York Consortium *for* Craft and Conservation

Winter 2025

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Message from the Chair



I am delighted to reflect on our recent AGM and Foundation Bursary Award Evening, which this year marked the final AGM for the committee with Sir Ron Cooke as President - a moment to acknowledge his long-standing involvement and support. Thank you again, Ron! We also introduced a special award in honour of Martin Stancliffe, designed to support the integration of heritage and music by focussing on the craft and conservation of musical instruments - and we very much look forward to integrating this new award into our annual bursary offering from next year.

The evening reaffirmed our continued commitment to supporting craftspeople and conservators through our annual bursary programme- thank you very much to those that made it, and thank you as ever to Sponsors - The Surveyors Club, The Mountain Bothies Association, the Merchant Taylors, The York Conservation Trust and to Pinnacle Conservation - for your continued support. A special thank you to Delma Tomlin and National Centre for Early Music for the use of their beautiful venue.

We were then treated to an inspiring, information-packed lecture by Nicola Duncan Finn, whose focus on developing stronger regional skills networks resonated deeply with our own priorities - and we look forward to working alongside her to advance this important initiative into the New Year. As ever, we remain dedicated to building meaningful collaborations that strengthen the heritage sector both here in York and across the wider community with our partners and for our membership- and we look forward to sharing this work with you as it develops.

In the meantime, we hope to see you at our end-of-year "Prints and Drinks" gathering at Thin Ice Press on December 9th!

Best wishes for the holiday season and thank you for your continued support.

On Sir Ron Cooke

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Professor Sir Ron Cooke, who retired this year as President of the Consortium, first had the idea 27 years ago to create in York a collection of local skilled crafts people and conservators when he was at the University of York and seeking to strengthen links with the City. He realised there was a wealth of talent in the region, and he thought that by bringing it together regularly it might be possible to enhance visibility, job opportunities and contract work , and foster creative talent. The decision to establish the Consortium's related charity came from a meeting with Ken Dixon (formerly Chair of Rowntrees), and Martin Marsh (who had recently retired from Rowntrees). Several trustees were immediately appointed, including June Hargreaves and Peter Addyman. This group drove the Consortium forward, with evident and growing success.

Believe it or not, Ron's conservation interests arose from his early career as a desert geomorphologist, in which he did studies of rock weathering by salt. This led to numerous studies in the UK of weathering of building stones in polluted environments (including a paper on stone decay at York Minster, "Weathering Heights", Chapter 11 in his book York- Changing the face of the city, 2016). These heritage interests also feature in his book with Alan Gibbs, Crumbling Heritage?, 1993.

Ron has done much more both in the region and nationally, but, as he wrote: "this is not an obituary!" KS

Bursaries

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

Applications for the Foundation's next round of bursaries will open in **February 2026**. Please see our website for details and please do share the info with your friends and colleagues.

Here are just a few updates from previous Bursary winners:

Vicky Flintoff



After changing career paths following the pandemic, Vicky Flintoff has spent the past few years building a strong foundation in historic building conservation, with a particular passion for traditional mortars and surface finishes. With support from the bursary, she has been able to deepen her expertise through a wide range of training events, conferences, workshops, and hands-on experiences across the UK. These opportunities not only broadened her technical knowledge but also sparked new research that she has since shared at sector events.

Highlights from the year included workshops on fibrous plasterwork, field trips with the Lime Finishes Group, and presentations at the *What's the Point?* Summit in Stirling and the Building Limes Conference in Brighton. Vicky's developing research into the relationship between historic surface finishes and masonry tooling has opened new avenues of inquiry and contributed to wider conversations within the conservation community. Alongside these events, she has enjoyed connecting with many inspiring craftspeople, researchers, and practitioners, gaining invaluable insight into heritage skills and building performance.

Vicky's professional journey has also taken an exciting turn: she began the year as a Building Maintenance Officer at English Heritage and has since stepped into the role of Building Conservation Manager for the North East. She now helps care for landmark sites such as Belsay Hall, Dunstanburgh Castle, Finchale Priory, and Hadrian's Wall. The knowledge gained through the bursary has been instrumental in her work, particularly in developing and trialling compatible mortar mixes—an essential step in addressing the legacy of harmful past interventions and the effects of climate change.

