York Consortium *for* Craft and Conservation

Autumn 2025

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Message from the Chair



The preservation of our past is the preservation of our identity.
With that in mind, we must ask: *What in our past is worth preserving? And who will take on that responsibility?*
These are the questions we grapple with daily in our work as traditional craftspeople and conservators. We see immense value in our cultural heritage—not simply as objects or buildings, but as the embodied legacy of human knowledge, creativity, and skill. These artefacts and places connect us to our forebears. They resonate because they are evidence of lives lived, of hands that shaped the world before us. To truly care for these things, we must also preserve the skills and understandings that shaped them. Each time we work on a building, for instance, we continue a dialogue our ancestors began. We meet their craftsmanship with our own, engaging in an unbroken conversation across generations. This is why we feel such a strong responsibility—not only to practice these skills, but to pass them on.

And yet today, the heritage sector stands on precarious ground. Opportunities for training are limited and insufficient. Funding is scarce. Knowledge is vanishing. And with it, the tangible and intangible heritage that defines us all begins to slip away. If we are to safeguard the legacy of the past, we must invest in the skills of the present. Without them, there is no future for heritage.

And yet, absence has a way of calling us to attention.
In an age defined by digital acceleration—where artificial intelligence and rapid innovation reshape every sphere, including heritage—our work gains renewed urgency. The faster we move forward, the more essential it becomes to remain grounded in where we've come from. Now more than ever, we need honest conversations about where we are going.

We hope you'll join us on September 30th at the National Centre for Early Music—an evening dedicated to celebrating not only the traditional skills essential to preserving our cultural heritage, but also the individuals who dedicate themselves to carrying those skills forward for future generations.

Bursaries

We have awarded over 300 Foundation bursaries since 2000, helping individuals develop vital skills in heritage conservation and traditional crafts.

Applications for our next round of bursaries will open in **Spring 2026**. 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:

Marlene Lagnado



With support from our Foundation bursary programme, stonemason Marlene Lagnado completed the 2024 SPAB Fellowship—an intensive training programme run by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Designed to broaden knowledge of traditional building repair and conservation philosophy, the Fellowship involved extensive site visits across the UK, as well as time in Ireland, Scotland, and Burgundy. Fellows engaged directly with leading conservation professionals and craftspeople, visiting sites ranging from Westminster Abbey and Manchester Town Hall to rural ruins and lesser-known heritage buildings.

The experience deepened Marlene's understanding of materials, techniques, and conservation principles, while also developing her confidence and critical thinking. In the final phase, she undertook hands-on placements, including time at Gloucester Cathedral, with sculptor Michelle De Bruin in Scotland, and with noted letter carvers in London and Cambridge. The Fellowship has had a lasting impact, inspiring Marlene to pursue a three-year letter-cutting apprenticeship at the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop. She describes the year as transformative, reinforcing the value of continuous learning and collaboration within the heritage crafts sector.

Image: Lime plastering with Philipp Gaches at Castle Howard

Beckett Thornber



The Foundation bursary programme has also supported Beckett who has successfully completed an MA in Conservation Studies (Books & Library Materials) at West Dean College. This intensive year-long programme provided a strong foundation in both practical conservation skills and historical bookbinding techniques. Over the course of the year, he worked on a range of conservation projects, including 17th- to 19th-century books and documents, tackling complex issues such as deteriorated leather bindings, fragile paper, and unstable iron gall ink. Hands-on treatments were complemented by specialist workshops in parchment and Gothic bindings, and by short courses in areas such as wood engraving and illumination.

A six-week placement at Cambridge University Library further enriched the experience, allowing Beckett to carry out conservation treatments, assist with the installation of the *Curious Cures* exhibition, and produce a teaching model of a medieval folding manuscript. The

placement also led to a published blog post reflecting on the work. The year has greatly enhanced his technical abilities, confidence, and commitment to the conservation profession, and he now hopes to begin his career in a museum or archive setting, focusing on medieval and early modern materials.

