York Consortium *for* Craft and Conservation

Winter 2024

What's inside

- Message from the Chair - 1
- Bursaries - 2
- Events - 3
- YCCC Update - 6
- Member News - 6
- Research - 8
- Chris Topp - obituary - 9



Message from the Chair

I'm incredibly pleased and honoured to have been elected Chair of the YCCC at this year's AGM in July, though it is a rather daunting position to be in- following 19 years of Martin Stancliffe's tenure. Martin's vision, his intelligence and creativity, and his enormous experience in the heritage sector has strengthened and diversified the organisation whilst staying true to its objectives of collaboration and the preservation of heritage skills through our bursary programme and engagements.

A little about me: I was invited to York in 2001 to work for the late Dick Reid as an architectural woodcarver and I stayed in his workshop until Dick's retirement. Since then, I have co-run a commercial heritage stonemasonry, carving and conservation workshop just outside York, Matthias Garn + Partner. From experience, I understand that the future of our material heritage is dependent upon the perpetuation of certain specialist skills and knowledge, the type of knowledge that we value in our workshop, and which the YCCC works hard to support.

I do believe that collaboration is the key to keeping the sector strengthened and resilient moving forward, and we at the YCCC are developing strategies to work collectively with the many like-minded organisations, businesses and institutions in York who equally value fellowship, traditional skills and cultural heritage.

We want to ensure that our work stays relevant and valued, as a necessary form of knowledge both for the buildings and objects that have been fashioned before us, and for ourselves as makers, conservators and thinkers.

In the meantime, we wish you a peaceful holiday season and a prosperous New Year. Thank you for your continued support and we look forward to seeing you in 2025!

Bursaries

The York Consortium for Craft and Conservation has awarded over 300 bursaries since 2000, helping individuals develop vital skills in heritage conservation and traditional crafts.

Applications for our next round of bursaries will open on **Monday 3 March 2025**. Please refer to our website for details and please do share the info with your friends and colleagues: YCCC/bursaries.



Here are just a few updates from previous Bursary winners:

Thin Ice Press

Thin Ice Press, recipients of a YCCC bursary in 2024, continue to thrive and achieve remarkable milestones. **Nick Gill**, Master Printer at Thin Ice Press, recently led the York Centre for Print to win the prestigious **Heritage Crafts England Maker of the Year Award**, supported by the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation.

The award, presented at Eltham Palace on Tuesday, 26 November 2024, included a £1,000 prize and recognised Nick's exceptional skills in the endangered crafts of typecasting and letterpress printing. It also celebrated his efforts in promoting heritage crafts to new audiences and supporting the next generation of printers and typecasters.



Kate Longsworth

Since receiving a YCCC bursary in 2023, Kate completed the prestigious **SPAB William Morris Craft Fellowship**, an experience that has profoundly shaped her career. Over nine months, she travelled across the UK, learning from expert craftspeople and working on diverse heritage projects, from lime harling in Scotland to carving stone at the City & Guilds London Art School. Her time at Bulmer Brick and Tile deepened her appreciation for handmade materials, which she now uses in her work.

The fellowship allowed Kate to refine her skills and develop her conservation philosophy, which she continues to apply at **Hampton Court Palace**, where she is currently involved in restoring its iconic chimneys. Kate credits the YCCC bursary with enabling her to fully immerse herself in this transformative opportunity.



Suncana Marochini Darby

Since receiving a YCCC bursary in 2023, Suncana Marochini Darby has made great strides in her expertise in natural history conservation. The bursary enabled her to attend a four-day fluid preservation course at the **University of**

Nottingham, where she gained invaluable hands-on training in preserving fluid specimens, including techniques such as rehydration, seal assessment, and preservative replacement.

During the course, Suncana worked on projects involving a crayfish, cuttlefish, and brittle star, addressing challenges like damage, evaporation, and improper storage. She has since applied these specialised skills at **Colchester Museums**, where she is working to restore a neglected fluid specimen collection, improving its long-term preservation.

This experience has also shaped her ongoing development at **Museums Victoria**, where she is continuing to expand her knowledge in natural history conservation, building on the solid foundation provided by the course.

Events - Timber Day

On Saturday October 19th, we held our ***Materials: Timber*** event at the **King's Manor, University of York.** It was a busy and interesting day exploring timber-frame construction by engaging a cross-disciplinary panel of experts in a format designed to combine walking, talking and making- and relying on York's significant and beautiful built heritage to set the scene.