Looking ahead, Vicky is eager to continue exploring traditional techniques, researching surface finishes, and applying her learning to help safeguard historic structures. She expresses deep gratitude to us for enabling a transformative year of growth, collaboration, and discovery—one that has strengthened her commitment to the heritage sector and introduced her to a welcoming network of colleagues and friends.

Darren McLean



Thanks to a bursary from York Foundation for Craft and Conservation, I was able to attend a transformative 10-day course at Palazzo Spinelli in Florence, where I gained hands-on experience in traditional decorative techniques like trompe l'œil, marbling, wood graining, and stencilling. The course, led by accredited conservation technician Tiziano Lucchesi, combined theory with practical sessions, offering invaluable insights into both historical techniques and the challenges of conserving decorative finishes.

One key takeaway was Tiziano's distinction between "fresco" and "secco" (dry) painting, which reshaped my understanding of fresco conservation. I learned how different methods of painting impact the durability and deterioration of artwork, with repairs needing to respect the original materials and techniques. The course also deepened my appreciation for the balance between preservation and the natural decay of historic materials.

This experience has not only expanded my technical skills, such as paint mixing and matching, but also influenced my approach to conservation in the UK. Recently, I applied my new knowledge to conserve historic finishes in a 1900s living room, successfully advising a client to preserve rather than replace original plasterwork. I am grateful for the opportunity to share these skills with colleagues and students, enhancing both my practice and the broader conservation community.

Catriona Rigby



Catriona Rigby has now completed her MPhil in Textile Conservation at the University of Glasgow, a journey made possible with the support of York Foundation for Craft and Conservation. In her second year, she built on her foundational knowledge, learning advanced techniques in adhesives, gels, and bleaching, which she applied to two significant conservation projects.

The first involved restoring a c.1860s net crinoline underskirt from Paisley Museum, where she developed an innovative method to repair and stabilise missing sections of net. The second focused on an Edwardian bodice, where she helped stabilise a fragile collar using adhesive support, a process later presented at the TTC@50 conference.

Catriona also successfully completed her dissertation on washfastness testing, contributing new insights to the field of textile conservation. Looking ahead, she plans to pursue a career in textile conservation within the UK, with potential opportunities to work abroad to broaden her expertise. She is immensely grateful for the support from the York Consortium, which enabled her to complete her studies, and looks forward to contributing to the advancement of the field.

Image: Reconstructing the Edwardian Bodice, © University of Glasgow and credit to University of Glasgow's Photography Unit

Partner News

Restoring the Historic Linoleum Floor at De Grey House, York Conservation Trust

Prior to our project in 2022, the entrance hall at De Grey House had an uninspiring institutional feel, with magnolia dark beige walls and blue commercial grade carpet. Anticipating that there might be an underlying 19th-century encaustic tile or stone floor underneath the modern carpet, an exploratory investigation was undertaken as part of an enabling contract. To our surprise and delight, our trial holes revealed an intact historic linoleum floor, featuring a striking inlaid design of buff squares within deep red grid lines, a decorative border, and a central Art Deco motif. Our research into its potential origin led us to conclude that the floor is likely to have been installed when the property was first converted into offices in the 1920s.

Linoleum
A British invention from 1860 by Frederick Walton, linoleum became a durable and versatile flooring solution throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The material was particularly popular in domestic and commercial buildings, with the highest production centred in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. The flooring at De Grey House was found to be of a rare 'Battleship Grade', which is a thicker and double-sided variant, designed for high-wear environments.

Conservation Challenges and Methodology
There are no guidelines available for how to repair historic linoleum restoration, so we had to work things out for ourselves. Alongside Valero Caputi, who leads the team of conservators at Pinnacle Conservation we developed a sensitive approach to the conservation of this important floor. A process involving the following stages:

Tile Reuse & Re-adherence
Severely damaged sections were replaced using salvageable tiles from the kitchen, carefully removed using gentle heat to soften the adhesive and minimise breakage.

Filling & Repairs
Hundreds of screw holes and gaps were filled using a water-based timber filler with synthetic fibres for durability and flexibility. Pigments were added to match the surrounding tones while keeping repairs distinguishable.

