

# The Weardale Museum Christmas 2025 Newsletter



## **Dear Friends and Fellow Volunteers,**

2025 is coming to an end and we embark on the next and exciting stage in the history of The Museum! This year we managed to celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an incredible series of talks and events. I was truly amazed by the efforts of our band of merry volunteers, so thank you!

The Methodist Tapestry Collection had an amazing tour of Cumbria, in no small part due to the efforts of Sue Hinde. We also had several successful exhibitions in County Durham together with talks to local WI groups – thank you David!

After a slow start the scaffolding eventually went up and all the windows in the Chapel have now been replaced, work is continuing apace with the re-mortaring of the outside walls with lime mortar to preserve the heritage of the 1760 Chapel and allow the walls to 'breathe', hopefully avoiding any future damp problems. As the scaffolding went up the contactor and Phil Newbold could take a closer look at the state of the walls and as expected numerous problems have been found and corrected, not least the undulating south facing roof – it looked more like a ride from Alton Towers than one that would support our PV Panels. The contactor has worked through wind, rain and snow to get the roof repaired and it now awaits its crowning glory of PV Panels and unbroken tiles, so we all need to remember and be grateful for their efforts and skills.

Inside the Chapel the new floors are beginning to take shape. The new first floor gallery is looking fantastic it is so flat that no escaping marble can roll across the floor, another testament to the carpenter's skills. There is still so much work still to be done but we have risen from the abyss of administration and are on the march to achieve a Museum and Visitor Centre that Weardale and our dedicated volunteers deserve. There are still major funding challenges ahead, but we have an incredible track record, thanks to Allan Percival, and are perceived as a worthwhile cause to support.

Besides the visible building work, there has been a great deal going on behind the scenes, a complete inventory of the Museum is almost complete, a new web site is being implemented, the digitisation of our paper records is due to start in January, the Family History database has been expanded to include Tow Law (now approaching 80,000 records), our extensive photographic collection is due to be digitised to allow 'free text searching' and the email system is also under review and will hopefully be revamped in the New Year, pause for breath here!

We are working on a 3-year Marketing Plan which is about 80% complete, future displays have been identified for research (Burnhope Reservoir, the changing social conditions in Weardale, the coming of water and electricity to the Dale and Legends and Folklore). Our new book about Stanhope Dene has been launched and can be found on the shelves of

the Dale Centre, where its sales have passed all expectations.

To complete the works on the link between the Chapel and the Manse we need to list, check, pack, transport and store the contents of the Wesley Room, this is fast becoming urgent, and we need all the help we can get. I am talking to a conservator who will be willing to assist us in this task and pass on any hints and tips. Depending on the schedule of works other artefacts may need to be stored safely, until they can be proudly displayed back in the new Museum.

A museum designer has also been engaged to help us interpret our artefacts in the Museum and those stored in our unit at the Dales Centre, to realise our vision for the Museum, most of you would have heard me whither on about this during our anniversary celebrations. This plan will be shared when it is complete.

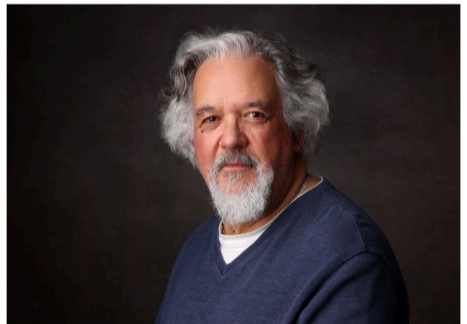
There is still a long road to travel, with no doubt the usual potholes and unexpected diversions along the way, before we have the Visitor Centre, new car park and an amazing and vibrant Museum. Although however hard this journey is going to be, it is probably the most exciting phase within the history of The Weardale Museum and gives all of us a chance to ensure that the history of Weardale is preserved for future generations and its myriad of stories are told in innovative ways. We will ensure that these stories are accessible to everyone and that the Museum will become a must-see visitor destination and a permanent home to the

incredible Methodist Tapestries Collection.

There is little more for me to say but to express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to the volunteers that bring life to the Museum and form this wonderful family.

