

# CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

## BULLETIN

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### TRUST OPEN MEETING

Our autumn meeting this year is an innovation: instead of a lecture we are launching an anthology, *Durham in Poetry*. The book is edited by your Secretary, and seen as complementary to the Trust's earlier publication, *Durham in Paintings*. The book is not a work of literary criticism, but a celebration, or evocation, of place. Some three dozen poems have been assembled, ranging from the eleventh century up to the present day.

We are very pleased that David Burnett, David Crane, Alistair Elliot and Anne Stevenson have all not only contributed their poems but have also accepted our invitation to read their poems at the launch. The meeting is on **Saturday, 24th October in Elvet Riverside 1, room 141 at 2.15pm**. Both book and the Trust's 2015 Christmas card will be on sale at the meeting.

### TRUST'S CHRISTMAS CARD

This year's card is '**Durham**', by **John Dobbin, 1854**. The artist (1815-1888) was born in Darlington, but moved to London, where he became a noted water-colourist. He is best known for his widely-reproduced 'Opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825'. (It was depicted on our £5 notes, along with the portrait of George Stephenson, until 2003)

The view here is that from Aykley Heads. His interest in architectural detail is shown in the detail of the peninsula, Framwellgate Bridge and weir and cluster of riverside buildings. The church towers of St Nicholas - four years before it was replaced with the city's first spire - and St Margaret are clearly visible. The pastoral foreground is somewhat fanciful.

An Order Form accompanies this Bulletin.

### COUNTY PLAN

Members will remember it was in mid-February that the Inspector produced his Interim Report on the County Plan, following consideration of evidence presented at last autumn's Examination in Public and earlier written submissions. The Authority, taken aback by the Inspector's interim

findings, with its severe criticism of the Plan and three-fold choice which it was offered, commissioned Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to make an independent assessment of what it saw as an ambitious Plan. Not surprisingly, since the company had undertaken work for the Authority earlier in the process, the document supported the County's standpoint. However, the Inspector highlighted too many flaws in this new submission to justify his changing his mind, even if it had been procedurally acceptable to admit such a submission at this stage in the process.

There then followed discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the merits of the policies and the fairness of the Inspector's procedure. The DCLG gave short shrift to the former, but was not prepared to defend the claim of procedural unfairness in a Judicial Review. The Trust submitted a written defence - Friends of the Green Belt did likewise - but could not risk financial bankruptcy by appearing in any full court hearing. The Trust's view was to insist that we were only at the stage of an interim report. Moreover, the County Authority had at no time during its month-long session raised any query about the Inspector's running of the Examination. Neither had it taken any opportunity to refute the criticism or alternative views expressed on the other side of the table in the final word which the County was always afforded. Its barrister was also present, able to interrupt at any time.

The decision of the High Court of Justice, stamped 4th September but not received by the Trust until the 23rd, upheld the County's Claim. Accordingly, the Interim Views of 15th February and Inspector's further letter of 8th May were quashed: "the Inspector's conduct of the examination was procedurally unfair.....The County Council has agreed that it shall forthwith withdraw the County Durham Plan.....and will then re-submit for independent examination an amended and refreshed Local Plan."

One concluding comment. The County Authority's 'victory' is solely a legal one. To put it bluntly, it is ruled that the County should have been told earlier that its key policies presented were likely to be judged unsound. However, despite its quashing, the substance of the Interim Report surely remains, since its policy findings have been already found acceptable to the DCLG. In preparing any 'refreshed' Plan, therefore, the County will have to treat consultation far more seriously than hitherto.

## **FUTURE HOPE**

As members are well aware, the city has been without a local representative forum, an unparished unit, since 2009. Hope now looms on the horizon for a City Neighbourhood Forum. Two public meetings in the summer revealed the wide extent of citizen support. The 'neighbourhood' covers most of the city, apart from Newton Hall, and the task of the 'forum' is to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. When completed - and approved by the County as conforming to the County Plan - it will become a statutory document offering detailed planning guidance. Perhaps not all members know that the Trust's chairman, Roger Cornwell, until recently vice-chair of the Forum to our M.P., is about to take over the reins as the latter stands down.