Cleaning & Protection
Initial cleaning with soapy water was ineffective, so a low-pressure steam cleaner was used, followed by detailed hand-cleaning. A protective wax finish was applied to enhance durability and moisture resistance.

Maintenance
Now in use for over two years, the restored linoleum has proven both resilient and easy to maintain. Routine

cleaning and annual wax applications in March ensure it remains well protected from heavy foot traffic and any moisture and dirt brought in from the street.

Summary

This project has successfully reinstated a unique and historically significant feature of De Grey House that had been lost and forgotten for many years. Our efforts to restore it mean that it will now remain in use and be enjoyed; perhaps even for many more years than originally intended. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity this project has presented and are very pleased with the end results.

Guy Bowyer RIBA CA
Chief Executive, York Conservation Trust
July 2025



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Member News

- **Archaeology, craft and conservation - Viv Walker's view as a SPAB Fellow**
  3 September, 2025
  Read Foundation's Bursary Award winner Viv Walker's recent blog post about her SPAB Fellowship here.

- **How endangered craft industries are resisting the AI jobs threat - The Financial Times**
  19 October, 2025
  From scissor making to basket weaving, some professionals think ancient skills look like a safe career bet - read the article in full here.

- **Membership Fees**
  It was voted in amongst members present at the recent AGM to increase our annual membership fees by £5 per respective membership. Please expect to see these changes in your next renewal.

- **The Heritage Alliance's *Young Heritage Hero Award* Open**
  The Heritage Alliance is inviting nominations for its new Young Heritage Hero Award, celebrating outstanding volunteers under 30 who are making a real difference to heritage—whether as young trustees, project or maintenance volunteers, supporting visitor engagement, or contributing in their own time. Winners will be honoured at their Heritage Day in March, and all nominees will feature in the Alliance's uplifting video showcase. Nominations are open across your own organisation and partner groups, full details and the nomination form are available on The Heritage Alliance's *Heritage Heroes* page.

Research and Articles

The Ringing Isle

Our September Newsletter flagged up newly published *Craftland* by James Fox as a good read for all of our persuasion and related interests.

Chapter seven of the book offers a fifteen hundred year perspective on the role of tower bells in the structure and social fabric of our society and presents an inspiring revival account of the UK's last surviving bell foundry in Loughborough. This spurred me on to pay a long intended, overdue visit to what is now a significant set of conserved industrial buildings housing both a thriving traditional craft business and a museum with factory tour attached.

Interactive exhibits invariably bring out the worst in me but here I eagerly struck identical sized bell castings of iron, copper, lead, aluminium and bell metal - an alloy of precisely 78% copper and 22% tin. Only the last rang sweetly and clearly. When was that perfect mix determined? Did it depend on trial and error? What rudimentary scientific methods did early bell founders have available to them?

Bells appeared in Britain from the sixth century onwards. They quickly became a major feature of Christian worship but also found significant secular functions in Guild Halls, Town Halls and Universities - as beacons of communication and authority.

Change ringing is the art of pealing tuned bells in sequences that follow precise permutations; it results in a powerful, rich, cascading sound that the English took to like no other nation on earth. A peal is a continuous sequence of at least 5,000 changes rung without repetition or break; it normally takes around three hours and represents a remarkable test of skill, stamina and precision.

Poor haulage conditions on English roads meant that early bells were cast in ground close as possible to the towers for which they were intended. Bell Lane, Bell Common, Bell Meadow or Bell Inn are mostly reliable indictors of itinerant founders' temporary sites around which villages congregated, parishioners raising funds, donating metal, building furnaces, digging clay and collecting firewood while the clergy recited prayers to ward off evil spirits when the molten metal was poured. Once cooled, the whole community put its collective back into hoisting the bell to the tower position with ropes and tackle.

From the late Middle Ages permanent bell foundries began to appear in ecclesiastically important towns & cities including York, Norwich, Bury St Edmonds, Colchester, Nottingham, Salisbury, Gloucester, Worcester, Lincoln and London. Mostly they also made other metal goods including buckles, candlesticks, cauldrons and cannons. There were hundreds of bell foundries in Britain as recently as the mid C18th; today there is just one - run by John Taylor Bell Foundry (Loughborough) Ltd.

