

# Visit County Durham

## DURHAM PRESS PACK

### Welcome to Durham

This handy fact pack contains information about Durham, the North East's cultural city and county, including:

- History and Heritage – from the Birth of English Christianity to the cradle of the railways
  - Durham's iconic UNESCO World Heritage Site, Durham Cathedral and Castle described as "the best Cathedral on Planet Earth" by Bill Bryson
  - The natural wonders and remote landscapes of the Durham Dales and North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
  - Turning the tide of heavy industry: the rebirth of Durham's Heritage Coast
  - The arts and treasures of the county
  - TasteDurham: Keeping it local, keeping it Durham, authentic dining experiences for visitors
  - Ghost stories and paranormal activity: Haunted Durham
  - Hidden Gems – the surprising places and people which set the county apart
  - Hollywood Movie locations and claims to fame
  - Sporting Success: Durham's rise to back to back national Cricket Championships
  - A "Who's Who?" of Durham's famous people, including Bill Bryson's love affair with the city
  - Culture Durham: annual events, festivals and cultural celebrations
  - Did you know? – surprising facts and stats about Durham
- Plus, detailed information about two different ways to experience the great outdoors in County Durham:
- Get Outdoor and Active
  - Recharge with Peace and Tranquillity

### About Durham

Durham is a unique county in England. The only one which bears the name 'County' ahead of its principal town or city name, many people have been confused by its geography enough to believe County Durham is actually in Ireland. Most commonly, counties are named after their principal town (e.g. Yorkshire) but Durham did not become a county until after the language of government changed in 1066, when the Normans changed it from Anglo-

Saxon to Norman French. Before this Durham was a Bishopric, a territorial area governed by a bishop.

Located in the heart of North East England, Durham City is a historic jewel at the heart of the region and the proud capital of County Durham. The city is looped by the River Wear, which at 96kms long flows through the county and protectively encircles the **UNESCO World Heritage site Durham Cathedral and Castle.**

From head to mouth, the river encircles the city and flows eastwards through Weardale in the Durham Dales, before flowing south east and then north east back through to Sunderland and into the North Sea.

To the west sits the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Durham Dales, made up of lush green Teesdale, an area hewn by glacial movements during ice age Britain and split by the River Tees – and Weardale – the westerly dale, whose history and heritage is founded on lead mining and the religious influences of preacher Rev. John Wesley. Both are dramatic, beautiful and tranquil landscapes which offer visitors a range of short break opportunities from relaxing country retreats to outdoor activity breaks.

In the central corridor and North of the county sits the Vale of Durham, which furthest North borders Tyne and Wear and is known for the rolling Derwent Valley and world famous Beamish Museum: The Living Museum of the North.

To the east sits the Durham Heritage Coast, a stretch of wild and beautiful coastline reclaimed from the heavy industry of coal mining and brought to life by 'Turning the Tide,' a regeneration project that has reinvigorated the area and attracted growing numbers of visitors.

In the city, the river has cut deeply into sandstone creating a peninsula that has been exploited for its natural defensive enclosure throughout time. As it flows it passes beneath **eight bridges** which have become defining aspects of the city. These are: Bath's Bridge, New Elvet Bridge, Elvet Bridge and Framwellgate Bridge (both medieval road bridges), Kingsgate Bridge, Prebends' Bridge, Milburngate Bridge and Pennyfeather Bridge.

**In 2007, Durham City was voted Conde Nast Traveller's 'Favourite UK City' in a reader poll.**

### **Durham Cathedral**

Founded in 1093, Durham Cathedral is a breathtaking example of Romanesque architecture and one of the finest Norman buildings in the world.

An iconic image of North East England, local people have voted for the Cathedral as the place they are most proud of and in 2001, a national BBC Poll of viewers and listeners revealed that Durham Cathedral was Britain's "Best loved building."

Together with Durham Castle, the Cathedral has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site – one of the first to be granted the prestigious protected status - since 1987. The original rib vaulted church, an architectural innovation of great importance, took just 40 years to build which is a remarkable feat of engineering for its time.

It is the only Cathedral in England to retain almost all of its Norman craftsmanship and one of the few to preserve the unity and integrity of its original design. It is also the home of St Cuthbert's tomb - one of the most revered English saints and formerly Bishop of Lindisfarne (Holy Island).

After St Cuthbert's death, monks fled Danish raiders with his body and eventually settled in Durham. A carving on the north front of the cathedral commemorates the legend that the monks carrying St Cuthbert's coffin were guided to Durham by a milkmaid looking for her dun cow.

When Cuthbert's body was removed from Lindisfarne it was magnificently preserved and had not decayed. Miraculous cures were then associated with his shrine and Durham became the most important centre for medieval pilgrimages in Northern England.

The Cathedral is also home to the tomb of the Venerable Bede, now Saint Bede - the Father of English history and first recorded Christian scholar in the British Isles. The Cathedral faces on to Palace Green where its full 496ft (143 metres) from east to west can be seen and appreciated.

## **Durham Castle**

Founded by William the Conqueror in 1072, Durham Castle is one of the first fortified castles built by William in his 'harrying of the North'. It is an example of a 'Motte-and-bailey' castle and is now a World Heritage Site with adjoining Durham Cathedral (see Cathedral section).

