York Consortium *for* Craft and Conservation

Spring 2026

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Message from the Chair



Dear Members and Friends,

Recent conversations in the wider cultural and technological world have reflected on how emerging tools — particularly artificial intelligence — may change creative work. Some suggest that such tools can remove the more "laborious" aspects of production, allowing us to focus on skill and creativity, and produce more, more quickly.

For those of us working in craft and conservation, the picture is more nuanced.

In heritage practice, the preparatory or technical stages of work are rarely separate from the more visibly creative parts of the task. Levelling a stone, preparing a surface, mixing a mortar, or carefully cleaning a fragment are not just procedural steps before the skilled work begins. They are acts of judgement and expertise — moments of close attention in which understanding is shaped through a dialogue between practitioner and material.

The slight imperfection in a surface, the feel of a tool in cold weather, or the way a material responds unexpectedly are not interruptions. They are often where skill is most fully exercised. What may appear from the outside as labour-intensive production is, in practice, the ground in which informed judgement takes shape.

Preserving heritage skills is not only about safeguarding techniques; it is about sustaining patient, attentive ways of working that ensure our cultural heritage is conserved with integrity and depth. Thoughtfully

applied technologies can support documentation and analysis, but trained skill, lived experience, and material understanding remain central to how we define excellence in craft and conservation.

The richness of our cultural heritage endures because it carries the marks of time, labour and care. By supporting the continuation of traditional craft skills, we ensure that this depth of understanding — this conversation between material, maker and meaning — continues for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued dedication to this vital work.

Introducing James Grierson, our new President



As a long standing Consortium Member and a Trustee of York Foundation for Craft and Conservation which funds the annual Bursary Programme, James has previously led the Bursary awards process and is currently raising funds to support and extend the Foundation's work. Following a professional career in the property sector with senior executive, partner and consulting roles at Donaldson's, DTZ and Savills, James now has a portfolio of non executive roles in the Conservation, Heritage, Museums and University sectors. He is Chair of the Victorian Society, a Trustee of York Conservation Trust and of York Unlocked and a Member of the Plowden Committee. Until recently he was a Trustee and Chair of York Museums Trust and of the Institute of Conservation; a Member of Council at Durham University and from 2010-16 a Council Member at Goldsmiths College. James lives in York and has recently been appointed to serve as High Sheriff of North Yorkshire for one year from 2027.

Can you share a brief overview of your professional background and what led you to take on the role of President of the York Consortium for Craft & Conservation?

I became a Chartered Surveyor because of an interest in buildings since childhood and am lucky that this interest has stayed with me, and developed, throughout my life.

I worked my way up from surveyor to equity partner and board member of a 1,000 strong firm of commercial real estate advisors, eventually selling the business. I think I was fortunate in the firm I stayed with, and also the times I worked in, because I enjoyed a level of autonomy which people nowadays seldom experience. Essentially, if I found and kept profitable clients, I could do what I wanted and I was always more interested in trying things that hadn't been done before than in repeating myself. I realise that that's very different from the approach needed to be a great craftsperson and I admire people with a commitment to honing and deepening their skills over time.

I joined the Consortium as a committee member and a Foundation trustee as a successor to Martin Marsh who I had known for many years (he was my wife's boss at Rowntree's).

You have several roles across the heritage field at both a regional and national level. How have these experiences shaped your approach to leadership and collaboration?

From my work I was always quite used to pitching ideas to organisations I didn't know, and it was quite natural for me to gravitate towards fundraising, and this is something I intend to continue with.

As well as my business roles I've been lucky enough to have gained experience on boards in the charity, museums, heritage, NHS, university and central government sectors. The common factors are creating networks, attracting good people, generating energy and making connections. I hope this experience can be of value to the Consortium.

Our Consortium sits at the intersection of craft and conservation. How do you see these two priorities working together, and what opportunities do you believe we should explore in the coming year?

I am a little uncomfortable with the idea that craft and conservation are two entirely different things. In this country we suffer from a tradition of seeing craft and trades occupations as "manual" and this, I think, led to conservators working hard to establish themselves as "professionals". I prefer to see these activities as completely complementary. When I was chairing Icon, I recall someone telling me that he'd always thought of himself for 20 years as a roofer, but he now realised he was a roof conservator – in many ways he was right.

I think it's a great shame that the school curriculum nowadays places so little value on hand skills. I think this is a drum the Consortium should bang loudly. After many years of government resistance to signing up to the UNESCO charter on intangible cultural heritage this is now being recognised, and we need to capitalise on this.

What do you consider the most important priorities for the Consortium during your term, and how do you plan to address them?

Developing the membership, sustaining an impactful events, research and publications programme and raising the funds to make this all possible.

Whilst I shall be continuing to focus on fundraising, as President my focus will be on making connections and acting as a sounding board for Kibby and other members of the Committee.

How do you plan to involve and support our members, especially those who may be new to the organisation, in achieving our collective goals?

Where possible, I would like to be able to support members, especially those who are working craftspeople and conservators, by public endorsement and helping them build links.

