

North East case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Region:	North East
Theme demonstrated by case study:	Asset transfer of a heritage asset to a local community group to support its conservation and enhanced public access
Name of project/group:	Dukesfield Steering Group
Lead contact:	Ian Forbes
Location:	North Pennines

Short description of project:

The lead industry is often overlooked as an integral part of Tyneside's economic and social history. This project focused on the site of the Dukesfield lead smelt mill in Hexhamshire, its connections with the wider lead industry and its social and economic legacy in the area.

Central to the project were two large stone and brick Gothic arches, which form part of the ruined Grade II Dukesfield smelting mill. This project involved physical repair works to the arches in parallel with a well-developed activity programme, which introduced new audiences to the heritage of this lost industry.



Dukesfield Arches © Peter Jackson

The project has achieved positive outcomes for both heritage and the local community. A unique structure has been preserved and safeguarded, whilst an extensive community programme has provided a wide range of events, workshops and activities to stimulate local interest. These have included educational activities, heritage skills training in archaeology and conservation, plus extensive volunteering opportunities.

Why did you get involved with this project or activity?

I am the chair of the Friends of the North Pennines and the Dukesfield Steering Group. This is made up of a dedicated band of volunteers who have donated their time, expertise and enthusiasm to the project. The Friends took on a lease from the landowner (Allendale Estates) through a 25 year asset transfer agreement, which helped to secure the future of the site. The arches look stunning now and it has given us much joy seeing them cared for.

The Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers Project was instigated entirely by volunteers and grew from local concern about the state of this Grade II listed structure. The parishes of Slaley and Hexhamshire worked with the Friends of the North Pennines to raise funds to repair the arches.

How did you resource your project or activity?

The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and other sponsors. It also relied heavily upon support from local volunteers. Over the course of the project, 199 individual volunteers helped to support the project, providing over 1,626 days of volunteer time. The project built on people's existing interests and helped them to share and extend their skills.

What would have happened without your project or activity?

Without this project and group an important part of the historic environment would have been lost and forgotten. The Grade II listed arches would have declined into their woodland setting and the archaeology of the site would have remained undiscovered.

What difference been made by your project or activity?

As a result of this project, an important historic structure has been restored, safeguarded for the future and etched into the collective memory of the area. The arches are now a valued community asset rather than a misunderstood ruin, disappearing from view. The project has raised awareness of this landscape feature amongst the local community and the historic significance of the site is now better understood.

A total of 95 learning and participation events took place over the course of the project with 6,116 participants. Collaborative partnerships were also developed with local schools to support memorable learning experiences. Volunteers took part in investigative research, through archaeology, genealogy and archive transcription. The project's website now incorporates a searchable database of over 1.5 million words transcribed from mouldering industry documents. This archive is informing academic research at several UK universities.

The project was runner-up in the heritage category of the Constructing Excellence North East Awards, was nominated in the Love Northumberland Awards and was a finalist under the industrial category of the 2015 Heritage Angels Awards.

What have you learnt from this experience?

The amount of time, effort and skill required to carry out an asset transfer and develop a major grant application should not be underestimated. Some community groups may not have this level of ability to be able to carry out such a project.

The nature of the project's activities and outputs also evolved over the duration of the project. The group appreciated the flexibility of the Heritage Lottery Fund in allowing some of the original activities to be replaced by those more appropriate to participant needs. This allowed the project to attract a wider range of people with specific interests, who were then encouraged to try new activities in addition to their original interest.

What does the future hold for your project or activity?

Thanks to this project, the future of the Dukesfield Arches and their place in the memory of the local community is secure. The site will remain in the care of the Friends of the North Pennines until the end of the 25 year lease.

The level of enthusiasm and skills development achieved by individuals and volunteers involved with the project has been a key element of this project's legacy. Many of the archaeology volunteers have gone on to volunteer at other archaeological digs across the region. Some of the volunteers involved in the historical research and transcription for this project have also decided to continue and are still uploading their work to the project website at www.dukesfield.org.uk

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