Image: Consolidating a heavily deteriorated leather spine.

Aurelia Fernandes



Aurelia, a Master's student in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management at the University of York completed a twelve-week studio placement at Jim Budd Stained Glass in Herefordshire. The trainee bursary placement provided extensive hands-on experience across a variety of conservation projects, including glass documentation at Calke Abbey and All Saints Church, lead and glass treatment at Wightwick Manor, and paint consolidation work on historic stained glass from Yazor and St Mary's Churches. She also had the opportunity to work on a 20th-century reverse glass painting, experimenting with consolidation methods in consultation with international experts.

The placement also provided valuable insight into stakeholder engagement, with active involvement in projects managed by organisations such as the National Trust and the Churches Conservation Trust. Aurelia participated in project planning meetings, public outreach activities, and discussions on the complex histories surrounding heritage collections—particularly those linked to colonial contexts. These experiences offered a deeper understanding of the collaborative and often sensitive nature of conservation practice. The bursary enabled full immersion in both the technical and professional aspects of studio work, equipping her with a strong foundation for a career in stained glass conservation, particularly within cross-cultural and international contexts.

What's on in York

YCCC Events:

AGM, Bursary Awards and Lecture

6pm, 30th September, National Centre for Early Music

Members are welcome to join us for the AGM from 6-6.30pm as we reflect on the past year, go over general business and look ahead to the future of the Consortium.
Free tickets are available for members here.

Afterwards, join us for an inspiring evening hosted by Professor Sir Ron Cooke, President of the Consortium, as we honour the next generation of talent at our Annual Bursary Awards Ceremony and John Shannon Memorial Lecture.

Meet this year's bursary recipients—emerging makers and conservators whose work represents the future of heritage craft and conservation. Our generous sponsors will introduce the award winners, offering a unique glimpse into the journeys and ambitions of tomorrow's skilled professionals.

This year's John Shannon Memorial Lecture, held in collaboration with York Civic Trust, features Nicola Duncan-Finn, Associate Director of Heritage and Social Impact at Oculus Management. A trailblazer in the field, Nicola is shaping the national agenda for specialist craft and conservation skills. Her talk will explore how sustainable, values-led approaches are vital for the future of our built heritage, and how empowering people and communities can drive meaningful, long-term change.
Tickets are available here.

Consortium Winter Social

9th December, 2025 at Thin Ice Press

Join fellow Consortium members for our Winter Social at Thin Ice Press - an evening for making a festive gift, while socialising over a glass of mulled wine. Tickets go on sale in October.

More information to follow

Selected York Events:

- **York Civic Trust - Tour of York Magistrates' Court**
  11.00am, 26 September, York Magistrates' Court, Clifford Street, York
  A rare opportunity to visit York's Grade II-listed courthouse, opened in 1892 and thought to be the first purpose-built magistrates court in Britain. This maze of a building has been adapted through the decades and is in daily use. This architectural visit takes place while the court is open.
  Find out more.

- **ICON PPG SYMPOSIUM 2025 - Private Practice: Where are we now?**
  6 October, The Belfrey Hall, York
  The Icon Private Practice Group (PPG) is pleased to announce its inaugural symposium will be held at The Belfrey Hall in York on the 6th October 2025. The first Icon PPG AGM will also be held at this event. Topics presented will be informed by the pre-symposium survey and explored on the day alongside talks by invited speakers, presentations by private practice colleagues, round table discussions and audience participation. The symposium will be both an in-person and online event.
  Find out more.

- **York Museum Trust - Conservation Talk: the Park Drag**
  2:00-2:30 pm, 10 October, York Castle Museum
  One of Kirkgate's historical coaches will be undergoing conservation work between 6 – 17 October. Objects conservator, and YCCC Bursary Officer, Dr Alaina Schmisseur of Rook Heritage Consulting and specialist decorative arts conservator Helen Gartside-Jones will be working to conserve the object. Join Dr Schmisseur for a short, insightful talk about conservation work. Learn about the work being carried out on the 200 year-old carriage, with an opportunity to ask questions. This talk will take place on Kirkgate near the carriage and is free with admission. Booking is not required.
  Find out more.

