

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST OPEN MEETING

Our spring lecture will be given by **Norman Emery** (archaeologist) and **Garry Hodgson** (architect) on **Eshwin Hall**. The story of this distinguished building which has won this year's Architectural Award is one well worth telling – from its origin, failure, neglect and remarkable restoration. The illustrated lecture will be held on **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March** in our usual venue, **Elvet Riverside 1, room 141, at 2.15pm.**

### ARCHITECTURAL AWARD OF THE YEAR

The winner of the Trust's Architectural Award for 2012 is **Eshwin Hall**, the restored Miners' Memorial Hall in Esh Winning. The value of what, in fact, has been a rescue effort is best appreciated from a historical perspective, for everything about the original building was remarkable.

The Twentieth Century Society listed it as "one of the grandest village halls in England", but the sheer size and scale of the structure, boldly proclaiming the

Baroque Revival - "almost Edwardian", according to Pevsner – speaks of an urban setting. (The 1923 building bears comparison with the miners' headquarters at Redhills Lane built eight years earlier.) It is a surprise to find that the architect, John A. Robson, was an Esh Winning man, and that two-thirds of the public subscription was raised by the miners themselves.

The facilities offered in this community centre were comprehensive: a concert hall (with stage, auditorium and gallery; it was soon converted into a cinema), swimming bath, games rooms, library, reading and meeting rooms.



Eshwin Hall

Unfortunately, during the years of depression - including strikes – there were insufficient funds to operate as intended, and the Hall was sold in 1936. There followed a series of different uses until the early 1970s when it was finally vacated. At the millennium a detailed feasibility study, spearheaded by Anthony Scott, proposed its conversion into a series of business offices, craft workshops and artist studios, but nothing materialised.

The building therefore continued to deteriorate, a process accelerated by frequent visits by vandals. With part of the roof missing and the rear wall bulging, the windowless building was recommended for demolition following a structural engineer's report. At this point, 2009, **Mick Brett** (of Brett Brothers Ltd) stepped in and bought the property. His vision has resulted in a restoration hardly less remarkable than the story of the original building.

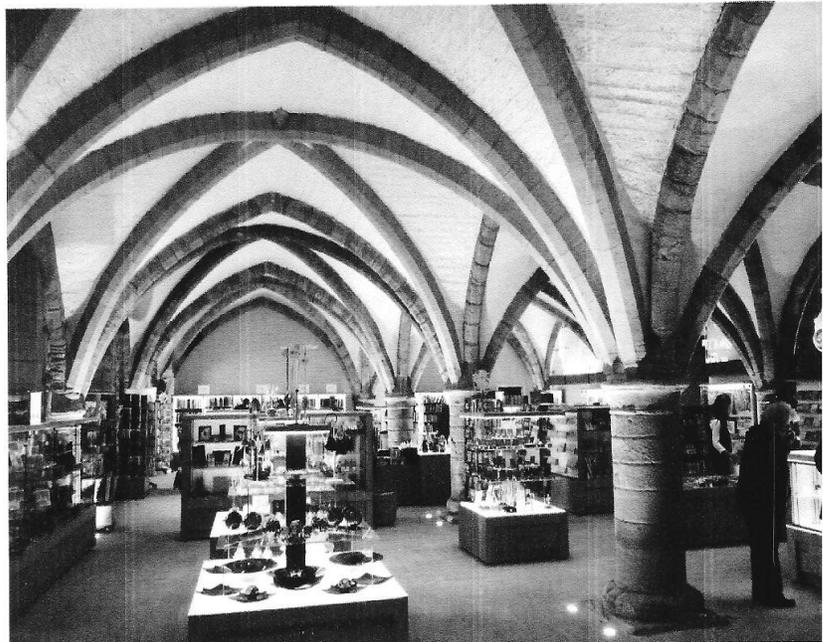
The imposing front elevation has had its brickwork and terracotta stone cleaned, sympathetic windows re-inserted and lantern tower and clock restored. Even the distinctive down-pipes have been retained, even though they no longer function. The bold façade therefore again proudly performs its role as the architectural signature, or place-maker, of the village. At the rear, parts of the wall have been rebuilt, with some new bricks seamlessly inserted, while a slightly higher new roof permitted insertion of a third floor. Completion of the lower two floors required the removal of several hundred tons of debris, much of it being concrete tiers from the cinema.

The interior is now a pleasurable experience. Elegance is given by the manner in which the staircase winds around the inserted lift. Its former history is captured by artistic collections of photographs, while the care taken in the conversion is immediately evident inside the front door with a stone mosaic, which was rescued

from elsewhere in the building and re-laid, tessera by tessera.

Eshwin Hall now provides 'supported living tenancies' in twenty self-contained flats for adults with mild or moderate learning disabilities. Its twin role as a reminder of its mining heritage and community use has therefore been maintained. It is fair to say that no annual award of the Trust has been more deserving or given with greater pleasure. For this, our gratitude is extended to entrepreneur and visionary, Mick Brett, who with his architect, the late David Spark, succeeded by Garry Hodgson, along with encouragement from Steve France in the County Planning Office, brought the project to fruition.

