

About the Portrait Bench

The Portrait Bench is a new and unique National collection of local portraits. The figures are inspired and chosen for their individual contribution to the life of the community.

Creating portraits is an old custom - honouring individuals for their philanthropy, political prowess or acts of heroism, and most commonly for the love of family members. All major public spaces are graced by statues or portraits of eminent individuals and family photos are treasured across the world.

Each Portrait Bench is a collection of three distinctive, life-size local figures cut from sheet steel and installed by a simple bench, inviting you to sit or step up into the space and become a part of the portrait group.

The features of each character have been simplified while retaining their essential characteristics. The characters reflect those things that are important to the community; each is inspired by the local heritage, culture and aspirations of the area; some we'll know and some we won't...together they will represent around 230 characters chosen by thousands of people from across the UK.



Choosing the Luton portraits

The characters were chosen by the project Steering Group from a shortlist of six characters. The Steering Group is made up of Councillors and officers of Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Hertfordshire County Council along with Sustrans Rangers, local cycle groups and the landowners who have agreed to the route crossing their land.

New walking and cycling networks

Sustrans is bringing the award winning National Cycle Network deep into the heart of communities across the UK to enable many more people to get about on foot and by bike. Find out more about walking and cycling routes in Luton and how to find this portrait bench at www.sustrans.org.uk/c2/portraitbench

Portrait Bench Upper Lea Valley Way



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First Luton Sea Scouts



Formed in 1909 the First Luton Sea Scout Troop is the oldest troop in Luton, as well as one of the oldest in the country. As part of the Scouting Movement started by Lord Baden-Powell in 1907 the Luton Sea Scouts combine traditional scouting with various water-based activities such as sailing and canoeing (often using the lakes on the River Lea at Luton Hoo, designed by Capability Brown).

Sea Scout troops are inspected every year by the Royal Navy and the top 101 are awarded Admiralty recognition. The First Luton Sea Scouts have been Admiralty recognised since 1941.

Ever popular, the Group today has Beaver, Cub, and Scout sections for boys and girls between the ages of 6 to 14. The main aims of the First Luton Sea Scouts are for all its members to have fun whilst learning and developing new skills, interests and good citizenship.

Eric Morecambe OBE

(John Eric Bartholomew) 1926–1984



Born John Eric Bartholomew, Eric took his stage name from his home town Morecambe. Eric is most famous for his award-winning double act with Ernie Wise. The pair worked together on popular shows *Two of a Kind* and *The Morecambe and Wise Show*, becoming famous for visual comedy, song and dance routines and catchphrases. Many celebrities appeared on the shows welcoming the appalling treatment they would receive from Morecambe and Wise who, for example, would mispronounce their names.

Morecambe and Wise became so popular that their annual BBC Christmas shows were considered mandatory viewing in the United Kingdom from 1968 to 1977. The 1977 show recorded one of the highest ever audiences in British television history.

In 1976 Morecambe was awarded with an OBE for his services to entertainment.

Eric lived in Harpenden, was a keen birdwatcher and a lifelong fan of Luton Town Football Club of which he was also a Director (1970-77).

Lancelot “Capability” Brown

1716–1783



Lancelot Brown is the most famous English landscape designer. Brown gained his nickname “Capability”, because he would characteristically tell his landed clients that their estates had great “capability” for landscape improvement.

The fashion for less formal English gardens developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century and Capability Brown was influential in developing the style of a more wild landscape. At the forefront of the new style, Brown’s services were in great demand from the landed gentry and in 1764 he was appointed Master Gardener at Hampton Court. Many examples of his work are now open to the public.

Brown described himself as a ‘place-maker’, not a ‘landscape gardener’. The landscape at Luton Hoo was remodelled in 1764 following purchase of the estate by the 3rd Earl of Bute in 1762. It is this landscape you can see from this Portrait Bench site.