

MEDIA RELEASE

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Road in Harrogate named after road building legend

Yorkshire legend John Metcalf, one of Britain's greatest civil engineers, has been honoured by having a road named after him.

This year marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of Metcalf, commonly known as 'Blind Jack of Knaresborough', who was the first professional road builder to emerge during the Industrial Revolution.

The proposal of naming one of the Harrogate district's roads in Metcalf's honour was originally raised by the Blind Jack of Knaresborough Tri-centennial Anniversary Committee. Harrogate Borough Council were pleased to grant the request and a section of the A658 southern bypass between A61 Buttersyke Bar roundabout and the A661 Kestrel roundabout outside of Harrogate, has been named 'John Metcalf Way' in recognition of his pioneering work.

John Metcalf was born into a poor family in Knaresborough in 1717. At the age of six, he was left completely blind following an attack of smallpox. During his lifetime, Metcalf developed a legendary reputation as a musician, drinker, gambler, huntsman, horse dealer, adventurer, trader, smuggler and most significantly – a road builder.

John Metcalf understood that roads should drain properly and pioneered innovative building techniques which were used by subsequent road builders including Thomas Telford and John McAdam.

Between 1752 to 1791, Metcalf and his team of over 400 builders constructed roads in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire and Cheshire including routes from Knaresborough to Wetherby; Minskip to Ferrensby; Wakefield to Huddersfield and Saddleworth; Bury to Blackburn; and Skipton to Colne and Burnley.

John Metcalf retired in 1792 and died aged 92 on 26 April 1810 at his home in Spofforth.

The 'John Metcalf Way' road sign was officially unveiled on Friday 7 July 2017 by the Kestrel roundabout on the A61 outside of Harrogate with Councillor Anne Jones, Mayor of the Borough of Harrogate; Councillor David Goode, Mayor of Knaresborough; Roger Hewitt, the Town Crier of Knaresborough; local historian Brian Forshaw; Bernard Higgins and other representatives from the Blind Jack of Knaresborough Tri-centennial Anniversary Committee, the FEVA Knaresborough committee and Welcome to Yorkshire in attendance.

Councillor Richard Cooper, Leader of Harrogate Borough Council said: "John Metcalf played a significant role in the development of our road network. As an important historical figure from our district it is fitting that he is recognised appropriately. I believe that in light of his achievements there is no more fitting a way of doing this than by naming a road in his honour. That is why I was pleased to support this proposal."

Bernard Higgins of the Blind Jack of Knaresborough Tri-centennial Anniversary Committee said: "Tuesday 15 August marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of John Metcalf and naming a road after him is a great way to recognise his exploits. I am delighted that a section of the A658 (Southern Bypass) has now been named the 'John Metcalf Way'.

"He played an import role in the development of our highways and the roads he built had a significant impact helping move people, goods and services around the North of England in a much quicker and safer fashion at a time when the Industrial Revolution was taking off.

"John Metcalf with all his faults and eccentricities is one of the great men of Yorkshire and of England and I am pleased that two hundred and seven years after his death we can at long last celebrate his achievements with the very first roadway named after him.

"Visitors arriving for next week's Great Yorkshire Show will be able to see these new road signs which have been erected in his honour and I hope that they will be encouraged to learn a little bit more about a Yorkshireman whose courage and perseverance enabled him to live the fullest of lives until his 93rd year.

"I would like to thank Harrogate Borough Council and Knaresborough Town Council for their support for our road naming proposal. A huge debt of gratitude goes to them."

Councillor Anne Jones, Mayor of the Borough of Harrogate said: "It was a real pleasure to attend the unveiling of John Metcalf Way today. He is an important local figure who has been overlooked and he deserves to be more famous nationally as he played a major role in the early Industrial Revolution."

On Tuesday 15 August between 2.00pm-3.00pm at Knaresborough Castle and Museum, local historian Brian Forshaw will be discussing the eventful life on Blind Jack on the 300th anniversary of his birth. Tickets cost £5. Further details are available by visiting www.harrogate.gov.uk/museums or calling 01423 556188.

PHOTO CAPTION:

John Metcalf Way sign unveiling 1 (left-right): Roger Hewitt, the Town Crier of Knaresborough; Bernard Higgins of the Blind Jack of Knaresborough Tri-centennial Anniversary Committee; Councillor Anne Jones, Mayor of the Borough of Harrogate; and Councillor David Goode, Mayor of Knaresborough unveil the road sign in honour of John Metcalf..

John Metcalf Way sign unveiling 2: Councillor Anne Jones, Mayor of the Borough of Harrogate; Councillor David Goode, Mayor of Knaresborough; Roger Hewitt, the Town Crier of Knaresborough; local historian Brian Forshaw; Bernard Higgins and other representatives from the Blind Jack of Knaresborough Tri-centennial Anniversary Committee, the FEVA Knaresborough committee and Welcome to Yorkshire celebrate the unveiling of the road sign in honour of John Metcalf.

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