Joe Thomspon (Carpenter in Residence and Programme Leader for the **MSc in Timber Building Conservation at the Weald & Downland Museum**, validated by the **University of York**, and Owner of **Sussex Oak**) joined us a lead practitioner, designing a programme which explored materiality, traditional construction and conservation, focusing on building history and the parameters created by working with existing structures. For the "making" component, we created a pop-up workshop to enable participants to have-a-go at creating oak pegs, using some of the traditional tools and methods detailed during Joe's demonstration, such as sawing, lining out, and augering. Participants were then invited on a walking tour of the **York Minster Chapter House** roof to see one of the most exceptional, traditional timber-frame engineering examples we have, first-hand.

Rachael Baldwin-Gledhill (Director of **Lantern Heritage Consultancy Ltd**.) provided a perfect segway to the more contemporary by exploring the use of glulam timber on the repair and conservation of **Clifford's Tower, York**- a complex and elegant project which employed modern timber technology to effectively celebrate the old by both facilitating engagement and exploration of its historic fabric, and capitalising on its prominent location within the city. The day was capped off with a fascinating keynote address by **Professor Michael Ramage** (Head of the **Centre for Natural Material Innovation at the University of Cambridge** and founding partner of **Light Earth Designs**) which explored the use of low-energy, hi-rise structures built of timber as a sustainable alternative to those built from materials like steel and concrete. His lecture carried on themes that were picked up during the day, such as the benefits of wood, green credentials and building techniques, whilst examining leading research into current and future applications of the material.



Moving forward, we will continue to put a spotlight on York as a city of heritage crafts and conservation, but also as a place with an interest in exploring the relationship between historic and current (and future, of course) applications of traditional, sustainable materials. By doing so, we can work towards developing a deeper understanding of the value of the material.

For next year's event, we will examine the properties of **Adhesion**, revisiting some of the themes we considered in our webinar series on the subject in 2021, Chaired by the late **Professor Tom McLeish**. Adhesives are essential within many fields of craft and conservation across the heritage sector. From traditional materials, such as lime mortar and isinglass, to modern epoxies and resins, adhesives can provide elegant solutions or pose tricky (and sticky!) challenges. The intended effect of adhesives can vary significantly in different contexts, but, perhaps surprisingly, the same adhesives are used across very different fields. We will explore how adhesives are used and when they are best avoided... leading to the question: *what is the perfect glue?*

What's On

YCCC Events:

March 26th, 2025

Peasholme Green, York, YO1 7PW

Thin Ice and Thinner Paper

In 2024, YCCC awarded a training bursary to Nick Gill, Lizzy Holling and Helen Smith of Thin Ice Press: the York Centre for Print. Join us for an engaging short talk about their trip to Oguni Washi in Niigata Prefecture, Japan, and their adventures in traditional Japanese papermaking, as well as to learn about the skills -- and the beautiful papers -- they brought back from their trip. The talk will include an opportunity to tour the Centre and pull a unique souvenir print to mark the occasion.

More information to follow

Partner Events:

York Georgian Society - Saturday 11 January, 2025

23 Stonegate, York YO1 8AW

York Georgian Society - Emotional Labour, Elite Women, and the Eighteenth-Century Country House

This talk discusses the emotional labour experienced by elite women in their role as mistress of the eighteenth-century country house and examines how their pursuit of domestic perfection often incurred painful and damaging consequences.

Register now

World Heritage UK - Tuesday 21 January, 2025

Online

World Heritage & Climate Action webinar – #1

Webinar 1 of 4 on UK World Heritage Sites & Climate Change. Roxanne Andersen, lead peatland adviser and Professor of Peatland Science at the University of the Highlands & Islands, speaks about the Flow Country World Heritage Site's efforts to tackle climate change.

Register now

Historic England - Thursday 23 January, 2025

6 Mount Street Manchester M2 5NS

Historic Environment Skills Forum Workshop 2025

This year's annual Historic Environment Skills Forum workshop will be an interactive day focused on collaboration and planning. The aim is to bring together the new Skills Forum Working Groups to draft delivery and reporting plans that will drive forward the actions in the Historic Environment Skills and Careers Action Plan for England.