There is a wonderful concentration of amazingly skilled people working in heritage in York and North Yorkshire. I would like us to attract more of them into our membership and build on the idea that this is a friendly and mutually supportive club to belong to.

What message would you like to share with our members about the Consortium's future direction?

I would like the Consortium to keep growing, to keep on expanding its influence and reputation. Through the Foundation, we've been running a successful bursary programme for over twenty years now and significant parts of the heritage landscape involve people we've helped along the way. I hope that these many hundreds of people will not just have benefited from the skills that we've supported financially but will be in a position to help new people in the earlier stages of their careers.

The Consortium committee chaired by Kibby Schaefer is delighted that members approved by a majority its recommendation to appoint James Grierson as President with effect from the EGM of 9 February, 2026. This means that the new President has now made a start and will chair the Consortium's Annual General Meeting on 21 July 2026. This will be held at Merchant Adventurers' Hall and combined with the Foundation's 2026 Bursary Awards event.

Bursaries

We're delighted to announce that applications are now open for the Foundation's 2026 Bursary Awards. Since 2000, the bursary programme has supported over 350 talented craftspeople and conservators, helping them take vital next steps in developing skills, confidence, and professional networks. Made possible through the generosity of donors and partner organisations, these bursaries can make a real difference—whether you're taking a first step, developing specialist expertise, or changing direction. If this opportunity isn't right for you just now, we'd love you to share it with someone in your network who might benefit.

The Foundation especially welcomes applications from those connected with Yorkshire and the UK. Full details of all bursaries, eligibility, application guidance, and applicant support are available on the website. If you have any questions, please contact us at info@conservationyork.org.uk.

Annual Bursaries

Looking to develop your skills in heritage conservation or traditional craft practice? The Foundation's Annual Bursaries offer up to £2,000 for individual craftspeople and conservators, and up to £3,000 for organisations and businesses supporting staff training. Apply by Monday, 16 March, 2026.

Craft Trainee Bursaries

Supporting the next generation of heritage craftspeople, the Craft Trainee Bursaries offer up to £15,000 over two or three years for sustained training in traditional building crafts. Open to recent entrants across a wide range of heritage-related disciplines, applications are made jointly by an employer and an apprentice or trainee. Apply by Monday, 16 March, 2026.

Martin Stancliffe Award

This year sees the launch of the award established to honour the memory of the Consortium and Foundation's longstanding previous Chair, the late Martin Stancliffe. The award will be made annually on a rotating basis to three different objectives that link Martin's twin passions of heritage and music. The objectives are to assist with the costs of training for a musical instrument conservator, secondly, to improve facilities for music performance in a York church and, thirdly, to support an early music performance in a North Yorkshire ecclesiastical setting. This year the Foundation will be selecting a conservator looking to develop skills in musical instrument repair and conservation at West Dean College.

Member and Alumni News

- **Bringing Heritage Skills Training into Prisons:**
  Heritage meets Hope in a New Workforce Pathway
  Watch Video: https://youtu.be/J-H2fN5x2Os
  The Hopwood Foundation has launched a pioneering heritage skills training programme at HMP Thorn Cross, bringing traditional building craft education directly into the prison estate. Designed to address the UK's critical shortage of specialist heritage skills — with an estimated 105,000 workers needed annually to retrofit traditional buildings — the initiative also diversifies pathways into the sector by equipping prisoners with in-demand, job-ready skills. Through professional workshop training and site-based experience, participants gain a credible route into stable employment and a new future, while helping safeguard endangered crafts. The programme directly supports heritage sector workforce resilience and is now seeking trainers, employers, contractors, and sponsors to help scale this model nationally.

  To find out more, and explore how you/your organisation can support this work, visit www.HopwoodFoundation.org or contact Skills@HopwoodFoundation.org.

- **Free Heritage Conservation Programme Opens Doors for Local Learners**
  A new hands-on training opportunity has launched in York and North Yorkshire with Pinnacle Conservation partnering with York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority and York Learning delivering a free 10-session Heritage Conservation Programme aimed at boosting local skills and supporting the region's heritage sector and need for more trained Heritage Craftspeople.
  The initiative offers residents the chance to step directly into the world of heritage conservation, gaining practical experience on a live site while working alongside skilled industry professionals. With the region home to some of the UK's most significant historic buildings, the programme has been designed to help people develop the specialist skills needed to protect and maintain these important structures for future generations.

  A Practical Route Into Heritage and Construction Careers
  Participants are learning a range of traditional and modern conservation techniques, including joinery, pointing , roofing, plastering and wider heritage conservation skills. Sessions are delivered on-site, giving learners the rare opportunity to apply new techniques in real working conditions.

  Pinnacle Conservation, is committed to preserving historic buildings and supporting local communities, says the programme is designed to open doors for people considering careers in construction, heritage trades, or hands-on restoration work.

  "This programme gives people genuine, practical experience that employers value," said Adam Hickey, Pinnacle Conservation. "Heritage skills need to be maintained, and this is a chance for learners to build confidence, gain industry insight, and take their first steps into a rewarding career."