Home of Durham's Prince Bishops for 800 years, it was given by Bishop Van Mildert, the last of the Prince Bishops, to Durham University in 1832. It then became the University's foundation college, University College, in 1836 and is still a college (part of Durham University) today. No other college in the British Isles has a more ancient or impressive home.

Outstanding features of the castle include The Great Hall, built by Bishop Bek in 1284, the 57ft high dark oak Black Staircase, and the Norman Chapel, the oldest part of the castle readily visible, which was built around 1078.

It is very Saxon in its appearance, most likely due to the forced Saxon labour after Norman invasion, and after many years of neglect and under use (including use as a RAF observation/command post in WWII) it was re-consecrated and returned to its original use after the war.

Most impressively, the castle's 15<sup>th</sup> century kitchen is still in working order and the Great Hall acts as the dining room for the Durham University students that live in catered accommodation at the castle.

## **Durham Dales and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Few British landscapes are as remote, undiscovered and unspoilt as the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Durham Dales in North East England.

More than 100 years ago, the heather clad moorland and rolling dales rang noisily to the sound of lead mining, smelting and quarrying. Now the area is so still and quiet, it was voted the fourth most tranquil place in Britain by the Campaign to Protect Rural England in 2007.

Known as one of England's "last remaining wildernesses," the natural landscapes of Durham's Dales and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been reclaimed from the heavy industry of lead mining and transformed into an area appealing to lovers of the outdoors for its crowd free sweeping horizons, isolated tranquillity and rugged remote terrain.

The area is different to those that sit around it in Northern England, as Durham is:

1. Less crowded than the Lake District
2. More rugged and remote than the Yorkshire Dales
3. Unlike Northumberland's ancient remains, Durham is full of historic signposts that easily evoke images of a time when people struggled to survive in a harsh industrial age

### **The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

The North Pennines is a protected landscape which extends over the Durham border into parts of South Northumberland and Eastern Cumbria. It was designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty in 1988 and is the second largest AONB in Britain second only to the Cotswolds.

The 766 square miles (1,983sq km) area covers parts of County Durham and is a European and Global Geopark - a UNESCO designation for areas with outstanding geological heritage - where geology is used to support sustainable development through nature tourism, education and environmental interpretation.

Mining has left a physical legacy within the North Pennines AONB – it celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary in 2009 – and the area is rich in remains of structures such as smelt mill chimneys, flues and spoil heaps as well as having England's highest roads. The mines led to the area's strong chapel heritage and culture, with Methodist figurehead John Wesley visiting in the

1700's. There is also a visible heritage of reading rooms where miners were encouraged to read.

#### **Facts about the AONB:**

- It is the second largest area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Britain after the Cotswolds
- It contains 40% of the UK's upland hay meadows – a nationally and internationally important type of species-rich grassland habitat which is becoming increasingly rare.
- It is home to many rare breeds of animals and plants including: short-eared owls, red squirrels, otters, water voles, ring ouzels, snipe, redshank and rare arctic-alpine plants.
- It is home to England's biggest waterfall – High Force in Teesdale.
- It has an imprint of an industrial past – principally lead mining which dominated the economic life of the area from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until its decline at the end.
- It is home to 80% of England's black grouse
- It contains 30% of England's upland heathland and 27% of its blanket bog.
- It has 22,000 pairs of breeding wading birds
- It offers peace, tranquillity and fabulous night skies

#### **High Force and Upper Teesdale**

High Force is England's largest waterfall and is one of the jewels in the crown of the Durham Dales and the North Pennines AONB. The walking route to High Force takes you along one of Britain's most spectacular rivers, the River Tees. Taking in parts of the Pennine Way you will cross Bowlees Beck, the Wynch Bridge, pass through Natural England's vast Moorhouse National Nature Reserve, and Low Force – the younger, smaller cousin of High Force.

You can also discover the area's rich and important flora, including the rare arctic-alpine flowers that grow in the cracks of rocks and along the riverbanks here. They are known as the "Pearls of Teesdale," and are delicate survivors of a post ice-age Britain.

Flowers which grow in this area are:

1. Mountain Pansies: boldly coloured purple flowers with a yellow lower lip and striped with black
2. Teesdale Violets
3. Bird's Eye Primroses: delicate deep pink with an intense yellow eye

The climate in Upper Teesdale stays cold and wet until late spring and these flowers thrive in this environment.

Rare Migratory Birds you may see:

1. Rare wading pairs including Snipe and Redshank
2. Curly Lapwings

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*“Open skies, big horizons, a moorland plateau intercut with Dales and rolling green landscapes.”*

**Shane Harris, North Pennines AONB partnership, on the Durham Dales**

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## **Durham Heritage Coast**

### **About the Durham Heritage Coast**

From Sunderland to Hartlepool, the Durham Heritage Coast has emerged from its industrial past to be an area worthy of Heritage Coast status. The coastal path that runs along much of the coast leads you through a wonderful mosaic of great natural, historical and geological interest with dramatic views along the coastline and out across the North Sea, an area rich in shallow bays and headlands with yellow Magnesian Limestone cliffs.

