
Tourism bosses admit Stan Laurel mistake

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TOURISM bosses at a town which claimed it is the birthplace of Ulverston's most famous son have admitted making a 'nice mess'.

A new tourist information leaflet and map proclaims: 'Bet you didn't know that Bishop Auckland was the birthplace of Arthur Stanley Jefferson, better known as Stan Laurel', but as all fans know he was in fact born in Ulverston on June 16, 1890.

Visit County Durham has apologised for the error, but will not recall or reprint the brochure because of finances.

It is not the first time there has been controversy over who 'owns' Stan. Thirty-four years ago Bishop Auckland, where the slapstick comedian went to school, was adamant he had been born there. But the then-mayor of Ulverston and huge Laurel and Hardy fan Bill Cubin proved he was actually born in Argyll Street in Ulverston.

And when a £60,000 statue of Stan and his comedy partner-in-crime Oliver Hardy was unveiled to Ulverstonians last April after 17 years of planning, they had already been beaten to it by Bishop Auckland, whose own version was revealed the previous year.

Mr Cubin officially opened the world-famous Laurel and Hardy Museum in 1983, which is now owned by his daughter Marion Grave, who said: "Somebody must be living in the past. Bishop Auckland was most disheartened when my father showed Stan was born in Ulverston.

"It was something he'd always known. When I was a child he would say to me: 'Stan Laurel was born here and I will prove it to you.' I never believed him, but of course he was right. Stan's family lived in Bishop Auckland so he did spend some of his childhood there."

Town mayor Phil Lister said: "I am sure they just made a silly mistake because as much as they would like to have claim to Stan's birthplace, they know it is not true. Stan came to Ulverston in the 1950s with Oliver Hardy, stood on the balcony of the Coronation Hall and announced to the crowd that they were so pleased to be back in the town where Stan was born - I don't think they would have said that if they weren't sure.

"I wouldn't have thought this would effect tourism for us because I think the statue and the new layout of County Square has been so successful, so people are very aware of the fact Stan is from Ulverston.

Craig Wilson, Visit County Durham marketing manager, said 'urban myth' had led to the error.

"He was baptised at St Peter's Church and schooled at King James Grammar in Bishop Auckland. His parents also ran the local theatre, but he was of course born in Ulverston. I guess Bishop Auckland is as proud of its connections with Stan as Ulverston is passionate about it being his birthplace.

"We're obviously both trying to lay claim to some of the Laurel and Hardy magic. Hopefully this will allow us to make it clearer about Stan's early years and allow both Ulverston and Bishop Auckland to share some of Stan's limelight."

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