The Taylor Family had been bell founders since the C14th, first in Norwich and later in St Neots. Great Paul, their 1881 bell for St Paul's Cathedral was the largest ever cast in Britain with a diameter of 2.9m and weight of 16,812kg. It took four days to cool at the Loughborough works and was transported to London by rail. Good rail connections had first attracted the Taylor family to Loughborough, pretty much at the centre of its UK market.

Great Peter is the bourdon, the largest, deepest sounding bell, at York Minster. 2.64m in diameter and weighing 11,009kg, it was cast by John Taylor in 1927.

AC / DC fans will recall Hell's Bell, first track on the band's 1980 album Back in Black. It opens with a slow bell toll creating dark funereal tones that recall singer Bon Scott's death earlier that year. This was a 900kg bell commissioned from the Loughborough foundry and the track laid down on the spot in John Taylor's Freehold Street premises. Hell's Bell was subsequently used in many AC / DC live shows and helped establish Back in Black as a defining rock album with over 50m copies sold world wide.

Sadly John Taylor & Co experienced severe difficulty following the 2008 financial crises. It faced administration and the foundry, surrounded by residential areas, was put up for sale. But by the time property developer purchase offers were submitted, a group of determined people, bell enthusiasts with some York connections, had successfully encouraged a grade II* statutory listing of both premises and machinery. The offers were quickly withdrawn.

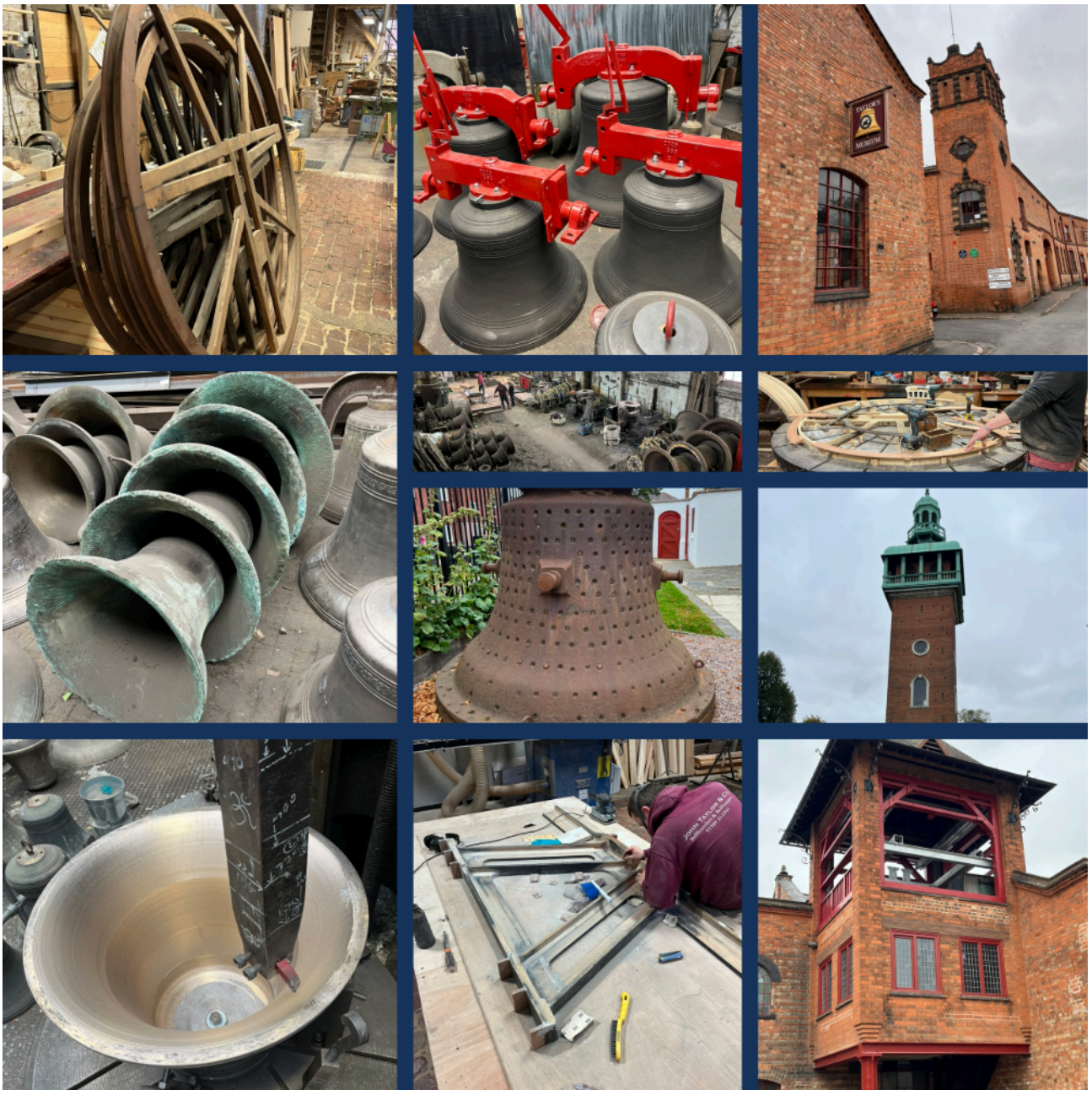
Pooling their own resources and triggering grants from other sources including National Lottery Heritage Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Pilgrim Trust and Charnwood Borough Council, the activist group acquired the premises themselves through a special purpose vehicle and subsequently a charitable company. This trust refurbished the property and now leases most of it to John Taylor Bell Foundry (Loughborough) Ltd established in 2009 to resurrect the business that had operated from Loughborough since 1839.