### **Interesting topical facts about Durham Heritage Coast**

- In 1991, Blast Beach Seaham was so blackened by coal waste it was chosen as a film location for the alien planet in Sci-Fi Blockbuster Alien 3.
- In 1971, the climax of gangster movie Get Carter starring Michael Caine was shot at Blackhall Rocks near Peterlee. At the time the beach had the last working example of a coal removal chute.
- 92% of Britain’s magnesium limestone grasslands are on the Durham Heritage Coast, and they are thought to be the only cliffs of their kind anywhere in Europe.
- The coast is home to the rare brown Durham Argus Butterfly and a thriving colony of little terns
- Turning the Tide cost £10m over five years and regenerated 18km’s of coast. The project removed 1.3m tons of colliery spoil from the beaches which was 30ft deep in places
- Coal was dumped along this coast for around 100 years before the last pit closed in 1993.

## **Nature and Wildlife on the Durham Heritage Coast**

### **Castle Eden Dene Nature Reserve**

A Natural England national nature reserve, Castle Eden Dene is a special place and one of the last remaining places where the ancient wild wood that once covered England still flourishes. The tangled landscape is renowned for its yew trees and is home to more than 10,000 years of wild growth in a deep gorge.

There are several walking trails throughout the gorge and denes which make up this beautiful nature reserve situated close to the outskirts of Peterlee.

### **Nature Walks**

There are two marked walks around the reserve. Walk one is 3.5km, and takes between 2-2½ hours to complete. Walk two is 3km, and takes between 1-2 hours to complete.

### **The Dene**

The Dene, with its strange rocks and mysterious atmosphere, has fascinated people for thousands of years. The reserve covers 221 hectares of woodland and lowland grassland, where post-glacial melt waters have carved out some spectacular limestone cliffs and gorges. Often there is no water at the bottom of the gorge, as Castle Eden Burn which reaches the sea at Denemouth is now seasonal and disappears into the limestone rock during the summer months.

### **Yew Dene, Eden**

Once upon a time, the Saxons called this area Yoden, meaning Yew Dene. Yoden then became Eden. The Burdon family, owners from 1757 into the mid 20th century loved its wild beauty, and created many of today's paths and began rebuilding the castle.

### **Wild weather, wild life**

The Dene is a wild world of constant change. Severe weather can cause landslips and falling trees so it is therefore not advisable to visit during bad weather.

For the birds and other animals of the Dene, this wildness is essential. If you are quiet you may see roe deer, but foxes and badgers stay hidden in the undergrowth.

Living and dying trees are home to fungi and insects that feed many woodland birds. In autumn, berries provide a feast for thousands of exhausted birds arriving from northern Europe.

### **Seaham – “The Lively Harbour Town on the Durham Heritage Coast”**

This former Georgian port and colliery town was once home to one of the most productive pits in North East England at Dawdon Colliery. It closed in 1993 and since then the town has slowly been reclaimed from industrial waste and is the starting point for the Durham Heritage Coastal Walk.

The start of the town's development as a tourism destination came when developer Tom Maxfield bought a dilapidated and run down Seaham Hall, and turned it into the North East's only five star hotel and spa in 2001. The hotel, now owned by the Von Essen group, is established as one of the UK's top destination spas and its White Room restaurant has been the only eatery in North East England to hold a Michelin Star.

### **Seaham's Past: Lord Byron**

Lord George Gordon Byron married Annabella Milbanke, daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke at Seaham Hall in 1815. He was the most prolific and controversial of the English poets. In the 1820's the Millbanke's sold their estate to Charles Stewart, the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry and his coal heiress wife, Frances Vane-Tempest.

During the First World War, Seaham Hall was used as a war hospital and in 1927 it became a tuberculosis sanatorium.

Byron was an aristocrat, rake and revolutionary. He is celebrated as much for his exploits and good looks as he is for his poetry. Byron lived for the life of the senses, declaring as much when he said “The great object of life is sensation, to feel that we exist – even though in pain”.

Author of ‘Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage’ and ‘Don Juan’, he was a literary star of a kind never seen before. ‘The Corsair’ of 1814 sold 10,000 copies in a single day, a feat seldom achieved by a novel, let alone a book of poetry. It still holds the record for a book of poetry sold in such a short time.

### **Present Day**

In 2009, a tourism development plan for Seaham was launched by Visit County Durham. Its aim is to transform the town into a “lively harbour town on the Durham Heritage Coast,” with popular appeal to visitors to the county based around a lively marina, fresh fish markets, café’s, bars and restaurants, quality accredited accommodation, watersports and a programme of annual events. The vision is to be completed by 2020.

The town’s North Dock and Harbour is the subject of a £3.25m regeneration programme by Durham County Council and regional development agency ‘One North East’ to transform it into the marina at the heart of the plan.

Most recently, a new tourism skills programme for local businesses was launched in 2010. ‘Know your Durham Coast’ will be delivered by Visit County Durham and is designed to increase the local knowledge of everyone from taxi drivers to receptionists and ensure that visitors are made very welcome in the town.

