

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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durhamcity.org

THE AUTUMN TALK: “DURHAM CASTLE AND CATHEDRAL, NINE YEARS A WORLD HERITAGE COORDINATOR”

We are delighted to welcome **Jane Gibson**, former Coordinator of Durham’s World Heritage Site. She writes:

After 9 years as Coordinator for Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site I have had the privilege of working with so many knowledgeable colleagues, many of whom have given their time and expertise freely, on a wide range of topics and in widely varying circumstances. Coming to the position with a background in the heritage sector, I found the environment of development and planning on and around the WHS particularly stimulating(!), but also enjoyed the more familiar ground of community engagement in ensuring our WHS remains at the heart of so many communities in and around Durham City and much further afield. In a brief 45 minutes, I look forward to sharing some of these experiences with you.

This event will be held at **2 pm on Saturday 2 December, in Elvet Riverside, New Elvet, room 140.**

The talk is accessible online. Email zoom@durhamcity.org a day or so before the event to request the link.

REDHILLS, MAJOR TRANSFORMATION AND UNESCO BID

The Trust continues to offer the warmest support to Redhills, or The Redhills Charity, as it is called now since ownership of the Durham Miners Hall was handed over to the people of the Durham Coalfield by the Durham Miners Association. The historic Grade II listed building of 1915, with its famous The Pitman’s Parliament, is currently being transformed into a living archive of the Durham coalfield and a centre of learning for schools, the local community and the wider public. It will offer a people’s history of the Durham coalfield through guided tours, and open up the building and its collections, as well as offering space for exhibitions and where community groups can meet and brass bands and county choirs perform. **It is aimed to reopen Redhills in the Autumn of 2024.** For more details see <https://redhillsdurham.org/>.



As first briefly reported last year, the Durham Miners Hall is part of a bid to receive UNESCO world heritage status. The bid is part of an international scheme led by “The Workers Museum in Copenhagen” which is working to achieve world heritage status for a selection of workers’ assembly halls across the globe. The website for the Workers Museum includes details of the plan, <https://bit.ly/47ognwD>, with a schedule for

preparation and submission of the bid, predicted for 2025 with a response from UNESCO expected in 2026. The Workers Museum website states: “This project aims to preserve the global labour movement by working towards inscription of those buildings in which the labour movement developed”.

Nicola Craddock, Communications & Engagement Manager at Redhills, supplied the image copied here and has been generous in keeping the Trust updated. She writes: “In terms of the UNESCO bid, we continue to work with the UNESCO Chair on Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage on this. We are currently looking at a peer review of Redhills' inclusion within the serial transnational World Heritage bid, as we move towards looking to be recommended for the UK tentative list for World Heritage—inclusion in such a national list is a condition of eligibility for inclusion in the transnational bid. The UNESCO chair, Professor Robin Coningham, whom we are exceptionally lucky to have here in Durham as a Professor of Archaeology, hosted a workshop on 18 October where those who already have UNESCO status could review and comment on our inclusion as part of the Danish-led bid. We need to be added to the UK tentative list for World Heritage before the UNESCO bid is formally submitted in 2025”.

Although Redhills is currently closed, the full work of the charity has continued mainly outside the City, including support for the Redhills Youth Brass project (see <https://bit.ly/3s70ag9>). Details of all Redhills activities are available online: <https://bit.ly/3s61Syq> .

THE RIVER AND INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES (INNS)



The damaged condition of England’s rivers has been making angry national headlines in 2023. The City of Durham Trust’s work to protect and enhance Durham City cannot engage solely with the built environment while disregarding how the riverbanks, woods and fields across the area are being badly degraded. Trustees continue to support the **Wear Rivers Trust** in working for the health of the county’s rivers and riverbanks. Our Trust is represented among other local bodies at biannual meetings organised by the **Wear Rivers Trust** to support its ambitious long-term project to rid the whole catchment area of three very damaging invasive alien plants. These are **Japanese Knotweed**, **Giant Hogweed** and **Himalayan Balsam**.