Register now

Sheffield Heritage Fair 2025 - Saturday 25 January 2025 - Sunday 26 January 2025

Millennium Gallery, Sheffield

Sheffield Heritage Fair is back for 2025! Celebrate Sheffield's rich history and meet more than 40 local heritage groups at a weekend-long fair at the Millennium Gallery.

More info here

YCCC Update



This year, we've said farewell to some wonderful trustees while also welcoming new trustees to YCCC.

Among those who have made an exceptional impact is **Professor Sarah Brown**, whose expertise and dedication to heritage conservation have been truly inspiring. Sarah was recognised with the prestigious **2023 Plowden Medal for Conservation,** an accolade which honours her outstanding contributions to stained-glass conservation, including her leadership as **Director of the York Glaziers Trust** and her role as **Course Director of the MA in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management at the University of York.**

The award celebrates Sarah's exceptional achievements, such as her work on the monumental conservation of the **Great East Window of York Minster**, and her dedication to training the next generation of conservators, ensuring the preservation of this intricate craft for years to come.

Member News

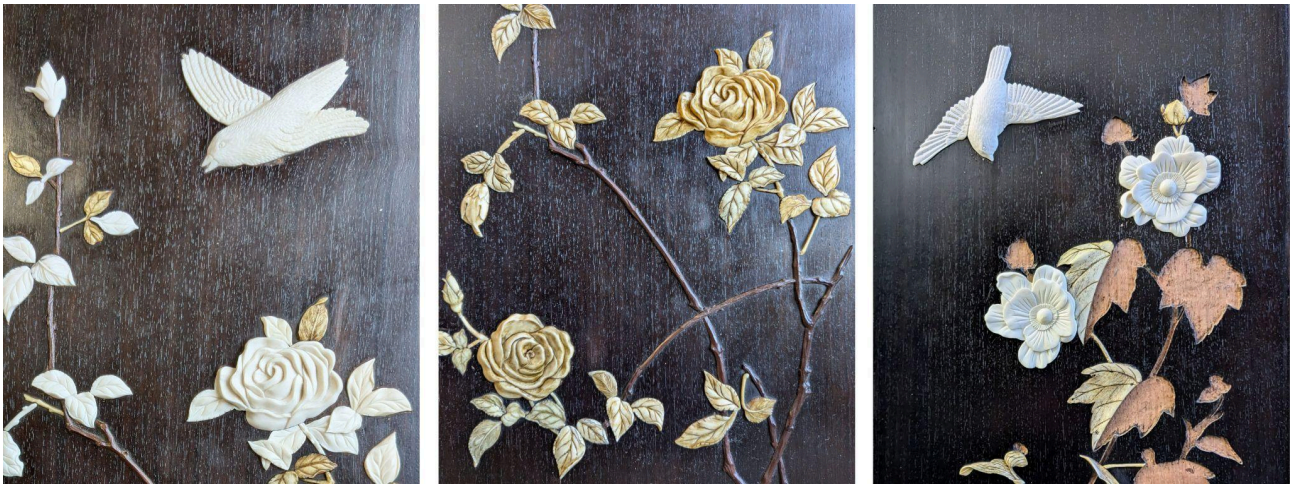
Knockderry Castle

Iain Broadbent recently completed the restoration of two 19th-century door panels for **Knockderry Castle in Scotland**. Once the home of Glasgow industrialist James Templeton, Knockderry was originally designed by Alexander 'Greek' Thompson and built in 1850, with later baronial additions.



Iain explained:

“After many years of neglect, the house is now undergoing a much-needed major restoration programme under its new owners. As shown in the images, all the missing areas needed carving. The first stage was to produce drawings, both for my own reference and for the clients’ approval.
I used a faux ivory product called ‘Super Tusk,’ manufactured by Elforyn. This mineral composite material is designed with great attention to detail, including a grain and annual growth rings, known as ‘Schreger Lines,’ to replicate the appearance of real ivory.



There were pros and cons to working with this material. It’s physically much harder than wood, so I had to work it slowly to avoid cracking the material or damaging my tools. However, the lack of a naturally occurring grain made it easier to manipulate without the danger of surface tearing.
In addition to my usual gouges, I used an assortment of fine rifflers (shaped files) and needle files. The process felt, in some ways, more similar to carving stone than wood.”