Taylor's foundry has cast over 25,000 bells which are hung in more than 100 countries. Notable exports include fifty-three bells for the National Episcopal Cathedral in Washington DC, Goulburn Cathedral in New South Wales, the Canberra War Memorial Carillon, The Church of St John the Evangelist in Colaba, Mumbai, Chimes in Esbjerg Denmark and a Carillon in Vlissingen, Holland.

John Taylor's has an outstanding heritage, a remarkable story and a bright future for which those people involved in its revival deserve both respect and congratulations. A visit is highly recommended https://belltrust.co.uk/

Also recommended is *Craftland* copyright @ James Fox 2025, a Bodley Head, Vintage Penguin Random House UK publication.

Jonathan Bryant
20 November 2025



All images courtesy of Jonathan Bryant

What's on in York

Consortium Events:

- **Prints and Drinks: A 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 wine or beer.

  Tickets are available here.

- **Materials Day: Adhesion**

  Autumn 2026

  We'll continue to develop our Materials Day series, turning our focus in 2026 to Adhesion and the fascinating properties of stickiness. Whether it's the lime in mortars, animal glue in gilding, or modern adhesives in paper or architectural conservation, the science of stickiness plays a vital role in holding history together—quite literally. But the subject of adhesion also opens up broader, cross-disciplinary conversations. How do things—materials, ideas, communities—hold together over time? From the chemistry of craft to the bonds of nature and culture, exploring "stickiness" invites us to consider what binds people to place, practice, and purpose.

  More details to follow.

Selected York Events:

- **Linocut Christmas Cards Workshop**

  6-8pm, 18 December, 2025 at Thin Ice Press

  Patch York, Terry AvenueYork, England, YO1 6FA

  Join Thin Ice Press this festive season for an opportunity to print your very own linocut Christmas cards to send to your nearest and dearest. In a small group setting you will come up with a simple design, carve your block and print a set of cards. The workshop will be led by Izzy Williamson, a York based printmaker specialising linocut. Find out more.

- **York Georgian Society - 'Beningbrough Hall: The Rise and Fall of the House of Earle'**

  2.30-4pm, 10 January, 2026 at York Medical Society

  Beningbrough Hall near York is one of two major early 18th-century Yorkshire country houses cared for by the National Trust. Drawing on new research, this talk explores letters, archival records and physical evidence to reveal the major legal dispute over Beningbrough in the early 1760s. The victor's social ambitions later led to a financial collapse whose effects still shape the site today. The story will be compared with similar events at Nostell, near Wakefield, showing how family finances can illuminate the histories of these distinguished homes.

  Matthew Constantine is a regional Cultural Heritage Curator for the National Trust, working with a portfolio of sites across much of Yorkshire, including Beningbrough. Find out more.