## TALES FROM THE RIVERBANK

Some eighteen months ago the route from Watergate across Prebends' Bridge to the White Gate was given a tarmac surface for the first time and made part of the national cycle route. An appropriate notice is attached to Watergate, but on the incline on the opposite side of the Bridge is

an intriguingly small notice standing barely six inches above ground level. Close examination reveals a request to cyclists to show respect to pedestrians. (See pictures.) Am I alone in thinking it calls to mind notices concerning dog behaviour which are fixed too high on lamp posts for the animals to read?



Cyclist and notice on the Riverbanks



Nearby, on the southern loop of the river, the Cathedral Chapter has recently made safe a viewing platform on the outer bank immediately above the abutment of the original crossing lost in the flood of the 1770s. Provision of the view of the elegant arches of Prebends' Bridge is an act in the spirit of the romantic landscaping of the Banks in the 18th century.

Elsewhere on the river banks Trustees expressed concern at the sudden appearance of extensive railings and the threat of lighting, triggered by recent student fatalities. Of course, the loss of a single life through drowning is a tragedy and one too many, but the speed of erection after recommendations by a safety committee took most people by surprise. Historic England, the Trust and even the World Heritage Site Co-ordinator were not consulted.

We hope there will be a re-think over the lighting proposals. Do university students, for example, really need finger posts directing them to lit routes? Is it necessary to light the path to Palace Green up Broken Walls, which is hardly near the riverside? Why is ground-level lighting not considered? The proposals could seriously challenge the environmental sensitivity of the World Heritage Site - and its hoped-for extension. An adopted document in its Management Plan, *Strategy for Lighting and Darkness*, for instance, proposes to preserve "the night-time setting of the Castle and Cathedral."

## **GENEROUS DONATION**

Earlier in the summer Trustees were overwhelmed to receive an exceedingly generous donation of £5,000. The member, who requested anonymity, asked that it be put "for your campaign." (By coincidence, this figure was approximately the cost incurred in engaging traffic consultants at two stages in the County Plan process.) Such generosity is indeed a great encouragement; at the same time it causes one humbly to reflect on the depth of feeling that motivated the deed.



### **MARTIN ROBERTS**

We are delighted to announce that Martin Roberts, who gave the lecture at our last AGM, has agreed to present an annual lecture to Trust members, beginning next autumn. His wealth of knowledge and enthusiastic delivery mean that Martin is much in demand as a speaker, so we are especially privileged. Having produced the definitive volumes on the city's architecture and university buildings, Martin is currently revising Pevsner's volume on Durham in the author's *The Buildings of England* series. We look forward to learning of his latest findings.

## **THE BOW TRUST**

The City of Durham Trust was one of the supporting societies when the Bow Trust was founded in 1975. The purpose of the new Trust was to preserve the Grade 1 listed church of St Mary-le-Bow in the North Bailey and to open it as a heritage museum. To celebrate the fortieth anniversary the committee of the Museum and Heritage Centre are holding a Reception in the Museum on Saturday 17th October, 4.30-6.30pm. All Friends of the Museum, members of the Bow Trust and members of all supporting organisations are invited.

## **DO WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS?**

The Trust has on file the email addresses of slightly under half of its members, but we think that rather more members will have one. (Many members are long-standing and joined before email communication was widespread.) You will know if we have your email address because you will have received an email from us on 9th September to let you know about the next open meeting of the Trust. If we do not have your email address, could you send it to us, please? Just email and we can take it from there. Your details will not be passed to any other party.

If we have your email address, we will be able to let you know of developments between the regular *Bulletins*, and can also save on postage costs. (The *Bulletin* is now on the Trust's website.) If you prefer, you can have an electronic, rather than a paper, copy of the *Bulletin*. We assure you, however, that there is no intention of ceasing to produce a paper copy of the *Bulletin* and *Annual Report*.

D.C.D.P.