***A Very Special Christmas and New Year Greetings To You All from Myself And My Family.***

Mike



## Celebrating our Stewards and Volunteers



Volunteers listening to Mike Beer giving an update on the development of the museum while enjoying refreshments and meeting other volunteers at Chatterbox Cafe.

December 2025

The Weardale Museum Trustees and our Museum Team would like to say thank you to all of our stewards and volunteers for everything that they do. The Museum would not function without you





## Emptying the museum – Can you Help?

As part of the ongoing restoration at the Museum work will be starting shortly on the Manse building.

A doorway from our Wesley room through into the Chapel, works to replace windows, the creation of a stairway into the attic and other essential electrical and mechanical works must take place in the Spring. This will create a lot of dust and vibration from which our artefacts need protection.

We will need to move the artefacts and this will be a major task for our Museum team requiring each artefact to be checked against our accession register, carefully wrapped and packed in container boxes.

Small teams working in each room would make great progress. If you can volunteer any time, please contact Mike, our Curator, who is co-ordinating this work. He can be contacted via Facebook (Mike Beer) or by email:

[mike.beer@weardalemuseum.org.uk](mailto:mike.beer@weardalemuseum.org.uk)

Our images are from the Science Museum in London .

Our job is not quite as big as theirs



## ***Thank You!***

Since our Autumn Edition of the Newsletter  
we have received the following grants

Museum Development



£5,000

Design Consultant;  
Conservation Specialist;  
Packaging Materials



SIR JAMES KNOTT TRUST

£25,000

Passenger Lift

point  
north

2D Legacy Fund

£1,900

Audio,  
Visual Aids  
Digital Equipment

# High House Chapel – Restoration Report – December 2025

*Philip Newbold, Trustee of The Weardale Museum*

On 1 September 2025 work re-commenced on site with further repairs and restoration of the Chapel following the award of substantial MEND and HLF funding

The new funding permitted the detailed design of the re-modelling of the Chapel and the associated mechanical and electrical installations

Summer working restrictions imposed by Natural England due to the bats and swifts meant that this work was being carried out in winter weather.

**Major restoration and upgrading is now  
underway and we apologise for any  
resulting inconvenience**

**The works have been made possible  
by the generous support of the**

**Museum Estate Development Fund**



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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**National Lottery Heritage Fund**



Museum email contact: [info@weardalemuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@weardalemuseum.org.uk)



The first element of the restoration was the replacement of the windows in the north and south elevations with new double-glazed, sliding sash units



Work progressed on excavations for the new, insulated ground floor



and on the new, timber first floor structure to provide a large area of levelled gallery.



A new access hatch into the roof void was formed to enable repairs to the roof structure to be completed and safe maintenance platforms installed





In early October, scaffolding was erected to the south and east elevations providing access to the south roof and necessitating traffic management



The scaffold allowed a full inspection and repairs to the existing windows on the east elevation and replacement of the vent grill in the roof void



Externally, work continued with the raking out of the old cement mortar in the stonework followed by repairs and re-pointing with lime mortar



It was discovered that the roof structure had sagged over time and needed to be repaired to provide a level base for the installation of 28 solar panels

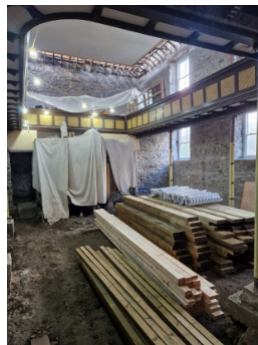




It was also discovered that the external walls of the Chapel had become distorted at the gable ends so further, unforeseen repairs were required



We are aiming to complete the restoration of the south roof, installation of the solar panels and repointing of the upper walls so that the scaffolding and traffic lights can be removed during the week before Christmas



Back inside the Chapel, the new first floor was completed at the east end and the materials for the rest of the floor are stored at ground floor level

## No scaffolding in sight!

A behind the scenes look into Steve's "Brick This" (Lego) workshop near the banks of the Tyne (sorry, not the Wear)



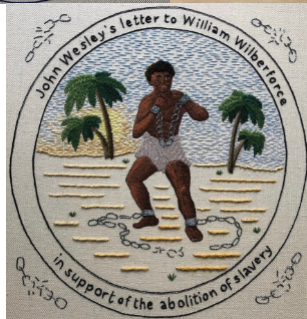
This photograph features the well-advanced model of High House Chapel and the Manse. When completed, part of the chapel roof will be cut away to permit viewing inside where a model of John Wesley will be standing in the pulpit.

