

Darlington Study Tour.

Day 1: With warm weather throughout the Study Tour, the Group was blessed to enjoy five most interesting and pleasant days exploring the hidden gem, which is the North East of England.



The first stop was at **Brodsworth Hall and Gardens (EH)**, Doncaster, an impressive Victorian mansion, in the Italianate style, with formal Victorian gardens surrounding the House and a pleasure garden beyond, containing the Fern Dell Grotto, Wild Rose Dell and Statue Walk and other gardens.

The House, conserved as found, was originally a country house for the Thellusson family, with original furniture and furnishings. The Group were charmed by the interiors, which contained some magnificent paintings, including Dutch Old Masters.



Our stay was at the historic **Blackwell Grange Hotel, Darlington**, an elegant C17 Georgian mansion. which enjoys an enviable setting in the beautiful County Durham countryside. It is nestled in wooded parkland on the outskirts of Darlington and is located between the North Yorkshire Moors and the Pennines.



Day 2: The Group had a full day in **Durham**, starting with a tour of the magnificent Cathedral, one of the great buildings of Europe. Set on a rocky promontory next to the Castle, with the medieval city huddled below and the River Wear sweeping round, the profile of this World Heritage Site is instantly recognisable.

The guided tour of the Cathedral was very informative and full and made the Group appreciate the 'wow' factor of the Cathedral - its space, height, construction and architecture, including the impressive decorative columns.

These huge carved Norman pillars are 6.6 metres round and 6.6 metres high, making their circumference the same as their height. They help support the wonderful stone

vaulted ceiling and are very distinctive. The stonemasons who built Durham Cathedral and its nave are believed to have invented the world's first structural arch. This was to solve the engineering problem of safely building a stone vaulted ceiling across such a large space.

Construction of the Cathedral as we know it today was started in 1093 by Bishop William of St Calais.



The Cathedral is also famous as the resting place of two important historical people, one of which is The Venerable Bede, AD 673 - 735, saint, scholar and Britain's first and pre-eminent historian.

Following the tour, there were many options which the group could pursue. A number of people had a River Cruise, sailing between the steep, wooded banks of the river.

Others had a guided tour of the Castle, the construction of which began in 1072 under the orders of William the Conqueror, six years after the Norman Conquest of England, and soon after the Normans first came to the North. The construction took place under the supervision of the Earl of Northumberland, Waltheof, until he rebelled against William and was executed in 1076. The castle then came under the control of the Bishop of Durham, Walcher, who purchased the earldom and thus became the first of the Prince-Bishops of Durham, a title that was to remain until the 19th century, and was to give Durham a unique status in England.

It was under Walcher that many of the Castle's first buildings were constructed. As was typical of Norman castles, it consisted of a motte (mound) and an inner and outer bailey (fenced or walled area).

The Castle, also known as University College, is now part of Durham University and the venue for the graduation ceremonies, which take place every summer. The University is England's third oldest university after Oxford and Cambridge. Between the Castle and the Cathedral lies Palace Green, originally the city market place. Around the green are a variety of buildings from different periods, many of which

are key to understanding both the responsibilities and the privileges of the Durham Prince Bishops. These include *Cosin's Almshouses*, constructed in 1666 by the Bishop of Durham, John Cosin, on the site of an earlier building, the song and grammar school of a previous Bishop of Durham, Langley, built in 1414. Other notable buildings in this area are *Cosin's Hall*, *Moneyer's Garth*, *Palace Green Library*, and the *Music School*. Others, such as *Abbey House*, incorporate important remains of medieval fortifications that have since been lost.



Another place visited was 'Open Treasures exhibition' set in the monks' dormitory and medieval kitchen of the Cathedral. The interactive exhibition is set in the dormitory while the Kitchen contains St Cuthbert's original 7th century wooden coffin, his gold and garnet pectoral cross, the portable altar and ivory comb which were placed in his coffin when he was buried and embroidered Anglo-Saxon vestments.

These and other treasures, including the original 12th century Sanctuary Knocker, and the Prince-Bishops' own silver coins, are displayed in the 14th century Great Kitchen, one of only two surviving medieval monastic kitchens of this type in England. It is octagonal with a high rib-vaulting ceiling, its huge scale reflecting the size of the community living in the Cathedral when it was built. The space was used as a kitchen until the mid-1940s.

Others chose to visit the University Oriental Museum: a collection of oriental art of international importance with exhibits from Ancient Egypt, Tibet, India, China, Persia and Japan. Others wandered round this charming city, with its winding, cobbled lanes, elegant Georgian houses, ancient marketplace, and quiet courtyards and alleys.



Day 3: Barnard's Castle (EH) and Bowes Museum. The Group were given a choice on the third day, either to visit the Bowes Museum, or to visit Barnard's Castle. Those who chose to visit the Bowes Museum could not fail to be impressed by the spectacular French-style château, as they approached the venue. Among the treasures in this magnificent building are major works by painters such as El Greco, Goya and Canaletto. The [Fashion & Textiles Gallery](#) contained some amazing artefacts from the wardrobe of Empress Eugenie and other stunning pieces from the Blackborne Lace Collection. At this time there was also a modern 'catwalking' exhibition on display. The highlight of the Collection was the 200 yr old mechanical silver swan catching fish, which the Group were privileged to see in action. In a performance accompanied by music, lasting about 30 seconds, the lifelike Swan appears to preen itself, then bend its neck to take a fish out of the water.