- **York Civic Trust - Our Great Railway Heritage**
  7.00pm, 16 October, Friargate Quaker Meeting House
  The Railway Heritage Trust is 40 years old this year. It has awarded over 2000 grants worth more than £72 million to restore the best of the country's railway heritage. During that time, it has awarded many grants to the buildings and structures of York's railway heritage.
  Tim Hedley-Jones, Director of the RHT, and a York resident, will talk about some of those projects and the challenges involved in restoring and re-purposing historic railway buildings.
  Find out more.

- **York Artworkers' Association - Mick Kirkby Geddes: Metal Sculpture**
  7:15 – 9:45pm, 3 November, Southlands Methodist Church, York
  Born in Sheffield, Mick now lives just outside Holmfirth in the Pennine hills of West Yorkshire. Based at Sculpture Lounge, home to 22 different artist's studios in nearby Holmbridge, he is influenced by cartoons, 1970s kids tv, books– "anything, really" - he makes sculptures for inside and outside, public art, commissions, works in schools & runs courses. Mick works alone in a workshop full of the discarded junk metal of everyday life. Compelled to see nothing go to waste, he spends all day sorting, cutting and welding the metal back together with new steel to create his sculptures. Usually with a touch of humour, animals, people and machines are re-born as unique pieces of art.
  Find out more.

Engaging the Next Generation of Makers

The Company of Merchant Taylors, York is pleased to introduce Consortium members to their Honorary Craftsperson Membership—an initiative designed to strengthen their connection with the local arts and crafts community. Through this programme, the Merchant Taylors' invite skilled makers and apprentices in disciplines associated with the construction and maintenance of historic buildings to join the Company and take part in its life and activities. Their initial aim is to recruit three Master Craftspeople and three apprentices as Honorary Craftsperson Members.

Honorary Craftsperson Members will be invited, alongside full Members, to use their craft knowledge to support the Company's core charitable activities and participate fully in Company life. They will be eligible to attend all Company events, and the cost of some formal events will be covered by the Company.

The Company's charitable work focuses on the maintenance and enhancement of the Hall and its grounds, as well as the development and sharing of the Company's purpose and the history of the Hall with the wider community. In addition, the Company is committed to supporting young people in the fashion, arts, and craft disciplines.

While Honorary Craftsperson Members will not have voting rights, they will be welcomed as valued participants in the life of the Company—bringing fresh voices, craftsmanship, and energy to our historic organisation. Honorary membership typically lasts for three to four years and is generally awarded by nomination from an employer or association, such as the YCCC.

This is an exciting opportunity to engage with an organisation responsible for the stewardship of a Grade I listed building in the heart of York. It will allow Honorary Craftsperson Members to develop broader professional and interpersonal skills while meeting and collaborating with a wide range of people. If you would like to find out more, or wish to nominate an outstanding apprentice or craftsperson, please contact Dax Gotteridge at clerk@merchant-taylors-york.org or visit our website: www.merchant-taylors-york.org.

The Company of Merchant Taylors is one of around 200 UK Guilds and Livery Companies in the UK. Originally promoting the interests of particular trades or professions today they are largely philanthropic; often focused on the preservation of their historic buildings and supporting the development of young people .

Member News

St Paul's marks 350th anniversary

The *Financial Times* chief photographer was allowed unprecedented access to Wren's masterpiece for a year to reveal unsung heroes who make the cathedral tick. The article allows a rare glimpse of St Paul's inner sanctum and is available to view online here.