### **Unveiling the County’s Art and Treasures**

From modern art to ancient relics, the county of Durham is filled with magnificent treasures. Here is a short overview of where they can be found:

#### **Durham City**

- **‘Revealed’** by sculptor Richard Cole is sited on the Riverbanks near Prebends Bridge and uses recycled stone from the Cathedral.
- **‘Kathetra’** by Colin Wilbourne who was an artist in resident at the cathedral, also sited near Prebends Bridge, is a stone representation of the Bishop’s seat of judgement.
- **‘Durham Cow’** by Professor Andrew Burton of Newcastle University, is sited further along the river by the bandstand. This is a reminder of the legend surrounding the foundation of the cathedral and city.
- **‘The Way’** by sculptor Hamish Horsley is located in Wharton Park and frames views of the cathedral.
- **Durham Light Infantry Art Gallery** – comprising two galleries. There is no permanent art installation at the gallery; instead it features a regularly changing series of exhibitions. An average of 20 exhibitions are held every year.

### **Treasures of St Cuthbert**

- A magnificent display of valuable and beautiful objects representing 900 years of cathedral history. This includes a fabulous altar plate, illuminated manuscripts, Bishops' rings, seals and vestments, as well as relics from St Cuthbert himself including his wooden coffin, and exquisite pectoral cross.

### **Auckland Castle**

- A unique collection of priceless paintings by Francisco de Zurbaran. Britain's finest examples of the Spanish artist's work contain 13 larger than life canvasses which depict Jacob and his 12 sons. They were originally sent to Mexico in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> Century to promote Catholicism among the native population, but they never got there after being captured by pirates and taken back to London. Twelve of the paintings were then sold in 1756 to the then Bishop, Trevor, for £125 for the set. The 13<sup>th</sup> picture, Benjamin, was bought by the Duke of Ancaster and Bishop Trevor had to commission a copy.

### **The Bowes Museum**

- One of the county's grandest surprises, a splendid 19<sup>th</sup> Century French style chateau containing one of Britain's leading collections of European art (including El Greco and Cannalitto). It brings Continental Europe into the heart of Durham and amazes with its difference and quality. It comprises a huge and varied collection, put together in only 15 years by industrialist John Bowes (an ancestor of the late Queen Mother) and his French actress wife Josephine.
- The building is a treasure in itself – a highly ornamented French chateau designed by Parisian architect Jules Pellechet – Pevsner called it 'gloriously inappropriate for the town to which it belongs' but despite its size it does not dominate the town, tucked discreetly into its own world of parkland and gardens.

### **Oriental Museum, Durham University**

- The Country's only museum devoted entirely to Oriental Art and Antiquities, boasting superb collections from all major cultures of the East.

### **Raby Castle**

- Captures the spirit of power and patronage in its fine paintings, including works by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Lely, fine furniture and important china.

### **Rokeby Park**

- Fine Palladian mansion with a unique collection of needlework paintings and an interesting late 18<sup>th</sup> century print room.
- The house and its park were the inspiration for Scott's poem 'Rokeby', Turner's painting 'The Meeting of the Waters' and Cotman's painting 'Rokeby on the Greta'.

## **C2C Sculptures**

- There is a series of sculptures on the Consett to Sunderland stretch of the C2C, a cycle route which crosses the country from east to west coasts. This part of the route runs along the former Stanhope and Tyne Railway which used to serve Consett Steelworks (closed in 1980)
  - 'Terra Novalis' by Tony Cragg (1997), sited at Consett. Stainless steel sculptures depicting 20 times life size surveyors' instruments, a theodolite and a level which would have been used in the building of the railways. Tony Cragg adds a humourous twist by giving them grotesque animal legs!

## **Seaham Hall Hotel and Serenity Spa**

- A sizeable collection of contemporary art featuring the work of painters Dale Atkinson, Ornulph Opdahl and Paul Gallagher and sculptures by Nicolaus Widerberg, Andrew Burton and William Pye's water vortex at the front of the hotel. Stained glass artist Bridget Jones has also created a complete ceiling based on Byron's poetry in the Atrium.

## **Taste Durham – Keeping it local, keeping it Durham**

Durham is the only county in North East England to have its own nationally accredited food quality mark. More than 40 of the county's restaurants, hotels, farm shops, cafés and bars have been recognised by assessors from national tourist board Visit Britain for the TasteDurham mark.

TasteDurham supports businesses offering consistently high quality service, authentic regional dishes and support for local producers.

TasteDurham was set up in 2008 by Visit County Durham to raise the profile of food and drink in the county among national audiences, and clearly signpost visitors to those eateries serving the best fresh, seasonal and local dishes. In just its second year, the scheme has seen a 30 per cent increase in the number of businesses applying to hold the food quality mark.

The 42 businesses were invited to join TasteDurham and undertake the assessment against strict national criteria for quality of menu, cleanliness, customer service and use of locally sourced produce.

### ***TasteDurham has three levels of award:***

**Highest Quality Assured** - awarded to businesses meeting 80 per cent of TasteDurham criteria.

**Quality Assured** - awarded to businesses meeting 60 per cent of TasteDurham criteria.

**Local Produce Champion** - awarded to those businesses who are strongly committed to using local suppliers and who help develop the growing distribution network for local produce in County Durham.

