

YCCC Chairman's Report 2024

As I approach the end of my term as chair of YCCC – a post that I have held for far too long (some 19 years!) – it is very rewarding to reflect on yet another exciting and productive year for the Consortium. Over the year we have continued to provide engaging events and activities for our members and for the wider community, while steadfastly focusing on our core mission of promoting and supporting craftsmanship and conservation in York.

The AGM on the 2nd of July 2023 was an enjoyable evening held in the historic Bedern Hall, York. We celebrated the 2023 Bursary Winners and were greatly impressed by the John Shannon Memorial Lecture from Professor Robin Coningham, UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics & Practice in Cultural Heritage at the University of Durham. His talk, "Rebuilding the Kasthmanadap: Research, Reconstruction, and Resilience," highlighted the collaboration between archaeologists, craftspeople, conservators, and architects in the reconstruction efforts following the 2015 Gorka Earthquake in Nepal. This was an excellent reminder that one of our core missions is the promotion of collaboration between the different skills represented by all those involved in complex projects of this kind.

Looking forward, this year's annual YCCC meet-up promises to be equally significant. It will take place at the recently renovated De Grey Rooms and is being planned as a larger event to include more guests, as well as this year's Bursary Winners, our members and those from the York Civic Trust who share an interest in YCCC's work. The John Shannon Memorial Lecture this year will be delivered by Dr Anna Keay, director of the Landmark Trust, who will discuss the ways in which the Trust engages with craftspeople and conservators, with particular reference to recent projects at Calverley Old Hall near Leeds and Fairburn Tower in Ross-shire. Anna's expertise and passion for heritage preservation promise to make this a truly inspiring event.

Following a very successful three year sequence of webinars, started during the Covid lock down, we took stock of this programme, feeling that as an essentially 'hands on' organisation we would like to move forward to champion events with a more practical content. The first step in this direction, and a significant highlight of the year, was the launch of our in-person "Materials:" series in October. The inaugural event, "Materials: Brick," was a cross-disciplinary collaboration between the YCCC and the University of York. Combining lectures, practical sessions, and walking tours, the event aimed to enhance the knowledge necessary to understand buildings and the skills required for their repair and conservation. This trial run exceeded our expectations, and we look forward to building on its success: indeed, we hope that this will be the first of a number of future events, and preparation work on the upcoming "Materials: Timber" day, scheduled for the autumn, is already well advanced.

This year, we have made significant strides in modernising our outreach efforts, focusing on enhancing our E-news bulletins to ensure timely and engaging updates for our members. Additionally, we ventured into the world of social media by launching an Instagram account. This platform has allowed us to connect with a broader audience, showcase our activities and achievements, and highlight the distinguished craftsmanship and conservation work supported by YCCC. Our efforts in digital outreach are helping to foster a vibrant and interactive community, furthering our mission in exciting new ways.

Our Bursary scheme continues to flourish. This year, we successfully targeted applications from more craft practitioners, particularly in the north of England and Scotland. We also saw increased interest in our Craft Traineeship programme, which encourages sustained training and development in heritage building crafts and trades. This programme offers up to £15,000, spread over two or three years, towards training and education for recent entrants in traditional building craft practices.

In November last year, Gill Chitty, YFCC Trustee and Bursary Officer, and Victoria visited Eden Stained Glass to witness first hand the impact of the very first YFCC Craft Traineeship Bursary on trainee Nerida. Funded by our Bursary programme for a second year, Nerida joined Eden Stained Glass in September 2021. Her apprenticeship began with a project at Kendal Parish Church, underscoring YFCC's commitment to supporting training in heritage building crafts. The Craft Trainee Bursary, launched in 2022, provides up to £15,000 over two or three years for individuals employed by a craft or conservation organisation, and Nerida's progress exemplifies the tangible benefits of this support.

As always, our work would not be possible without the generous support of our donors and supporters. We extend our gratitude to Pinnacle Conservation, the York Conservation Trust, the York Company of Merchant Taylors, the Surveyors Club, and the Mountain Bothies Association for their invaluable contributions. We are delighted to report that some of these organisations have decided to increase their grant to us, which is an encouraging acknowledgement of the ever growing significance and success of this programme. This ongoing support from our members and the wider community enables us to continue our crucial work in promoting and supporting craftsmanship and conservation in York, and wider afield.

At last year's AGM, we said farewell to Rebecca Thompson as a trustee, with heartfelt thanks for her contributions over the years. We wish Rebecca, now Director of Property at St Paul's Cathedral, every success in her future endeavours. This year, we are delighted to welcome Alex Holton as a new trustee. Currently Historic Buildings Surveyor for English Heritage Northern Territory, Alex brings a wealth of skills and experience that will greatly benefit the Consortium.

During the year our organisation has undergone some changes, as Victoria Hellewell, our Communications and Administration Assistant, completed her Masters in Conservation Studies at the University of York and began a new role as Heritage Training and Skills Consultant at the Commonwealth Heritage Forum. Fortunately for us, Victoria has reduced her working days with us to two days per week in order to continue contributing to YCCC.

We have continued to work on bringing YCCC and YFCC together as one single organisation, as reported in the last Annual Review; but following exchanges with the Charity Commission we have concluded that this could in reality restrict the work of the Consortium by placing conditions on our core mission of supporting and encouraging craft and conservation skills for our members. Consequently we have determined to retain the separate identities of the two branches of the organisation, while converting YFCC to a CIO. This work is still in progress.

Looking back over the last 19 years, it is very encouraging to see how the work of the Consortium has grown in significance and outreach during that time. Many of the original founders and supporters are still with us, and many wonderful people have contributed so much to the way in which the Consortium has grown and developed. I thank them all, both present and past committee members and trustees, for their unwavering dedication and hard work. Continued thanks are due also to our supporters and donors, and to the Governor and Company of the Merchant Adventurers for continuing to act as our registered office.

I am deeply reassured that, as I stand down as Chair, we can look forward to another successful year ahead, filled with more achievements and progress towards our mission.

Martin Stancliffe, Chair

Tuesday 18th June 2024