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Sculpture to honour BHP steelworkers

By *PENELOPE GREEN*

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A STEEL sculpture set to grace the former Newcastle steelworks site in honour of the workers who died on the job will offer some closure to their families and friends, two former BHP workers say.

Newcastle Industrial Heritage Association president Bob Cook and vice-president Aubrey Brooks will be on hand at 10am today at the iconic Mayfield site when Branxton blacksmith and artist Will Maguire unveils a model of his sculpture.

The state government has provided about half of the \$60,000 raised to build the memorial, the first step in a planned parkland including steelworks relics and a picnic area near the existing Muster Point sculpture.

The memorial will be built before June next year in time for activities marking the steelworks' 100-year anniversary.

It will sit on the vacant site of BHP's former industrial safety goods workshops, which helped rehabilitate workers injured in steelworks accidents.

Mr Cook, an apprentice who notched up close to four decades at the steelworks before its closure in 1999, said it was unknown how many workers died during its 84-year operation but it was speculated the figure could be more than 200.

Fifteen years on, he said the planned memorial and parkland would likely become a tourist attraction given its links to so many.

Mr Brooks, who followed his grandfather and father in joining the steelworks, said in his role co-ordinating BHP reunions and on-site tours he was constantly meeting those with a link to the site.

"This [new memorial] is significant because it not only honours the people who lost their lives but those that worked there and made Newcastle a great place and helped build this great country we call Australia," he said.

Mr Cook said Newcastle had changed dramatically since the steelworks' closure in 1999 and it was important to reflect on how the city had developed.