### **Showcasing the county's best breakfasts**

This year, the TasteDurham quality mark has been awarded to businesses for the quality of breakfasts resulting in a number of guesthouses and bed and breakfast providers entering the quality scheme.

### **Ghostly Goings On**

Like any ancient city, talk of ghosts and grisly goings on is rife. Here is a flavour of what to expect in Durham.

- **Lumley Castle** – The Lily of Lumley, wife of the castle's builder, Lord Lumley, reputedly haunts the castle. She was murdered by priests when she converted to Protestantism and refused to come back into the Catholic fold – they thought that by killing her they were saving her soul!
- **The Grey Lady of the Castle** – Thought to be the wife of one of the former Prince Bishops of Durham, she haunts the castle's black staircase (built by Bishop Cosin in 1662), because she fell down it to her death.
- **The Grey Lady of Crossgate** - In 1346, the Battle of Neville's Cross was fought between English and Scottish armies. Among the men that fought and lost their lives on the English side, one left behind him a wife and new born baby, but his wife didn't give him her 'farewell' as she hadn't wanted him to enlist. People driving their coaches and wagons up Crossgate Peth would often stop for a drink somewhere along the way and notice a drop in temperature. As they continued their journey they would notice the presence of the Grey Lady with her new born child hitching a lift, staying sombre, sad and silent, until they reached Neville's cross where she would disappear, perhaps looking for the body of her husband on the old battlefield. She hasn't been regularly sighted since the demise of horse drawn vehicles.
- **Ghost From a Workhouse** - More recently in the Crossgate area, a ghost of a young woman has been sighted, this time without a baby. This is said to be the ghost of a Victorian girl from a workhouse near Allergate who was murdered and then thrown down a flight of steps. Her attacker was a soldier, who later confessed to his crime years after the event while living abroad.
- **Crook Hall** – The hall's Jacobean room is haunted by the White Lady, said to be the niece of the fiery tempered Cuthbert Billington.
- **Jimmy Allen, the Ghostly Piper** - Jimmy Allen (1733 -1810) had a chequered history. He was a very talented player of the Northumbrian Pipes, and official piper to the Duchess of Northumberland for two years. He liked to drink, and gamble, and he also liked pretty women, conning them out of money to support his drinking habit. As well as this he was a horse rustler, consequently he was almost continually on the

run from various authorities. He travelled as far afield as India, the Dutch East Indies and the Baltic, making money from playing his pipes with his extraordinary skill. The authorities caught up with him eventually, however, and he was caught in Jedburgh, Scotland, for stealing a horse in Gateshead, County Durham. He was sentenced to death in 1803 and spent the last seven years of his life in a cell beneath Elvet Bridge, his sentence having been reduced to life imprisonment. He died a few days before a pardon came through from the Prince Regent. It is said that if you listen carefully, you may still hear his ghost playing the Northumbrian Pipes from the cell beneath the bridge (now a wine bar aptly named Jimmy Allens).

## Hidden Gems

Unearthing the secrets and hidden gems of a place is what makes a trip special. Below we've listed some of the county's 'hidden gems'.

- **Auckland Castle's** priceless 17th-century **Zurbaran paintings** were captured by pirates en-route to Mexico and sold to the Bishop of Durham for £126!
- St. Cuthbert's exquisite pectoral cross is now displayed as one of the Treasures of St. Cuthbert at Durham Cathedral.
- At **Crook Hall** you can lose yourself in acres of garden rooms including a deliciously-scented Shakespeare Garden riotous with herbs and roses.
- Or why not sway over the River Tees on the wobbling **Wynch Bridge at Low Force**, a series of exhilarating waterfalls and rapids in glorious Upper Teesdale?
- Take a pew to contemplate centuries of Christian worship – 900 years in Durham Castle's breathtaking Norman Chapel and 1300 in **Escomb Saxon Church**.
- Or splodge in the footsteps of 19th-century leadminers at **Park Level Mine**, Killhope's echoing underground experience.
- Imagine the feasts prepared in **Raby Castle's kitchen** – the grandest medieval kitchen in England. Unaltered since 1360, it remained in use until the last dish was washed in 1954.
- Across the county at **Beamish Museum**, you can step into the living world of an 1820s yeoman farmer at the candlelit Pockerley Manor.
- Every day at The Bowes Museum, there is magic for children of all ages as the famous Silver Swan musical automaton bends its elegant neck to catch a silver fish, and swallows it whole.
- The Parish Church of St Mary and St Cuthbert in Chester-Le-Street is one of the oldest in the North of England. It was here that the bible was first translated into English. Attached to the church is the **Ankers House museum** exhibition which shows the history of the Ankers House and church.
- The Bowes Museum's **Silver Swan** is a real gem - first seen by John and Josephine Bowes at the 1867 Paris International Exhibition. American

novelist Mark Twain wrote about it in his book 'The Innocents Abroad'. The swan dates back to 1773.

