

Working together

National Trust and
Newcastle University



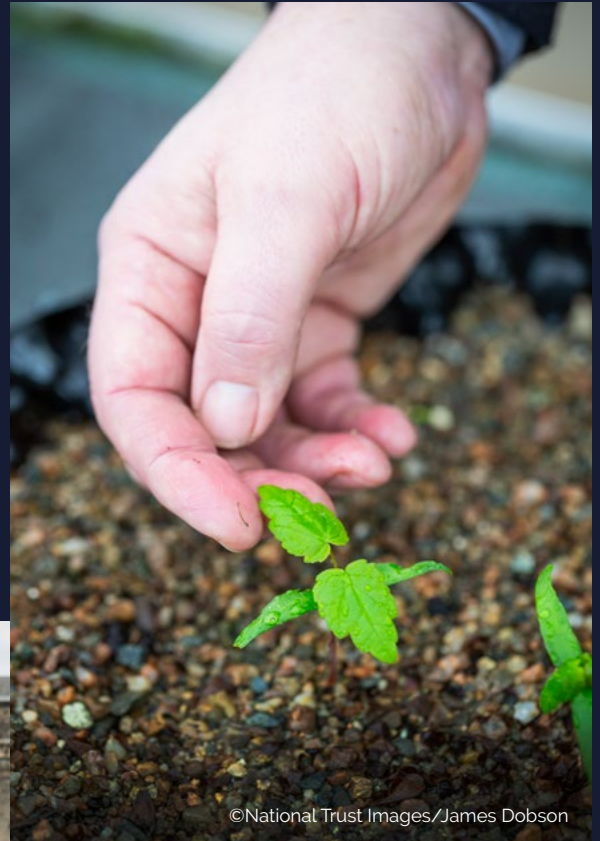


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Newcastle University and the **National Trust** have forged a dynamic partnership.

Since 2017, we've collaborated on projects worth over £8m that conserve nature, promote heritage, and engage communities.



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Introduction

Our partnership with the National Trust is formed on a mutual appreciation of the spaces and places that enrich our lives. Using the latest research, we aim to preserve nature, beauty, and history for everyone to enjoy – today and for years to come.

Newcastle University and the National Trust have a rich history of working together. Since 2021, a Memorandum of Understanding has strengthened our partnership. This agreement has helped us build deeper connections and work more strategically.

We're proud to share our latest joint efforts; including research, engagement projects, and work with students, all aimed at supporting the National Trust's goals to engage people in nature, beauty and history.



Nature



Heritage



Beauty

Many of these initiatives have grown from years of collaboration and build on our past successes.

Our collaboration stretches across three University faculties: Medical Sciences; Science, Agriculture and Engineering; and Humanities and Social Sciences.

We support the National Trust's strategic aims by addressing challenges raised when caring for nature and heritage; encouraging public engagement and equity throughout each project.

As we look to the future, we're eager to support the Trust's 2025–2030 strategy and continue our meaningful and blossoming partnership.



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“We all want quiet. We all want beauty... We all need space. Unless we have it, we cannot reach that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently.”

Octavia Hill
National Trust co-founder

Contemporary art and heritage

Our collaborations on pioneering projects in contemporary art and heritage explore how visual art can be commissioned for heritage sites – and how to navigate the challenges this brings.

The following work builds on the legacy of our standout project **Mapping Contemporary Art in the Heritage Experience** (2017–2020). Funded by the Arts Heritage and Research Council (AHRC), this initiative examined how temporary visual art can be integrated into British heritage sites.

This research looked beyond the art itself to consider the impact on artists, audiences, and heritage sites. The project brought together scholars, artists, heritage professionals, volunteers, and visitors, creating a multidimensional view of the heritage landscape.

Drawing on research findings we developed **Volunteer Voices: Engaging Volunteers with Contemporary Art and Heritage**. Volunteers co-created a rich skills development program to interpret contemporary art within heritage settings.