## OTHER ARCHITECTURAL COMPLETIONS



Cathedral Undercroft Shop

One hesitates to include the cathedral's seven hundred year-old **dormitory undercroft** under either 'other' or 'completions', but the removal of the treasury and incorporation of a choir vestry, and with only a glass division into the restaurant, the original architectural space of the twelve double bays with quadripartite vaulting can again

be fully appreciated. - And seen in all its glory, for, given the richness of finish and modern lighting, the quality of the space we now experience surely exceeds anything seen by the original medieval architect, or its occupants. Despite the undoubted quality of the restoration (architect: Chris Cotton; contractor: Simpson of York), the lack of an external elevation precludes it from being considered for the Trust's Architectural Award. (The Holy Cross Chapel, beneath the Deanery, was excluded two years ago for the same reason.)



'Welcome to Durham'  
Visitors' southern entry to the City

An enrichment of existing architecture can also be appreciated in the new **floodlighting of the cathedral** (Stainton Lighting Design Services). It was switched on in December, following similar updating on the castle earlier in the year. Both buildings are no longer washed with light but, rather, their architectural detail is etched and highlighted by more selective illumination from carefully located, superior lamps. The system is also much more energy efficient.

Improved illumination, together with provision of excellent exhibition space in Palace Green Library and earlier conversion of almshouses into a World Heritage Site Visitors' Centre, plus the recent careful restoration of Dun Cow Lane, collectively contribute to a rich environmental experience.

Also on the peninsula, but as yet just outside the W.H.S. boundary, two schemes were completed in **St John's College** (David Kendal Architects; contractor, Brims Construction Limited). An extension of the dining room projects sympathetically from the Georgian house into the garden. More challenging was the insertion into the garden of a dormitory block, the Garth. Constructed at right angles to the main

college buildings, its conforming brick, modest scale and simple lines ensure its success.

The biggest development by far was the **University's Gateway Project**, consisting of an extension to the library and the Palatine Centre (architect: Gotch, Sturridge & Saunders; contractor: Laing O'Rourke). The form and line of the extension acknowledges that of the existing, which building now announces itself as the 'Bill Bryson Library' in lettering to which the eye is appropriately drawn as a focal point of what can no longer be called the Science Site.

The Palatine Centre is a townscape disaster. It was perfectly acceptable that the Stockton Road frontage should be developed, and understandable that a more efficient assembling of some university services in more agreeable accommodation should be desired. However, the elevation on to Stockton Road breaks all the basic rules of architecture and urban design. Context is the first principle: place comes before building. To what does the Palatine Centre relate: where is there any hint of 'Durhamness' in its form or materials? Durham, as the Local Plan acknowledges, is characterised by brick or stone, simple robust shapes, vertical lines and a predominance of solid over void. The Centre is predominantly wood and

glass, with simplicity abandoned for a series of curves and flowing lines. The large, alien structure has drawn a unanimous response from the Trust, English Heritage and architects of national or international standing, who have summarised it as overbearing, unduly intrusive, aggressive, monstrous. Truly, an opportunity lost.

## COUNTY DURHAM PLAN

The Trust responded to the County's *Local Plan: Preferred Options* with a 59 page submission. Although submitted primarily on behalf of members, with the City's district status abolished and with no town or parish council to represent the City at this most critical point in its history, we feel that our comments may represent many of its disenfranchised citizens of Durham.

The Trust agrees with the Authority's goal of improving the well-being of all within County Durham through economic regeneration, but considers the present Plan will not achieve this. We urged the Authority to change its *Preferred Options*, since in our opinion the inspector at the Examination in Public may well deem the Plan unacceptable. Our full submission can be accessed via our website [www.durhamcity.org](http://www.durhamcity.org). In brief summary its major points were:

- There is no consideration of the County's regional context
- There is excessive concentration at the centre at the expense of the rest of the County. This lack of balance indicates an unreasonable rejection of previous County Structure Plans.
- The attack on the City's minimal Green Belt does not follow proper procedures, is contrary to previous inspector's recommendations and central government's recently introduced National Planning Policy Framework.
- The two proposed relief roads are not supported by the County's own

evidence and are contrary to its own sustainability principles and its Local Transport Plan.

- A concentration of 6,000 employees at Aykley Heads will lead to traffic congestion at a less than sustainable site and further loss of Green Belt. In contrast, the Plan glosses over the comparative advantages of Durham Gate and Amazon Park in the County as well as other sites within the City.
- The proposed out-of-town shopping centre north of Arnison not only breaches the Green Belt, but also contradicts the Authority's own policies for the City Centre, public transport and sustainability.
- The reliance on the Community Infrastructure Levy to finance the Plan is highly questionable. The rate mentioned by the Authority is excessively high compared, not only in relation to the rest of the county, but with the country as a whole. Moreover there is no guarantee that the Levy will last for the length of the Plan.

## STUDENT EXERCISE

Jamie Davies, a student in the Department of Archaeology, is part of a team from Durham University Archaeological Society undertaking a course in Heritage Skills in Education. The team is engaged on a project to devise a conservation management plan for the South Street Mill (opposite the Fulling Mill), for which a short on-line questionnaire has been devised. He has contacted the Trust to invite members to participate in the exercise, the questionnaire being available at <http://svy.mk/V4F5ZJ>

**D.C.D.P.**















