of the plaques will vary according to the needs for specific installation factors but will range between £800 and £4000.
15. Evidence from the EH scheme suggests that typeface, layout and design issues should be carefully thought through as they have a considerable impact on the attractiveness and legibility of the final product.
16. The length and content of the words carried on the plaque is also of particular importance. Plaques that attempt to carry too much information can end up conveying less. Standard EH Blue Plaques contain no more than 19 words including dates. The maximum EH recommended number of words for a plaque of this approximate size, based on experience, is 30 words.
17. The EH scheme roundels are generally 19 inches in diameter, most round plaque schemes tend to be between 18 and 25 inches. It is recommended that Stockton's plaques should be approximately 20 inches or 500mm in diameter, and contain up to 30 words, subject to detailed design proposals.

18. The use of upper and lower-case letters, and of differing sizes of type can help the viewer determine the hierarchy of information. If the name of the subject is in upper case and the supporting text in a smaller lower case, the legibility from a reasonable distance can be maximised. It is recommended that the Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme adopts this approach to form and content.
19. The matter of the ownership and responsibility for future maintenance will need to be approached on a case by case basis, depending on the nature of the building to which the plaque is being affixed. However, it is usually understood that the plaque becomes part of the fabric of the building and thus becomes the responsibility of the property owner.

### **Considerations in respect of individuals**

20. In respect of an individual as the subject to be commemorated, the Panel will consider written nominations as set out in the existing Commemoration Procedure. In order to qualify an individual should meet one or more of the following criteria;
  - I. There shall be reasonable grounds for believing that the subjects are regarded as eminent by a majority of members of their own profession or calling.
  - II. They shall have made some important positive contribution to human welfare or happiness.
  - III. They shall have had such exceptional and outstanding personalities that the well-informed passer-by immediately recognises their names.
  - IV. They deserve national recognition.
21. Criteria iii and iv can, when applied to living or recently deceased individuals lead to a massive number of nominations. To avoid this problem and to ensure that an individuals contribution can be objectively judged in an historic context, the EH scheme applies a strict rule that subjects must have been dead for 20 years. In addition the London scheme includes a 'centenary provision' so that a person can be commemorated one hundred years after their birth even if they have not been dead for 20 years. It is recommended that the Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme adopts these additional criteria.
22. The already adopted Commemoration Procedure scoring matrix incorporates levels of importance and relevance to the area such that a figure qualifying may have a very high international significance but with modest association with the area, or be known to a more select national audience but have had a sustained and significant impact on the area, for example.
23. The English Heritage publication "Conservation Principle" provides detailed guidance on the assessment of the significance of heritage assets, and will be used to inform our assessments.
24. In keeping with the EH and other schemes, the Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme may wish to erect only one plaque per person, except in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, in consideration of any individual, research will need to be conducted to establish all sites or buildings within the Borough with an association with the individual. An assessment can then be made as to which is the most appropriate, based on the following;

- The type of buildings that are eligible for commemoration (residential, commercial, unaltered from the time of the event/occupancy being commemorated etc).
- Was the person productive during their time at this address?
- Did they produce any notable works there, or did the address inspire/inform any such works?
- Is the building easily visible from a public right of way, and will it be viewed by a broad range of people?
- The need for outline consent from the building owner(s) and perhaps from relatives of a person proposed for commemoration.
- The likelihood of securing listed building consent where relevant, or the need for conservation area impact assessment

25. Discussion regarding permissions for installation, from owners and from officers with statutory powers, should take place as soon as possible in the process to avoid wasted effort.

26. Recommendations for the siting of individual Heritage Plaques will be considered by the Commemorations Working Group subject to final approval by Cabinet in each case.

### **Consideration in respect of events or places**

27. While the aims and basic principles of commemoration of individuals; significance and relevance to the area, will remain broadly the same for historical events, a different approach may be needed for plaques which draw attention to the history and interest of certain sites or buildings. Considerations in defining their worthiness for a plaque may include the following:

- The building's significance within the history of an area, or within the country as a whole.
- The importance of its structure or design.
- The building's associations.
- The building's prominence within the streetscape.
- Whether or not the building's significance can be adequately and succinctly relayed by a plaque inscription.

28. A specific association with a person or event is easily conveyed by a plaque, but a building's intrinsic interest often requires a fuller explanation than is suitable for a plaque inscription. Furthermore, where a building is in itself of significance, a plaque may detract from its design, special interest and character.

29. The intention in establishing a Stockton Plaque scheme is not to use plaques to note every important facet of local history. As mentioned earlier in this report, there will be events, sites and people where other forms of commemoration are more appropriate. We may wish to erect a statue to an individual in a prominent location whilst installing a plaque on that person's home where that is less accessible or visible. We may wish to use panels or pictorial devices to provide more information and interpretation than is possible with a plaque. We may also wish to embed electronic devices in the built landscape which trigger mobile technology recognition. There are already I-phone applications which locate and interpret significant historic sites in other UK towns and cities. Stockton may wish to invest in the development of an 'app' for our heritage.

30. Whatever the form of commemoration, we will use our museums, libraries, and online resources to provide additional context and to allow the public to see information about all the relevant people, events and sites that are marked.
31. The potential for these wider forms of commemoration and interpretation are explored further in the Stockton Heritage Strategy.

### **Celebration and launches**

32. Since the aims of the Stockton Plaque Scheme are to raise awareness of our heritage and connect past events to current places, the process by which plaques are nominated, approved, created and installed should all be seen as opportunities to generate interest. There has already been a general invitation to nominate people to the Hall of Fame, but the launch of a formally adopted Stockton Plaque Scheme should incorporate an invitation to the general public to tell us what they want to see celebrated in this way.
33. Our Hall of Fame can carry information about subjects under consideration at any point in time and invite people's views and any relevant information. In this way we can capture background information and connections to support any nomination.
34. When a plaque is installed, an unveiling event will provide an opportunity to raise the profile of the subject. Many plaque schemes are promoted by local history societies and include talks and guided walks that help to illuminate the subject for the general public.