Through methods such as peer learning and group interaction, this partnership deepened knowledge exchange. This work led to the **Engaging Volunteers with Heritage** project, which transformed research findings into practical policy recommendations.

All Our Histories was a similarly policy-focused project examining issues surrounding equity and under-representation in the commissioning of contemporary art for heritage sites.

A current project **Collections Policy and Contemporary Visual Art Commissioning** examines how contemporary visual arts can be documented and included in collections policy for heritage sites.

This responds to a recent collaboration, **On-Site/Off-Site: Thomas Bewick and Contemporary Art at National Trust Cherryburn** (2023–2024), that explored the potential of digital art commissions to preserve the legacy of site-specific art – and how digital spaces can engage new audiences.

This learning is now informing international practice. **Networking International and Transnational Approaches to Contemporary Art in Heritage Practice** seeks to initiate a new international network of academics, artists, heritage professionals, and organisations to explore approaches to contemporary art in heritage practice.

We also have two **AHRC funded PhDs** relating to under-represented groups and histories in heritage and cultural narratives: one examining creative programming and the other organisational approach and policy.



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Avi-Alarm, Hanna Tuulikki



Key outcomes:

- innovating and interpreting art within heritage settings
- exploring under-representation and equity
- initiating international collaborative networks

Next steps:

These projects explore themes such as the practices of commissioning contemporary visual and digital art for heritage sites from diverse perspectives, connecting our efforts both nationally and internationally.

They also address the under-representation in commissioning practices, examining how creative programming and contemporary art can inform organisational policy. Our partnership also reflects the critical role of volunteers in both the commissioning and interpretation of these works.

Over £1m of projects:

Our collaborations on the practice of visual art commissioning for heritage sites have resulted in:

- newly commissioned artworks displayed on-site, in galleries, and online
- policy-influencing reports
- training programs for volunteers
- academic articles

Tyne Derwent Way

The **Tyne Derwent Way** is one of the National Trust's green/blue corridors.

The partnership is led by Gateshead Council with the National Trust, Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, and the Tyne and Wear Building and Preservation Trust. It has secured significant government Community Renewal and Shared Prosperity funding to transform a neglected urban parkland into a vibrant community space.

This project aims to make culture, heritage, beauty, and well-being accessible to all.

It has evolved through research and innovation projects developed by staff and students on a range of topics from nature conservation to community oral histories.



Key outcomes:

- making nature more accessible
- creating a vibrant community space
- enhancing green and blue corridors

Next steps:

We are now leading a network of colleagues from universities in the North East of England to enhance green and blue corridors in the region.





Wilder Wallington

Through **Wilder Wallington**, we are working together on a major project to test innovative practices in nature recovery and climate resilience on the National Trust's largest intact estate (2% of the organisation's total landholding) in Wallington.

Newcastle University and National Trust colleagues are collaborating on a better understanding of tree health, hedgerows, and woodland regeneration, reducing the impact of climate change and environmental stresses on new and established woodland.

Our work measures the fascinating hydrological and wider impacts of recent nature-based project interventions. These include beaver reintroduction, engaging students in LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) scanning and habitat surveys, and recording soundscapes in the new beaver enclosure.

In summer 2024, Wallington and Newcastle University Library collaborated with local schools to develop **Species: Past, Present and Future**, an NHLF-funded exhibition of poetry and prints created by local 12-14 year olds.

"I believe the project has truly instilled greater self-expression, confidence and curiosity in many of our students."

"Our students have absolutely adored the opportunity to explore nature and how it interacts with the arts... and it has certainly given our students something to think about in regard to their careers and future potential."

Teachers from participating schools
Wallington exhibition

Key outcomes:

- nature recovery and regeneration
- encouraging meaningful engagement with nature
- promoting climate change and biodiversity

Next steps:

These collaborations are helping to engage new participants in themes of climate change and biodiversity in the Northumberland countryside.



Hadrian's Wall and Sycamore Gap

Newcastle University and the National Trust have a long history of collaboration at the UNESCO inscribed 80-mile Wall.