It remains a matter of concern that the wider public is still often unaware of the extent of the damage being done to Durham’s green environs by these plants. Once one comes to recognize them, they are noticeable all over the riverside and more widely. The problem can seem overwhelming in places, but there is some hope

in the longer term. See the WRT website: <https://bit.ly/3tEOvWb> .The WRT, working with the Durham City Parish Council, has produced and disseminated a leaflet on these issues.

Jack Butlin is now the officer for the Wear Rivers Trust responsible for organizing the removal of invasive non-native species. He has been generous with feedback on the INNS scheme, with its work coordinated with other regional river trusts, other local bodies and the University (especially at Blaid’s Wood near Josephine Butler College). The focus is mainly but not exclusively on riverbanks and the watercourses in the county that help the plants spread.

Japanese Knotweed suppresses other plants and can cause deep structural damage. It can still only be treated with a herbicide, timed for the late summer or early autumn. The image copied above shows a stand of knotweed rising above the broad-leaved butterbur on the riverbanks. Jack is particularly anxious about the knotweed on the banks at the Sands (imaged opposite). The reason is that two different species of knotweed are growing there close together, the “normal” type and a large patch of **Giant Knotweed** (its leaves are noticeably much bigger). These species are known to hybridize and the fear is that somewhere an emergent

hybrid will appear capable of disseminating viable seed. At present knotweed in the UK is restrained by being able to spread itself only by rhizomes.

Giant Hogweed is both invasive and dangerous for its toxic sap. The major source of local infestations was located at *Old Durham*, where a beck carries seed into the main river near the buildings of the Durham Amateur Rowing Club. Jack writes: “we’ve put in a massive effort tackling the Giant Hogweed on *Old Durham Beck*, which will have direct positive impacts on the amount of hogweed in and around Durham”.



Himalayan Balsam. This is easily the most conspicuous of the ecologically damaging plants, with now overwhelming infestations in various places, including that part of Hopper’s wood north of Crook Hall and east of the railway, as well as the hilly area east of the former DLI museum and the newly named Beacon Hill. Although superficially

pretty, with hundreds of pink flowers popular with bees in the later summer, the plant is ecologically very damaging. It shoots up to suffocate other species and then leaves the ground bare and prone to erosion after die-back in the autumn. Realistically, its removal in the worst areas here would now require a sizable group working for up to a week, with visits to be repeated annually over some 5 years until the stock of buried seed were finally exhausted. According to Jack, this does not at all mean that a “balsam bash” of the familiar community-action sort, pulling up the plants by hand for a few hours, is futile. It remains a valuable way of getting the public engaged, even if the impact is very localised. Such events will often have the most impact if they do not pitch at once into long-established stands of the stuff but concentrate first on areas where the balsam is still more distributed and spreading, where there is less seed lurking in the ground for next year.



One serious obstacle has been that Durham County Council still refuses to allow volunteers to work on its own land, stating concerns about insurance and health and safety. All the same, given the scale of the problem in places, to focus solely on voluntary community action as a remedy, when allowed, may also risk effectively acting to disguise or evade the need for fuller and more resourced official engagement. The balsam is still multiplying very badly in some areas around Durham City.

However, Jack reports very significant the progress in removing balsam from the upper catchment area, thanks to a remarkable effort from a volunteer in Weardale who has removed areas of balsam there by repeated visits, month after month, over two years. Looking back on

progress this autumn, Jack writes: “I can confirm that, although we didn't prevent plants from flowering, as far as we're aware no Himalayan Balsam seed pods were allowed to burst in upper Weardale”. This will have a huge positive impact downstream.