Barnard's Castle, the alternative venue, is set on a high rock above the River Tees, with fantastic views over the Tees Gorge. Barnard Castle takes its name from its 12th century founder, Bernard de Balliol. It was later developed by the Beauchamp family and then passed into the hands of Richard III, while still Duke of Gloucester. Richard's boar emblem may be found, carved above a window in the inner ward. The Castle is well preserved, with good information boards and is easy to negotiate.



The charming, historical town of Barnard's Castle itself, boasts handsome houses and charming stone cottages. Shops and inns dating from C17 - 19 line the wide streets, and there is a real farmers' market operating on

a weekly basis. An octagonal C18 Butter Cross (or Market Cross) is a feature of the town. The author, Cyril Northcote Parkinson was born in this town. He is best known for his 'Parkinson's Laws', the most famous being: Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.

Kynren Pageant at Bishop Auckland.

Taking place on a vast open air stage of 7.5 acres, with a huge lake at its centre, hiding a host of surprises, this breath-taking spectacle boasts a cast of 600+, and a back-up team of 400. The huge open-air auditorium can seat an audience of 8,000 for each show. The Pageant tells the epic tale of England, tracing 2,000 years of history, myth and legend, with spectacular lighting and sound effects. Starting at dusk, the show lasts for 1 1/2 hours, with a backdrop of the Bishop's Palace set high above the grass 'stage'.

Among the many dramatic contributions to this live action extravaganza were a real jousting tournament, a full-size steam engine and carriages being driven across the stage, live animals being herded across the stage, jaw-dropping battle scenes, fireworks, racing horses, a castle rising from a lake, a Viking longship gliding across a mass of water and water fountain displays.

The Pageant was very well organised, with so much action the audience were spoilt for choice. For comparison, think of the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, but in the open air. Everything was totally professional, from the Welcome Team (Archers) at the gates to the large-scale battle scenes and choreography. Brought to you by a 1,000-strong cast and crew who have been professionally trained by international performance experts in dance, theatrical combat, pyrotechnics, and equestrianis. The huge cast is joined on stage by the animals of Kynren, collectively bringing each scene to life amidst jaw-dropping special effects and an original sound track by the award-winning composer Nathan Stornetta.

The Epic Tale of England, a pageant celebrating the history, commemorating 100 years of the Suffragette movement. WW1 Centenary.



Spectacular sets appearing as if by magic, mass choreography and fierce battles are illuminated with dazzling special effects, lighting and pyrotechnics, set to a spine-tingling original score which you'll experience in movie-like surround sound.

The Group came away after a spectacular firework finale agreeing that this was one of the North-East's best kept secrets. (Find links at 'kynren' or 'eleven arches.org').

Day 4: A full day at the **Beamish Open Air Museum**. This large museum, set over 350 acres, is sited on an actual coal-mining village and surrounding area. There are a number of 'districts' in this museum, all connected by a circular road, along which run regular trolleybuses and trams.

The villages include a 1900s Pit Village, complete with school, chapel, terraced cottages and band hall. There is also a 1940's Farm, where one can experience life on the Home Front during WW2. The Colliery Yard has a 163 year-old working steam winding engine and the opportunity to take a guided tour underground at the drift mine. The 1900s Town was a real delight, with authentic shops and businesses, such as the dentist, the Bank, the Co-Operative store and much more. Pockerley Old Hall, a small Georgian manor house still on its original site, had a beautiful terraced garden featuring Georgian-era plants, herbs and vegetables. Throughout the museum volunteers dressed in appropriate costume and were happy to tell the visitors much relevant information.



In the evening the group were entertained by some of the Ukelele Group, with a variety of songs and an opportunity to 'sing along', which proved to be a most

enjoyable way to bring our stay at the hotel to a close.



Day 5: Mount Grace Priory (EH). Tucked away at the foot of the Cleveland Hills in North Yorkshire, Mount Grace Priory is the best preserved Carthusian monastery in the country. The Priory displayed many very good information boards, a reconstructed hermit cell and gardens, and an informative exhibition on the first floor of the original Guesten House. The Guesten House is now an Arts and Crafts house and garden with William Morris interiors. Chris Beardshaw recently re-designed the gardens in the Arts and Crafts style.

Founded in the late 14th century, you can still see remains of all the priory buildings today. The life of a medieval Carthusian was very different from that of other monks. In a Carthusian priory, each monk lived alone in a substantial house, called a cell. Each cell was in effect a private monastery, with its own cloister for meditation and a walled garden. At Mount Grace Priory in North Yorkshire - the best-preserved Carthusian monastery in England - there were 25 of these cells.



The Carthusian way of life was strict, but the monks enjoyed a good standard of living. This allowed them to concentrate on their religious life, without worldly cares. The purpose of Carthusian life was total withdrawal from the world to serve God by

personal devotion and privation. While other monks lived communally, Carthusians rarely met one another, passing the long day in the isolation of their cells and surfacing only occasionally. Only on Sundays and feast days was the monastic day different. On these days, the monks dined together, met to discuss business and discipline, and celebrated all offices in the church. Visiting the reconstructed hermit cell gave the group more understanding of the life of this unique Order.

The Group agreed that this Study Tour to the North-East was most informative and opened up an area of England that is widely unknown.

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