Newcastle archaeologists led a National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project to train hundreds of community volunteers in digital surveying, conservation, and geological work, aimed at preserving the Wall and preventing further deterioration.

The Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site Programs Coordinator, based at Newcastle University, leads an archaeological monitoring program that engages National Trust volunteers in hands-on participation along the Wall.

After the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree in September 2023, Newcastle University and National Trust colleagues collaborated on a swift technical response, scanning the felled tree within days and coordinating public engagement efforts.

Building on this, in 2024 geospatial systems research students participated in a 'challenge' week, where they spent time creating three-dimensional topographic surveys of Sycamore Gap.

By meeting the National Trust's needs as a 'client,' the students were introduced to contemporary surveying technologies, gained hands-on experience in data acquisition, processing, and analysis, and developed valuable professional skills.





“We are improving our understanding of Hadrian’s Wall and are in a much better position to ensure its survival. Together, we can conserve a vital part of our heritage and ensure that it can be enjoyed by future generations of local communities and visitors for many more years to come.”

Professor Rob Collins
Professor of Frontier Archaeology,
Newcastle University



Key outcomes:

- helping volunteers preserve the wall
- archaeological monitoring efforts
- public engagement for Sycamore Gap

Next steps:

Newcastle University continues to participate in the Public Engagement and Curation workstream for the **Sycamore Gap Project** which delivers outputs following the public response to the felling, including:

- artist exhibitions
- film commissions
- community engagement outputs
- delivering 'One Year On' anniversary plans

Newcastle University is leading a recently announced pilot project to address the impacts of climate change on Hadrian’s Wall, collaborating with communities and stakeholders to co-design, develop and test locally derived models of partnership working. The University will also create shareable tools and templates for analysing climate-related information more effectively.

This project is one of three pilots announced by the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that will receive funding and support to take part in the groundbreaking project, Climate Change and UNESCO Heritage.

Heritage volunteering and volunteer management

Dr Bruce Davenport and Professor Andrew Newman from the School of Arts and Culture, and Professor Suzanne Moffatt from the Population Sciences Institute ran an internally funded pilot study exploring when older volunteers stop volunteering due to age-related issues. The pilot project involved staff and volunteers from two Trust sites along with staff from the regional and national offices.

The results suggested that an expanded project could consider the experiences of both volunteers and volunteer managers and supported a successful ESRC grant application.

Recently, Dr Davenport was invited to discuss the project's implications with colleagues at Gibside, who incorporated these insights into their own strategies for managing older volunteers.



Key outcomes:

- exploring volunteer demographics
- ensuring successful volunteer management
- developing stronger engagement in heritage

Next steps:

Dr Davenport is currently developing a new project focussed on volunteer management and the hope is that National Trust sites will be included as case studies.



“Volunteers are crucial to the success of many cultural heritage organisations and, by extension, so are volunteer managers. By working with partners in the sector, we hope to improve our understanding of one aspect of volunteering and develop ideas for good practice that will improve the experiences of volunteers and the staff who manage them.”

Dr Bruce Davenport

Lecturer in Cultural Heritage and Cultural Gerontology,
Newcastle University

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Dressing Fancy at Bath Assembly Rooms

Dressing Fancy was a 2024 joint research and engagement project between Dr Meg Kobza, Newcastle University, and the National Trust at Bath Assembly Rooms. Dr Kobza's work is part of her Leverhulme funded research, which explores the interconnections between display, performance, and consumer culture.

As an extension of this work, Dr Kobza collaborated with the National Trust to bring an accessible and experiential history of Georgian fancy dress to the Bath Assembly Rooms.

The project delved into the world of Georgian fancy dress from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, blending archival research with contemporary programming. It not only uncovered the historical significance of these costumes but also invited us to reflect on their modern relevance and the sensory experience of wearing them.

Dressing Fancy research and engagement activity included a pop-up exhibition, a series of in-person and online talks and a Georgian-inspired grand Fancy Ball.