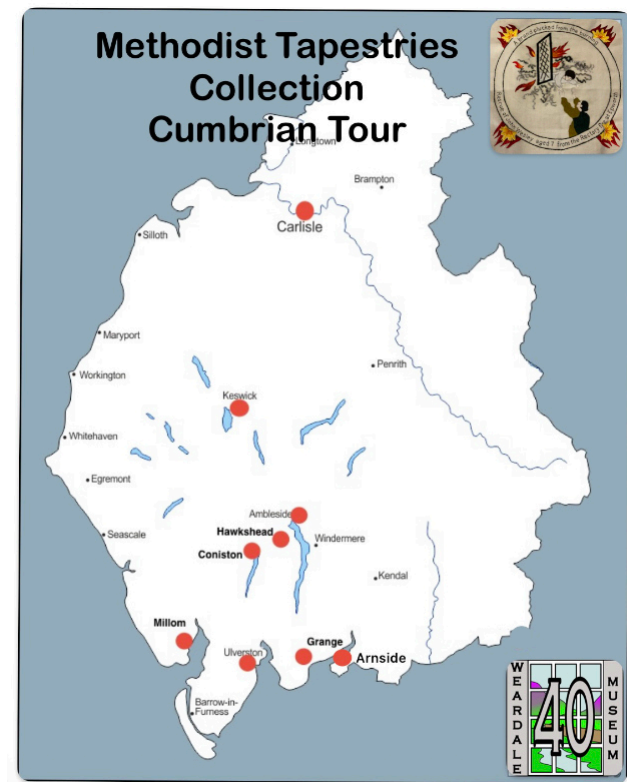


Partly financed by our National Lottery Heritage Fund award, eight other smaller models will form a trail that depicts favourite artefacts in the museum, the pulpit and communion rail, plus Wesley's Monument.



## Our latest Tapestries





In 2024 we received a request from the Methodist Superintendent Minister in the South Lakes asking if we could organise an exhibition in her Circuit in Cumbria. This would normally be outside our touring range but our Trustee Sue who lives in Keswick gallantly said that she would organise it and do all of the transportation. From the end of May until the beginning of October 25 of our Tapestry panels were taken on tour to ten different venues including Carlisle Cathedral and were seen by over 5000 people.

We also visited Hexham, Blanchland, Roker and Bishop Auckland as well as giving talks at 6 different venues in the County.

Our programme for 2026 includes Chester-le-Street and Gateshead and we are looking for other venues to visit while our permanent home at High House Chapel is prepared to house the collection.

Over 50 framed Tapestries are now complete with many more in the pipeline. Thank you to our talented embroiderers, to Tracy and her team who mount the embroideries, and to our framer John.



The Annual General Meeting of the Trust will be held on  
Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 1900

This will be a ZOOM meeting, the link to which is

[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84159953032?  
pwd=T4DUb6O9NPAubTbh1rX9ObRWvpvnZK.1](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84159953032?pwd=T4DUb6O9NPAubTbh1rX9ObRWvpvnZK.1)

Meeting ID: 841 5995 3032

Passcode: 385343

The meeting is open for anyone to attend but in the event of a vote,  
only Friends of the Museum may do so



## Alice's Shoes



### **How were the clogs in our Museum made?**

I was in the Museum the other day and standing in the Kitchen, my favourite part of the Museum possibly because it reminds me of my grandparents' house and especially my Nan's Kitchen on my cousins' farm in Devon. When, as I am prone to do, I was looking around and saw the last and the various shoes/clogs that we have and Alice's Shoes and I began to wonder about their history and how they were made.