- Also on display at the Bowes Museum is the conserved **Barbedienne Mirror**, by the bronze founder Ferdinand Barbedienne.
- Running along the Southern edge of Peterlee is **Castle Eden Dene National Nature Reserve** - the largest area of semi-natural woodland in North East England. This beautiful landscape is a survivor of the wildwood which once covered most of Britain.
- **Old Durham Gardens** in part of the 12-mile stretch of the River Wear that forms the Durham Necklace Park, The Gardens lie about 1½km east from Durham City Centre and is a beautiful old walled garden with terraces leading down to a small orchard.
- **Waldrige Fell** is designated a site of 'Special Scientific Interest'. It is one of the few remaining areas of 'Lowland Heath' in the North East. There is an extensive network of paths that allow you to fully explore the site (two of the paths are designated 'easy access' routes - suitable for visitors with a physical disability).
- **Wurlitzer Pipe Organ** at Howden-le-Wear is the largest, most versatile, theatre pipe organ in the North East Region and is housed in a former chapel in the small village of Howden-le-Wear, near Crook. The organ is renowned in theatre organ circles as one of the finest theatre organs of its size in the world. The former chapel, now called the New Victoria Centre, has been re-furbished to re-create the atmosphere of a 1930's cinema.

### **Movie locations and claims to fame in County Durham**

Below is a list of all of the movies that have either been wholly or partly made in the county.

- **Get Carter** (1971) – Starring Michael Caine, John Osborne, Britt Ekland, Brian Mosely, Alun Armstrong. Locations: Dawdon and Blackhall Colliery, Dryderdale Hall, Hamsterley, Hardwick Hall Park and Sedgfield.
- **Alien 3** (1992) – Starring Sigourney Weaver, Charles Dance. Locations: Dawdon Beach and Colliery.
- **Jude** (1996) – Starring Kate Winslet, Christopher Eccleston, June Whitfield. Locations: Durham Cathedral Cloisters, The Bailey, Durham City and Beamish.
- **Elizabeth** (1998) – Starring Cate Blanchett, Christopher Eccleston, Joseph Fiennes. Locations: Durham Cathedral, Raby Castle.
- **Billy Elliott** (2000) – Starring Julie Walters, Jamie Bell, Jean Heywood. Location: Easington Colliery.

## **Durham County Cricket Club (CCC)**

Durham County Cricket Club are the current English County Cricket Champions and sit proudly atop the pile in one of our best-loved national sports. Their victory in 2009 followed a first-ever County Championship title in 2008, which took the cricket world by storm after just 16 years as a top-flight County Cricket side. They play at the Riverside Ground in Chester-Le-Street, which in recent years has attracted One Day English International Cricket, Four Day test matches and most lucratively an Ashes Test match vs Australia in 2013.

In recent times, Durham has seen a number of their top players make an impact in the England team. Paul Collingwood (who became the first Durham CCC player to hit a Test century and double century), Steve Harmison and Liam Plunkett have all established themselves in the national squad with Phil Mustard also representing England in the one day format. The recent addition of Graham Onions to the test side for the home series against the West Indies in 2009 is a sign that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future and an indication of Durham's productive youth academy system.

In 2010, Durham CCC announced details of a ground-breaking sponsorship deal with Emirates Airline. Emirates have signed up to be the club's main sponsor in a major six year agreement that represents the latest stage of Durham CCC's plans to match success on the field with developments off it.

The club are also currently in the process of developing the ground to increase permanent capacity to 20,000 seats, construct permanent floodlights, create a 600 capacity banqueting suite, relocate and extend the club shop, and build a 150 bedroom hotel at the ground. Already a force to be reckoned with, these developments will help Durham CCC to continue to be a leading player in English cricket, and will also ensure that the stadium is ready to play host to Australia during the Ashes Test in 2013.

## **Famous People from County Durham**

Here we have listed famous people who were born or have lived in the County, both living and deceased.

- **Stan Laurel**

Comic Stan Laurel of Laurel and Hardy fame attended King James I School in Bishop Auckland while his father managed theatres in Bishop Auckland and South Shields. He also spent a year as a pupil at Academy Hall in Gainford.

- **Jeremiah Dixon**

A Raby estates surveyor, Jeremiah Dixon, born at nearby Cockfield, gave his name to America's Mason-Dixon line. Between 1763 and 1767 he and Charles Mason surveyed the disputed boundary line which demarcated the division between the Northern Free States and the Southern Slave States.

- **William Hedley**

Locomotive engineer and inventor, creator of the famous early engine "Puffing Billy". Lived at Burnhopside Hall near Lanchester.

- **Robert Smith Surtees**

Author of the comic fox-hunting character 'Jorrocks' in the 1840s, who lived at Hamsterley Hall in the Derwent Valley.

- **Timothy Hackworth**

Railway pioneer whose engine 'Sans Pareil' was beaten by George Stephenson's 'Rocket' in the 1829 Rainhill Locomotive Trials.

- **John Bacchus Dykes**

Precentor of Durham Cathedral who wrote more tunes for 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' than any other composer. His most famous being 'Jesus Lover of My Soul'.

- **Bonnie Bobbie Shafto**

The nursery rhyme character was in fact based on the election song of Robert Shafto of Whitworth Hall, elected MP for Durham in 1761.