Biological control? Longer term hopes lie with acceptable forms of biological control to weaken these destructive species. “Biological control is definitely something we are thinking about. Our friends from the Tees Rivers Trust are the forerunners in the region in this field, <https://bit.ly/3QdzhPv> . They have around 10 trial sites for a rust fungus that is looking promising for Himalayan Balsam (see <https://bit.ly/3Qb5R4J>). There is also a psyllid looking promising against Japanese Knotweed (see <https://bit.ly/3tQ67yz>). WRT are hoping to get involved with these trials in the not-too-distant future, but cost is a major barrier (each trial site costs around £10,000 to set up)”.

The Durham City Riverscape Community. Our Trust also warmly supports the *Durham City Riverscape Community*, which was set up in 2021 in coordination with the City of Durham Parish Council and involves the many local users and enjoyers of the river. A group of volunteers meets once a month clearing litter from the river in central Durham, both from the banks and in the water from a boat. Alarming large hauls are being

reported, including in July two bikes and a chair. It is easy to join the Facebook group (“Durham City Riverscape Community”: <https://bit.ly/3Fxy77P>). Work is also underway to support a recent initiative on plastic pollution of the river and its banks spearheaded by Peter Nailon of the WRT. See <https://bit.ly/3QyupWS> .

Volunteers on 1 July recorded numerous dead fish. The environment agency ascribed this to low water oxygen levels. Dead fish were being reported in rivers nationally after the UK had just had the hottest June on record.

The weirs in central Durham. During the past year debris has been cleared from both weirs in the city, but that at Milburngate/Framwellgate was still in a visibly dilapidated state. Measures with sandbags were observed this summer. We hear that an application is planned within the Environment Agency for funding for repairs, but are warned that the EA’s funding continues to shrink. There is a similar story with the other weir, between the two mills downstream from Prebends Bridge. Money to clear the weir of more debris may be obtainable, but the far larger sums needed to repair a hole in this wooden structure and to install a new fish pass will be challenging to find.

MESSAGE FROM JOHN LOWE, THE CHAIR OF THE TRUST

Dear Members, I want you to know how much Trustees value your support. We have many issues to address in the City and our views carry more weight the more people we represent. Our numbers remain static and we really do need to recruit new members. As I never tire of saying, if we each recruit one new member we’ll double our numbers. We have set up a new, simplified online membership application system at <https://durhamcity.org/> or, in case of difficulty, contact membership@durhamcity.org.

We would also welcome some new Trustees. We are a small, friendly group who readily welcome new colleagues. You don’t need any special expertise, but all contributions are welcome. We meet just one evening each month in Alington House. If you are interested, please contact me at chair@durhamcity.org or, if you prefer, by phone on 0191 386 2595. If you have any other thoughts at all about the work of the Trust, please get in touch.

TRUST PUBLICATIONS AND GREETINGS CARDS

With Christmas approaching it seems a good time to remind members that the Trust offers a range of publications about the City and that some could make good gifts, such as Douglas Pocock’s collection of poetry about Durham, *Durham in Poetry*, or his *In the Steps of the Masters: Durham in Paintings*. New for our anniversary year of 2022 were Angela Tracey’s cards depicting Crook Hall. They are both greetings cards (£0.60) and a postcard as shown here, available in two sizes (£0.30 and £0.50).



We still have some stock of various cards depicting historic images of the City, provided with envelopes. All available designs are left blank for your own message. A full list of publications and cards appears on the website. <https://durhamcity.org/publications/online-shop/> .

The Trustees

SURPRISE BREAKING NEWS

As this bulletin went to press Trustees welcomed the sudden news that, contrary to widespread expectation, including the implication in the Trust’s review of the last year, an application to convert the closed Hallgarth Care Home to student accommodation was refused on 27 October. An increase in the proportion of student accommodation in the area was held to be against policies 16 and 31 of the County Durham Plan as well as National Planning Guidance (NPPF, paragraphs 92, 130 and 185), with “a detrimental impact upon community cohesion and [it] would further adversely affect the amenity of existing residents within the local area from increased noise and disturbance”. Will there be an appeal?