It provided visitors with engaging and immersive experiences to explore and reflect on the role of fancy dress in the eighteenth century and its lasting impact today.

The exhibit posed questions about what it was like to attend a fancy ball, who wore and made the garments, and how these costumes reflected broader colonial ideologies. This project laid the groundwork for creating new types of multi-sensory visitor engagement that can be applied to other heritage sites, bringing Georgian sociability to life in tangible, smellable, and audible forms.

Dressing Fancy was funded by The British Academy and the Society of Antiquaries.

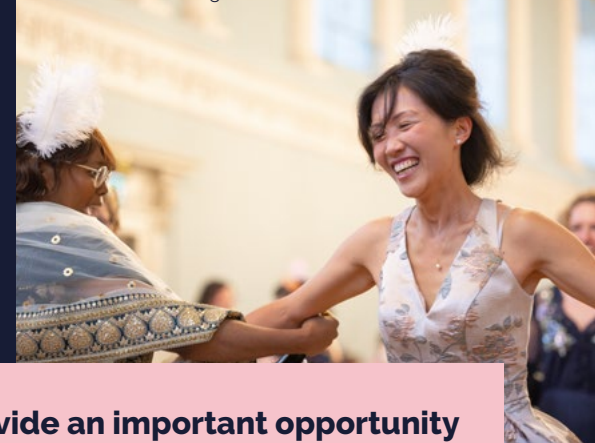
Key outcomes:

- widening participation in heritage
- developing multisensory modes of visitor engagement
- encouraging public imaginaries of past and present

Next steps:

This project was an extension of Dr Kobza's Leverhulme Trust funded work 'The Roots of Cultural Appropriation in Eighteenth-Century Leisure Culture' which is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and considers issues of race, empire, and otherness within the context of leisure culture in the British Empire from 1750 to 1850.

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“This event will provide an important opportunity to engage heritage audiences in conversations about the legacy of fancy dress, its relationship with cultural appropriation, and its place within leisure culture in the past, present, and future.”

Dr Meg Kobza
Leverhulme Research Fellow,
Newcastle University

Testing Ground at Cherryburn

Testing Ground is a program led by the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, in which teams of architecture students collaborate with local communities and organisations.

Together, they design temporary or permanent structures that meet the 'client's' needs while enhancing public enjoyment of spaces, heritage sites, and landscapes.

Students take on the entire process; from working with clients to develop their brief, right through to carrying out the physical build. Several structures created as **LiveBuild** projects have since won awards. The student design-build project at Northumberlandia won both the 'Best Small Project' and the 'Structural Artistry' prizes at the Institute of Structural Engineers NC awards in 2021, and their breath-taking viewing platform at Blakehope Nick, Kielder, received a special commendation in the IStructE Northern Counties Awards: Small Projects.

Over the last year, students have worked with the National Trust to develop a Welcome Hub for visitors to Cherryburn.

After getting to know the site, client, and context, the students developed a proposal that aligned with Cherryburn's 'Spirit of Place.' Their design aimed to enhance visitor welcome and orientation, preserve existing landscape views, and maintain a clear line of sight to the Birthplace Cottage.

They had to work alongside the existing accessibility strategy and demonstrate sensitivity to the grade II listed context. The final structure provides a new all-weather shelter that acts as a greeting threshold, meets practical needs for storage, and references Bewick's love of craft.



Key outcomes:

- implementing solutions to meet National Trust visitor need
- engaging with communities to develop solutions
- developing skills for future work

Next steps:

In 2024-2025, students will be working with the National Trust team at Washington Old Hall to create another bespoke welcome structure for visitors.

“We are excited to be part of Newcastle University’s ‘Testing Ground’ project at Cherryburn. Working with such talented architecture students on our new visitor welcome building has been an enlightening and enjoyable experience. Their response to Bewick’s interest in the natural world, his birthplace cottage and the surrounding countryside has produced a building perfect for its environment.”

