

Mark celebrates bridge bicentenary

Mark Lancaster has praised a unique feat of engineering which proves Milton Keynes North has a fantastic heritage.

Mr Lancaster visited the exhibition dedicated to the 200th anniversary of Newport Pagnell's Iron Bridge in the town's library on Friday.

The only working bridge of its kind in the Western Hemisphere, it has been the subject of celebrations along with the nearby North Bridge, also constructed in 1810.

Frequently using Tickford Bridge but unaware of its history, Mr Lancaster learnt about the extraordinary transportation of the iron from the north to Newport Pagnell - via sea and canal rather than road.

The exhibition charts the life of the bridge: requiring an Act of Parliament before construction could commence; surviving replacement in 1967 after a backlash against the decision; and seeing the erection and removal of controversial traffic calming bollards in the 1990s.

The bridge - which has never been officially opened - will be the centre of a celebratory parade on September 18.

Mr Lancaster, who afterwards went to admire the structure with its freshly gilded 1810 numerals, said: "Outsiders bemoan Milton Keynes's supposed lack of heritage, but our splendid iron bridge proves those people wrong.

"It is a beautiful structure and we must be grateful to the people who saved it in the 1960s, those who have worked to preserve it since, and now the volunteers who have organised these anniversary celebrations. Here's hoping it continues for the next 200 years."