- **Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

The poetess was born in Coxhoe Hall in 1806. The nearby St Helen's Church has a memorial to her.

- **Sir Anthony Eden**

Former Prime Minister Anthony Eden was born at Windlestone Hall in 1897. The Eden Family also produced a Governor General of India, two Cabinet Ministers and Lord Auckland who gave his name to Auckland in New Zealand.

- **Colin Milburn**

England Cricketer who played in 9 test matches before the loss in an accident of much of his sight prompted his retirement. Milburn was born in Consett, and brought up in the pit village of Burnopfield.

- **Sid Chaplin**

Author and playwright whose works are mostly set in North East England in the 1940's and 50's. Chaplin was born in Shildon in County Durham and spent a lot of his life living and working in Ferryhill.

- **Denise Welch**

Well known actress from 'Coronation Street' and 'Waterloo Road', born and brought up near Consett.

- **Robert Swan**

Famous Polar explorer, born and living in the county. Swan attended Aysgarth School and then Sedbergh School, before completing a BA degree in Ancient History at St Chad's College, Durham University. He is currently an advocate for the protection of Antarctica and renewable energy.

- **David Bellamy**

Scientist and TV personality. Bellamy first came to public prominence as an environmental consultant at the time of the 1967 Torrey Canyon disaster. He has written and presented approximately 400 television programmes on botany, ecology and environmental issues.

- **Bryan Robson**

Robson is a former footballer for England and Manchester United, who then moved on to football management in the mid 90's. He was born in Chester-Le-Street in County Durham, and was then brought up in Witton Gilbert until the age of 6 when the family moved back to Chester-Le-Street.

- **Norman Cornish**

A local artist who was born and brought up in Spennymoor. Cornish is undoubtedly the most celebrated mining artist and one of the most sought-after contemporary painters in the country.

- **Wendy Craig**

A BAFTA award winning actress who is best known for her appearances in the sitcoms: 'Butterflies' and 'Not in Front of the Children'. She was born and brought up in Sacriston and attended Durham High School for Girls.

- **Terry Deary**

Former actor, theatre-director and drama teacher who began writing at the age of 29. Most famously, he is the author of the 'Horrible Histories' series and is living in Burnhope in North West Durham.

- **Rowan Atkinson**

The star of shows such as 'Not the Nine O'clock News', 'Blackadder' and 'Mr Bean' was born in Consett and attended the Choristers School in Durham City (at the same time as Tony Blair).

- **Glenn McCrory**

Glenn Mccrory was a professional boxer who held the IBF version of the cruiserweight world championship. He was born in Annfield Plain in County Durham.

- **Tony Blair**

Former Prime Minister and MP for Sedgefield, he attended The Choristers School in Durham.

- **Anne Wood**

Anne Wood is a British children's television presenter who was born in Spennymoor in County Durham. Her independent production company was founded in 1984 and has produced programmes such as 'Teletubbies', 'Rosie and Jim', 'Boohbah', and most recently, 'In the Night Garden'.

- **Bobby Robson**

Distinguished football Manager for various teams (including both England and Newcastle United) who was born in Langley Park.

- **Paddy McAloon**

Driving force behind pop band, 'Prefab Sprout', originates from Witton Gilbert.

- **Graeme Danby**

World famous opera singer, born in Consett.

- **Bruce Welch**

Former 'Shadows' guitarist, born in Chester-le-Street.

- **Bruce Oldfield**

Fashion designer, spent his early years in Barnardo's foster care near Spennymoor.

- **Susan Maughan**

The 1960s pop star, famous for her rendition of "I Wanna be Bobby's Girl" was born in Consett.

- **Hannah Hauxwell**

Teesdale character and TV personality.

- **Sir Thomas Allen**

Internationally known opera singer, born in Seaham.

- **Paul Collingwood**

England & Durham Cricketer, from Shotley Bridge.

### **Durham University alumni**

- Judith Hann, TV broadcaster
- George Aligiah, TV broadcaster
- Kate Adie, TV journalist
- Jonathan Edwards, triple jumper
- Nasser Hussein, cricketer
- Late Mo Mowlem, MP and Government Minister
- Minette Walters, mystery novelist
- Jeremy Vine, TV broadcaster
- Tim Smit, Eden Project & lost Gardens of Heligan
- David Shuckman, TV Journalist

American novelist **Bill Bryson** is the university's current Chancellor, following in the footsteps of actor **Sir Peter Ustinov**, and ballerina, **Dame Margot Fonteyn**.

### **Bill Bryson's Love Affair with the city**

World-renowned travel writer Bill Bryson is one of the most famous people to have fallen in love with Durham. He is quoted describing Durham as a

“perfect little city” and North East England as “one of the friendliest corners on the planet”.

The following are extracts from his book “Notes from a Small Island” published in 1991 about journeys across Britain:

“I got off at Durham... and fell in love with it instantly in a serious way. Why, it’s a perfect little city. If you have never been to Durham, go there at once. Take my car. It’s wonderful.”

“I only intended to stay for an hour and fell in love with the place.”

“I unhesitatingly gave Durham my vote for best Cathedral on planet Earth.”