Kay Owen

Visitor Operations and Experience Manager,
National Trust



In All Our Footsteps

In a project led by Oxford Brookes University, Newcastle University's Dr Clare Hickman is collaborating with the National Trust on cross-disciplinary research that explores the historical, health, and policy aspects of twentieth and twenty-first century rights of way.

The project examines the importance of accessible and inclusive rights of way, emphasising its role in providing access to nature and promoting activities essential for human health and well-being, both historically and today.

In All Our Footsteps is a national project funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council and includes broader collaboration with Exeter and Bristol Universities, Historic England, the Sensory Trust, Sense, and Natural Inclusion.

The project builds on Newcastle University and National Trust collaboration on the AHRC-funded network, **Unlocking Landscapes: History, Culture and Sensory Diversity in Landscape Use and Decision Making**, also led by Dr Clare Hickman.

Key outcomes:

- exploring access to nature
- promoting social wellbeing initiatives
- building on collaborative research

Next steps:

Newcastle and Trust colleagues have developed a further AHRC bid, **Shaped Through Care**, a collaboration to explore the entangled histories of people, plants, and place.

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Emerging work

Our projects continue to flourish and evolve through a strong focus on equity and engagement.

Beyond the Curtain

This project brings together an interdisciplinary body of researchers from Newcastle University's Centre of Research Excellence for Children and Youth and colleagues from the National Trust.

It explores how best to enable equity of access for young people to nature, heritage, and beauty, working with the National Trust and Children North East.

Seaton Delaval Hall, located in an area of high social deprivation, has collaborated with Children North East to consult with children and young people to identify and address challenges related to engaging with heritage and nature.

Supported by ESRC IAA funding, this initiative will leverage existing research to inform future UKRI applications. It aims to enhance the National Trust's national Children and Young People's programs, aligning with the Trust's new strategy.



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Ageing Well Across the Life Course

This initial study aims to uncover opportunities for future research and innovation between Newcastle University and the National Trust by exploring how engagement with nature, beauty, and history can support healthy ageing throughout life.

It focuses on intergenerational activities and potential innovations in this area. The project is supported by Newcastle University's Centre of Research Excellence for Ageing and Inequalities.

Aligning closely with the National Trust's **'Everyone Welcome'** ambitions, the project will support the Trust to understand and articulate the impact and public benefit of existing activity, as well as identifying opportunities to enhance future practice.



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Growing together

Our work together has always had a strong focus on people and their engagement and access to heritage, beauty and nature.

Recent projects, including the **Tyne Derwent Way**, **Ageing Well Across the Life Course**, and our work with Children and Young People's hubs in the North East, highlight our joint commitment to equity of access.

We've focused on building a partnership rather than merely realising projects; and as our understanding of each other's organisations deepens, so does the impact of our joint efforts.

By linking social and environmental justice, our initiatives in nature, recovery, and climate resilience are bringing innovative research and practices to diverse audiences.

Each collaboration is aimed at achieving the National Trust's strategic goals, maintaining nature, beauty, and history for all.



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“Whatever the question is we feel we need answering, it feels like there is somebody within Newcastle University who we can get to who can help us to answer that question.”

Andrew Poad
General Manager,
National Trust



“It is immensely rewarding to see our partnership with the National Trust go from strength to strength, to see relationships growing between teams, and to be working on shared areas of interest where our collective expertise can make a difference to communities, environment and landscape, and heritage practices.”

Professor Vee Pollock
Dean of Culture and Creative Arts,
Newcastle University



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Working together

National Trust and Newcastle University



Newcastle University

Newcastle University exists for the public benefit to advance education, learning and research. Our objective is to build on this core purpose and, in doing so, provide new knowledge and creative solutions that make a positive impact. We aim to work collaboratively with our many external partners to shape brighter futures, grow the economy and champion social justice.

www.ncl.ac.uk



National
Trust

National Trust

We protect and care for places so people and nature can thrive. Many millions share the belief that nature, beauty and history are for everyone. So we look after the nation's coastline, historic sites, countryside and green spaces, ensuring everyone benefits.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