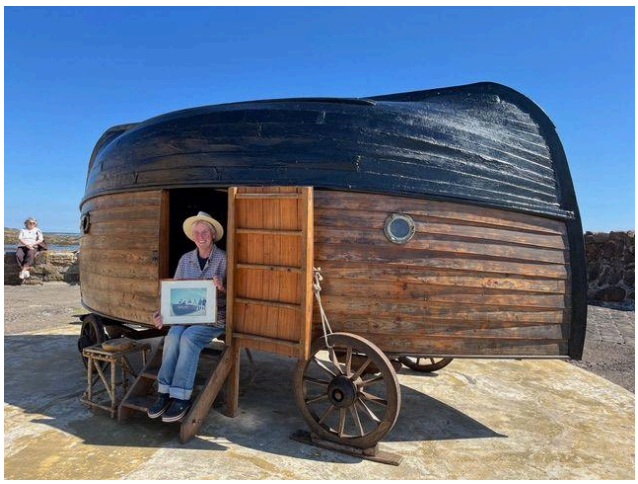
Pittenweem Arts Festival 2025 - *Spotlight on Guest Artist Gail McGarva*

This year's invited artist is someone many of you may remember: **Gail McGarva**, the boatbuilder and storyteller who presented a wonderful webinar for us during the later days of the COVID pandemic.

We thought her work would be of interest, so we've included highlights from the festival programme below, along with a few images from the event.

Meet Gail McGarva 2025 Invited Artist – Boatbuilder & Storyteller
Gail McGarva is an award-winning artist whose work merges traditional wooden boatbuilding with powerful storytelling. In 2024, she was honoured with the **Heritage Crafts President's Award for Endangered Crafts**, supported by the **King Charles III Charitable Fund**. Her boats are more than vessels — they are **living stories**, preserving the voices and histories of coastal communities. Gail's passion lies not just in building boats, but in celebrating the **human connections and heritage** they carry.

One of the centrepieces of the festival is Vera, a traditional lerret boat turned upside down to form the **Story Boat** – a beautifully immersive installation inviting you inside a miniature world of maritime heritage. Inside, visitors

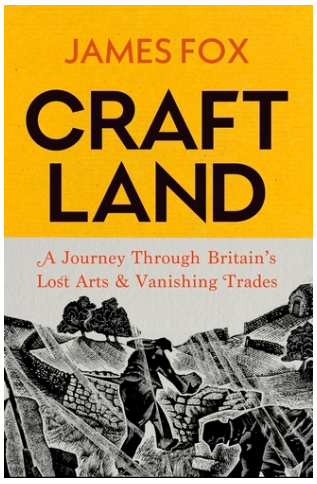




experience McGarva's deep connection to the sea and the stories that bind people to place through boats and tradition.

Also featured at the festival is **Disappearing Lines**, McGarva's moving installation that explores **transience, memory, and connection** in an increasingly digital world. With its evocative visuals and soundscapes, the exhibit offers a haunting tribute to fading maritime traditions — the ghostly echoes of journeys past and communities remembered. [More information about the festival can be found here](#).

Craftland: a journey through Britain's lost arts and vanishing trades by James Fox



A new book by Dr James Fox, Director of Studies in History of Art at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and Creative Director of the Hugo Burge Foundation, a charity dedicated to supporting the arts and crafts across Britain, has been released.

Britain has always been a craft land. For generations what we made with our hands defined our identities, built our communities and shaped our regions. Craftland chronicles the vanishing skills and traditions that once governed every aspect of life on these shores.

Travelling the length of Britain, from the Scilly Isles to the Scottish Highlands, James Fox seeks out the country's last remaining master craftspeople. Stepping inside the workshops of blacksmiths and

wheelwrights, cutlers and coopers, bell-founders and watchmakers, we glimpse not only our past but another way of life — one that is not yet lost and whose wisdom could shape our future.

For as long as there are humans, there will be craft. It is all around us, hiding in plain sight, enriching even the most modest things. And in this increasingly digital age, it is perhaps more valuable than ever. Craftland is a celebration of that deeply necessary connection between our creative instincts and the material world we inhabit, revealing a richer and more connected way of living. Find out more here.