Research

Updates provided by Dr Louise Cooke, Director of Studies MA International Conservation Studies, MA Conservation of Historic Buildings and MA Sustainable Built Heritage

University of York Climate Impacts on Heritage Crafts Research

A University of York Centre for Conservation Studies pilot research project is exploring the impacts of climate change on building conservation crafts in York and North Yorkshire. The research project was undertaken by students on the MA Conservation of Historic Buildings programme and gathered data to explore the anecdotal comments and observations of climate change impacts on conservation practices through a series of questionnaires and interviews. The high level of participation revealed new insight into the issues, for example:

- hands-on crafts workers indicate higher resilience and less negativity in dealing with challenges posed in the questions and in adapting to changes brought on by climate change than those in more administrative or managerial roles, whilst those working outdoors similarly answered with less negativity, demonstrating higher resilience and adaptability to those working indoors with traditional craft materials
- supply chain disruptions have been experienced with materials such as timber and wool increasingly scarce, leading to delays, shortages, and rising costs that complicate project timelines, whilst unpredictable weather and increased humidity are challenging storage and working conditions and fluctuating weather patterns are delaying outdoor work with additional protection measures and alterations to work schedules required
- The acknowledgment of possible opportunities for the heritage sector as modern materials and methods are failing with more frequency and people are looking back to traditional skills to tackle climate change - there was a view that the UK heritage sector would both be inspired by this and could play its own part in the global movement for traditional building and crafts.

This was a pilot stage and the team will develop the project in 2025 focussing (amongst others) on different geographical areas in the UK, exploring the connections between retrofit and heritage skills shortage, and the climate impacts on the quality of traditional materials.

Carrington Lime Fibres Project

There are currently two main options available on the mass market – animal fibres or plastic fibres - neither of which are ethical or sustainable. Carrington Lime have been working to find an alternative plastering fibre that is both ethical, sustainable and easily scalable. They have been working with lime plasterers across the UK with their 'fibre kits' to explore uses and experiment to find those that offer consistent results. More information online and through their podcast.

Weald & Downland Partnership

The Department of Archaeology, University of York has continued its long-established partnership with the Weald & Downland Living Museum to support their specialist heritage and conservation skills through the re-validation of the museum's postgraduate taught courses until 2032. The specialist MSc programmes in Building Conservation and Timber Building Conservation are unique as they are taught at the Weald & Downland Living Museum and draw on staff specialisms, the museum's collection of regional buildings and the rich regional heritage through case studies, site visits and student-led activities. The University is delighted to continue this partnership especially in 2024 which coincides with the UK government's Ratification of the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage which gives new recognition to heritage craft skills. More information about their valuable partnership.

Centre for Architecture, Urbanism, and Global Heritage

The Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Global Heritage (CAUGH) in the newly established York School of Architecture has launched with a focus on the human aspects of architecture, spatial practices, community architecture, urban heritage, material culture and the built environment within the ever-changing urban and social structures of contemporary cities.

Chris Topp – the inspiring life of a true enthusiast



Chris Topp, the inspiration behind the founding of the National Heritage Ironwork Group, passed away on 26th October 2024 at the age of 75. Here, his wife Bethan Griffiths looks back on a life driven by passion, curiosity and determination.

Chris was born on 3rd April 1949 in Bolton, Lancashire, to Harold and Evelyn Topp (nee Gillybrand), the third of three sons. A common interest in industrial archaeology with three school friends led to many group trips out to see mill and colliery engines. This honed Chris's interest in historical and mechanical things made of iron which went on to play an important part in the development of his career.

Chris's interest in wrought iron began at the age of 18 with a summer job in the engineer's department at Bolton Town Hall, within walking distance of Thomas Walmsley's Atlas Forge, the last in the world to produce puddled wrought iron. Given the freedom to roam the works, which to him was full of drama with high pressure steam exhausted from the huge engines of the rolling mills, he got into the habit of spending his lunch breaks at the forge. This was Chris's first exposure to the lure and fascination of hot metal, but especially wrought iron.

He studied Civil Engineering with Mining at the University of Newcastle, and took his first paid job, working for British Waterways, living on a retired working barge, named Frugality. But, he found the job tedious, so he jacked it in to become a full time (he hoped) restoration engineer.

