# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Robert Owen’s 250 anniversary commemoration** |
| **DATE** | **24 March 2021** |
| **BY** | **Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism** |

Robert Owen was a Welsh textile manufacturer, philanthropist and social reformer born in Newtown, Powys 250 years ago. Owen’s ideas about principled manufacturing, youth education and early child care, and the importance of community resonate with us two and a half centuries later. However, from the prism of a twenty first century position, it is important that people are provided with a rounded opportunity to understand his history with the slave trade – he is a persuasive example of how even progressive thinkers may be blinkered by the norms of their era.

As 2021 marks the 250 year anniversary of the birth of Robert Owen, the Welsh Government has been working with local partners to explore new ways of remembering this social reformer from mid Wales and telling his story in a full and rounded way. In conjunction with Oriel Davies in Newtown, the project sought to engage with the community, and open up a dialogue with local residents about the nature of such a commemoration.

Following an open competition, artist Lisa Heledd Jones was commissioned to take forward the engagement project. She undertook the research and engagement project during the past year and her final report was delivered to the local steering group earlier this year.

As a result, I am pleased to confirm that four specific projects will be taken forward to commemorate the life of Robert Owen.

The projects we will support are:

* A permanent sculpture to be commissioned and created by a professional artist to be erected in Newtown;
* A local sculpture competition for young people to explore the life and work of Robert Owen;
* A virtual reality trail in Newtown that will tell Robert Owen’s story; and
* Support toupdate the Robert Owen Museum including refreshed displays providing a wide-ranging account of his life, and an outreach programme for schools with a dedicated outreach officer to deliver the programme.

Given the extensive audit of statues, street and building names commissioned by the First Minister, it’s important that when we look at new commemorations and historical projects in Wales that they properly reflect all parts of a person’s history no matter how difficult. Robert Owen’s opposition to emancipation and the use of goods from American plantations, shows that despite the successes in his history, his time was not without controversy. Our work in the Government, does not seek to rewrite history, but to ensure it is properly reflected. To show individuals as they were, the good with the bad.

The Welsh Government is providing funding of £55,000 to support this work.