The making of wooden clogs with leather uppers and metal protectors ("clog irons") in the 19th century was a skilled trade combining woodworking, leatherwork, and metalcraft. The process was labour-intensive and required specialist tools and materials sourced from northern England's forests, tanneries, and ironworks



### **Preparing and Shaping the Wooden Soles**

Clog soles were carved from green hardwoods, often alder, sycamore, birch, or beech. These woods were chosen for being lightweight yet strong and resistant to water. Woodsmen felled and sawed tree trunks into blocks, which were roughly shaped using a stock knife while still moist and soft (“green”). The blocks were then stacked in pyramids for several months to dry and season while allowing air circulation. Once seasoned, the blocks were sold to master cloggers, who refined the sole’s shape with rasps and short blades and cut a rebate (groove) for the leather upper.

Clogs were designed with a cast, a gentle upward curve at the toe, enabling a rocking motion when walking. In hilly regions such as Weardale, soles were sometimes more curved to help with inclines

### **Making and Attaching the Leather Uppers**

The uppers were cut from thick leather using metal patterns or templates, a process known as “clicking out” due to the sound the knife made against metal edges. Pieces included the vamp (front), quarters (sides), and heel stiffener, stitched together using waxed hemp thread. Once sewn, the upper was heated, soaked, and stretched tightly over a wooden last to form shape, then tacked to the sole with brass or steel studs.

A narrow leather welt was often nailed around the join between sole and upper for reinforcement, hiding the tacks and preventing moisture seepage. Many cloggers also fitted toe tins—thin steel or brass plates—over the front leather to prevent wear from kneeling.



### **Adding Metal Clog Irons**

Finally, clog irons (also called “caulkers” or “cokers”) were nailed to the bottom of the sole. Typically, U-shaped, these strips of steel reinforced the wood at the toe and heel, shielding it from rough surfaces and extending the life of the clog. Ironworks in areas such as Sheffield and Keighley produced these parts, which were custom-fitted by local cloggers. The grooves of the irons were recessed to protect the nail heads from abrasion.

### **Finishing and Customization**

After assembly, clogs were smoothed, polished, and sometimes painted with tar or oil for waterproofing. Some regions developed traditional patterns or painted motifs identifying local makers or villages. The finished clogs were durable, affordable, and ideal for industrial work—making them the preferred footwear for Weardale’s miners, quarrymen, and agricultural labourers throughout the 19th century.

Clog making was a widespread craft across the North and Midlands. Itinerant woodcutters and clog makers supplied finished soles to local craftsmen, who would then attach the leather uppers. In County Durham, including Weardale, clogs were particularly associated with mining, where their thick, insulating soles provided protection against damp floors and falling objects. Workers valued them for their comfort, insulation, and affordability compared to leather boots.



### **Social and Cultural Role**

Clogs were not only utilitarian but also part of regional identity. They featured in clog dancing traditions, with the springy wooden soles producing rhythmic sounds. English clogs differed from fully wooden Dutch clogs (klompen) by offering more comfort and flexibility through their leather uppers. The use of mixed materials—wood, leather, and metal—represents the adaptation of rural craftsmanship to the demands of industrial labour life during the 19th century.



## LATE NEWS!

### Energy Resilience Fund award

Returning from attending a meeting of the Social Investment Business Foundation's Investment Committee, Emily, the Architectural Heritage Funds' Investment Manager had supported us throughout the application process and was present at the London meeting, able to advocate on our behalf. The Committee awarded us a blended grant and loan facility, thus easing most of our concerns following the loss of expected VAT grants earlier this year. This will enable us to fully complete all our renewable energy measures.

On returning to her Tyneside office, Emily advised:

*The Investment Committee were incredibly impressed with your fundraising to date, and noted that this clearly demonstrated that you had provided the level of detail and expertise expected by both the Arts Council and the NLHF. They were also hugely impressed by your proposals and the Passivhaus approach to the adaptations, and could see that the museum was a real asset to the local area and community, particularly demonstrated by the commitment from so many volunteers and clear in your aspirations for the future of the buildings.*

## FINALLY

We give a huge shout out to the excellent team of Contractors (Coverdale & Hughes) and Sub-Contractors (including NZECO of Wolsingham) who, despite all the challenges from wind, rain and snow, have ensured completion of this first stage of MEND and NLHF funded works to the chapel. They really have gone the extra mile - and will return in January to undertake three further months of restorations.



Produced by

The Weardale Museum

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1HD

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Scaffolding and traffic lights gone at last