Dismayed by the closure and dismantling of historic industrial sites he and his old friends started collecting disused equipment inducing steam engines and winding winches with the grandiose aim of preserving them. Luckily this coincided with the establishment of several open-air museums such as Beamish, Ironbridge and the Black Country Museum, which enabled. them to find homes for the equipment they had salvaged.

Soon it became clear that museums not only wanted the equipment but they wanted them refurbished and working. With a can-do attitude and having the experience of working on engines in their teens, Chris and his friends enthusiastically took on this new line of work and formed Dorothea Restorations in 1974, named after Dorothea Quarry in North Wales, where they had their initial base.



Living an itinerant lifestyle, they moved to where the work was and ended up in Buxton, where the lease for Weston's Forge became available in 1976 when the two brothers running it retired. Taking on the forge to widen the skillset of the group, each of the friends took a turn in the forge under the guidance of the brothers. Chris was a natural and soon decided to run the shop on his own, becoming a full time blacksmith. Although he maintained his connection with Dorothea Restorations, he never went back to contract work with them.

Eventually, the wet Derbyshire weather got the better of him, and in 1979 he set about trying to find a drier location for a house and workshop. Having viewed many properties, his car finally broke down in a small village near Thirsk in North Yorkshire, and he decided that would be the place to settle, taking a house, and what was then the village bus garage to turn into his workplace.

Initially, he undertook general blacksmithing work, but in 1982 responded to a call for local craftspeople to get involved in the restoration of Middlethorpe Hall in York. He ended up making new wrought iron railings and gates, in a sympathetic style, true to the history of the hall. They attracted attention in the restoration world, and this is when Chris really found his niche.



What set Chris apart was his curiosity. When he got interested in something he always wanted to know more and devoted time to informing himself through research. His interest in wrought iron was not just in the techniques of working it and the products made, he also wanted to know about the material itself. He discovered that unlike steel, wrought iron has a grain, similar to wood, due to the silica slag mixed with the iron making it more corrosion resistant but requiring an understanding of how to work with it. However, demand for wrought iron began to wane as it was more expensive to produce and not standardised (in engineering terms) like modern steel. The last company in the world to produce puddled wrought iron had ceased production in 1973. Not satisfied with this situation, and understanding the unique value of wrought iron, Chris set about rectifying it. He set up his own rolling mill, and in 1984 his Real Wrought Iron company began selling re-rolled wrought iron to blacksmiths for heritage conservation work.

Today his work is visible in many key national buildings, from Buckingham Palace, St Pauls, the Palaces of Westminster, the Natural History Museum, Chatsworth and York Minster. He described building a replica cannon for the Mary Rose, and testing it in the wilds of Northumberland, as 'the most fun you could have in a job'!



As passionate as Chris was to learn all he could about the world of ironwork, he was also a committed teacher. He had a stream of 'journeymen' from all over the world, who would find their way to Carlton Husthwaite, to work and live on site, with the aim of elevating their craft work to a higher level under Chris's direction. Some would stay just a few weeks, some a couple of years, and some never left, choosing to settle in the area and work for Chris's company, Topp & Co. As the company outgrew the workshop at the bottom of his garden, work gradually transferred to new premises a few miles away, with the final blacksmiths relocating from his home workshop to the new one around 2014. He remained involved with the company until his deteriorating health made it too challenging.

Chris inspired people to look at iron differently, to be inspired in the craft of making something new, but with an obsession over the material and quality of the finished work. He met Bethan, his third wife, through a shared passion for conservation and restoration of wrought iron. But even she got fed up with him complaining about unsympathetic conservation or repairs, and challenged him to either stop talking about it or do something about it. So, together in 2009 they initiated the National Heritage Ironwork Group, bringing together a group of experienced professionals from related disciplines to drive forward heritage standards and conservation principles in the sector. In addition to setting up National Occupational Standards, the organisation is responsible for undertaking and publishing research, providing a place for developing individual and collective knowledge, and championing heritage ironwork.



Chris's many other interests included owning three barges and his love of his children. Having five children over a period of 34 years he said that he always wanted a house full of children, instilling in them a love of books through his fantastic storytelling.

Chris was a pioneer in ironwork conservation and his legacy lives on through the preservation work he carried out, saving many pieces for posterity, and the continuing work of the National Heritage Ironwork Group.

Bethan Griffiths