CELEBRATING 50 YEARS WWT Washington Wetland Centre

First opening on the morning of 29 May 1975 at a cost of 40p for adults and 20p for children, WWT Washington Wetland Centre introduced the people of Washington to an array of ducks, geese and swans, living up to its then name 'Washington Wildfowl Park'.

Previously predominantly farmland, most of the trees and hedgerows didn't exist. All of the ponds and lakes were specifically designed and built as part of WWT's plan to increase biodiversity to the area by creating new wetland and woodland habitat, which served as a vital community asset. Fast-forward 50 years and it has become an urban oasis surrounded by industry.

Adjacent to the River Wear, the site acts as a nature corridor, a refuge spot or even a permanent dwelling for many wild species of insects, birds, amphibians and mammals, as well as an important home for conservation species within our living collection. But, where did it all begin?

Follow in Sir Peter Scott's footsteps eranda and see the visitor centre om the same angle 50 years later!

Sir Peter Scott met with the then curator John Secrett to discuss the opening. The nearby Barmston Ponds already saw a vast array of wild bird species and the hope was that the birds would navigate to 'Washington wetlands' and embed themselves into the environment, creating a joint conservation effort in the local area the idea definitely came into fruition!

1800s

or centuries, the land that WWT hington now stands on was originally working farmland, home to large anses of fields, farm animals and a water mill - situated at the 'gill' (stream) or Spring Gill, as we know it today.

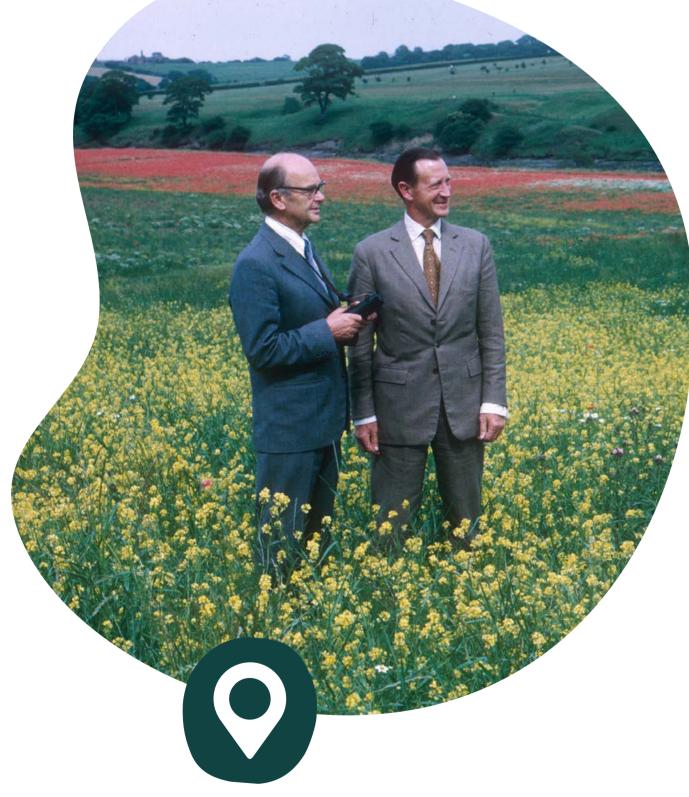
A forge also stood for many years and its last owner, George Stephenson, constructed shovels, horseshoes and anchors for the wooden ships made at the yards between Sunderland and Biddick.

Not to be mistaken with 'the father of railways' George Stephenson, our George was a master forger and ibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition at

rystal Palace in London.

ne forge stood in the area we know today as Wet Wood. Some of the bricks from the building can still be seen from the path heading into the woodland!

WWT's founder Sir Peter Scott began talk o purchase the land in Washington to pand his vision of creating new wetland abitat in the UK. He was good friends with local businessman Sir James Steel airman of Washington Development prporation from 1964 until 1977 and Lorc ieutenant of Tyne & Wear from 1974 to 984 - who introduced him to the area Ind the idea as a potential opportunity for the land.



Sir Peter Scott with Sir James Steel on Top Meadow on the day ownership was transferred to WWT, as part of the creation of Washington New Town.