  Boosting Employability and Supporting Local Skills Growth
  Alongside technical training, participants will leave with a certificate recognising their new skills, helping them stand out to local employers. The programme supports wider regional efforts to grow the construction and heritage workforce, ensuring that vital restoration and conservation work can continue across York and North Yorkshire.

York Learning and the Combined Authority have emphasised the importance of accessible training opportunities that help people develop practical, employable skills—particularly in sectors facing skills shortages.

A Chance to Experience Conservation in Action
The programme was opened to adults of all backgrounds, with no prior experience required. Whether participants are exploring a new career path, looking to retrain, or simply interested in heritage craft, the sessions offer a welcoming and supportive environment to learn.

We are delighted that the first round of courses were fully booked with a waitlist.

Research and Articles

Reflection on Martin Stancliffe by Sir Ron Cooke (September, 2025)

In honour of the Consortium's Founder and Chairman of 19 years, Martin Stancliffe, and marking one year since his passing, our former President reflects on his legacy and shares his thoughts



As you know, Martin Stancliffe, our former chairman, sadly passed away in January 2025 . Perhaps I might say a few words to recognise his enormous and generous contribution to the York Consortium for Craft and Conservation.

Martin had, of course, a major international reputation as one of this country's leading conservation architects. Much of this reputation arose through his Purcell Partnership, his brilliant work on St Paul's Cathedral, his major contributions to York Minster, and many other projects, some of them related to his links to the National Trust, English Heritage and the Landmark Trust. And he was a brilliant oboist to boot.

During his 19 years as chair of the Consortium, he brought all his formidable heritage, conservation and craft experience to bear on our progress. He understood clearly that craftsmanship skills are much more than shaping stone, wood and glass, that it is also fundamental to set them all in the context of cultural traditions, and that they must have a serious future we are prepared to fight for.

As part of the Consortium he focussed his efforts on apprentices, bursaries, crafts traineeships and practitioners, while at the same time taking us through numerous challenges - surviving the pandemic, growing our membership, agreeing a strategy and work plan, improving our publications and online services, and promoting our lecture and in-person practical programmes. More than that, he strongly promoted our links with conservators and crafts people and related organisations beyond York.

It's thanks to Martin's leadership that the Consortium has enduring strengths, and continues to grow and flourish. So, thank you Martin- you will not be forgotten.

What's on in York

Consortium Events:

- **AGM and Bursary Awards Ceremony**

  21 July, 2026 at the Merchant Adventurers' Hall, Fossgate, York

  Join fellow Consortium members for our Annual General Meeting and celebrate our 2026 Bursary Award Winners. The evening will be an opportunity to meet with craftspeople and conservators, keep up-to-date with the Consortium's developments, and enjoy a lecture highlighting the importance of bursaries and apprenticeships, and why they are crucial to the survival of our heritage.

  More information and tickets to be available soon.

- **Materials Day: Adhesion**

  17 October, 2026 at St Olave's Church and Church Hall, Marygate, York

  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 and tickets to follow.

Selected Events:

- **SPAB: Women in Conservation**

  5.30-8.30pm, 10 March, 2026

  The Art Workers' Guild, 6 Queen Square, London, WC1N 3AT and online

  SPAB is hosting a special event to celebrate women in conservation and timing it in recognition of International Women's Day in March. Join them for a unique panel discussion, led by award-winning sculptor Nina Bilbey, as we consider the creativity, skills, ambitions and barriers faced by women working in the historic built environment.

  The panel includes the Foundation's Craft Trainee provider Helen Bower, stained glass conservator, Karen Skeats, lime plasterer, Claire Vidler, building conservator, and Matty Thearle, blacksmith, to our panel for an evening of insight and inspiration into what it means to be a woman in conservation. Find out more and book now.

- **Thin Ice Press: The Complete Adana Workshop**
  10am-4pm, 21 March, 2026
  Peasholme GreenYork, England, YO1 7PW
  A one-day course for aspiring printers who have, or want to work with, an Adana printing press. In a small group setting you will learn the basics of letterpress printing and how to use and maintain an Adana. You can bring your own press along for servicing and leave the workshop with a restored Adana and the skills needed to establish your home studio. Find out more and book now.

- **York Civic Trust: Public Clocks in York**
  10am and 1pm, 7 April (walk) meeting at De Grey Rooms, York
  This visit to three of the city's historic clocks will be led by the York Clock Group. The clocks are all associated with the Newey family and are located at De Grey House, the Church of St Martin in Coney Street, and the Spurriergate Centre. Find out more and book now.

- **Sound and Conservation: Small Orchestra of Destruction, York Festival of Ideas**
  Sunday, 8 June at the Ron Cooke Hub, York University
  When restoration or repair is not cost effective, old pianos are often discarded. But they are ripe for reimagination. Experience the sounds and smells of a piano being dismantled and transformed into a playable 'strung back': the piano's frame and strings only. Afterwards, join a talk exploring conservation issues and the circular economy, plus music performances incorporating the strung back and the sounds of conservation. Find out more at York Festival of Ideas.