### **Famous Quotes about Durham**

In addition to the praises above from Bill Bryson, a number of other famous quotes have been made about the region. These are listed below:

“Durham is one of the great experiences of Europe to the eyes of those who appreciate architecture, and to the minds of those who understand architecture. The group of Cathedral, Castle and Monastery on the rock can only be compared to Avignon and Prague.” – **Sir Nikolaus Pevsner**, ‘The Buildings of England’.

“With the Cathedral at Durham we reach the incomparable masterpiece of Romanesque architecture not only in England but anywhere. The moment of entering provides for an architectural experience never to be forgotten, one of the greatest England has to offer.” – **Alec Clifton-Taylor**, ‘English Towns’ series on BBC television.

“I paused upon the bridge, and admired and wondered at the glory and beauty of this scene... it was grand, venerable, and sweet, all at once; I never saw so lovely and magnificent a scene, nor, being content with this, do I care to see a better.” –**Nathaniel Hawthorne** on Durham Cathedral, ‘The English Notebooks’.

“Grey towers of Durham  
Yet well I love thy mixed and massive piles  
Half church of God, half castle ‘gainst the Scot  
And long to roam those venerable aisles  
With records stored of deeds long since forgot”

**Sir Walter Scott**, ‘Harold the Dauntless’ – a poem of Saxons and Vikings set in County Durham.

“It’s got everything going for it – marvellous people, a super university, lovely scenery – and reasonable weather! What else could anyone wish for?” – **Sir Arnold Wolfendale** speaking about Durham’s bid for City of Culture.

“Durham is a jewel in the crown of the North East, it’s bursting with culture – particularly heritage. People want to come to Durham now. It makes this place look cool.” – **Steve Cram**, Olympic Gold medal winning runner and North East native, speaking about Durham’s bid to become UK City of Culture in 2013.

### **Durham’s Annual Events & Festivals**

A series of events are held annually in Durham that draws national and international crowds. The calendar of events for 2010 is as follows:

- **Bishop Auckland Food Festival in the Durham Dales**

April 17, 2010

North East England’s largest food festival is set in the grounds of Auckland Castle – the official residence of the Bishop of Durham – and showcases the finest local food producers, arts and crafts people. The festival attracted 30,000 visitors in 2009 and is a day packed with family friendly entertainment.

[www.bishopaucklandfoodfestival.co.uk](http://www.bishopaucklandfoodfestival.co.uk)

- **Durham Mystery Plays**

May 27-29, 2010

Brand new for 2010, the Durham Mystery Plays sees a revival of the telling of ancient biblical stories in the city and their reinvention at the hands of local and established writers. Plays including Noah and the Flood, The Crucifixion and The Fall of Lucifer will be retold with a contemporary twist using genre as diverse as street and urban dance, song, poetry, light displays, film, video and traditional performing arts. [www.durhammysteries.co.uk](http://www.durhammysteries.co.uk)

- **Northern Rocks Festival**

May 22 – June 6, 2010

Northern Rocks: The North Pennines Festival of Geology and Landscape includes over 40 events and activities with a geology and landscape theme. For more details visit [www.northpennines.org.uk](http://www.northpennines.org.uk)

- **Durham Festival and Regatta**

June 12-13, 2010

Durham Regatta is the premier rowing event to take place in the North of England and the second oldest Regatta in England. Called the “Henley of the North,” more than 600 crews from all over the country take part. Also includes festival and street entertainment plus a parade of local children through the city. For more details visit [www.durham-regatta.org.uk](http://www.durham-regatta.org.uk)

- **Brass: Durham International Music Festival**

July 3-18, 2010

International acts from across the world bring Durham to life with the sound of brass music. All forms of brass music are celebrated with world class acts from the fields of jazz, funk, classical, ska and of course traditional British brass bands appearing over a packed two weeks of live entertainment with over 2,000 brass performers. International street bands brighten up the city centre with a vibrant splash of colour and sound in 'Streets of Brass' and 124

years of heritage are celebrated at the Miners Gala with over 30 brass bands marching through Durham City.  
More than 80,000 visitors came to Durham in 2008 to party at BRASS.

For more details visit [www.brassfestival.co.uk](http://www.brassfestival.co.uk)

- **International Cricket – England vs. Pakistan**

September 10, 2010

England faces Pakistan in a One Day International, part of the NatWest Series at the Riverside, Chester-le Street.

- **Durham Book Festival**

October 2010 (Provisional)

Durham Book Festival, a celebration of the written word, will appeal to all ages with a programme ranging from nationally known to new and emerging authors. For more details visit [www.literaturefestival.co.uk](http://www.literaturefestival.co.uk)

### **Stats, facts and did you know...**

- **High Force** – England's largest waterfall where the River Tees thunders 70 metres on to rocks below;
- **Locomotion** – the region's first National Museum and the National Railway Museum's first ever outstation;
- **Tanfield Railway** – the world's oldest existing railway, originally opened 1725;
- **Causey Arch** – the world's oldest single span railway bridge, built 1725-1726;
- **Auckland Castle Chapel** – reputedly one of the largest private chapels in Europe, formerly the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Banqueting Hall of the Prince Bishops;
- **Durham University Oriental Museum** – the only museum in the Country devoted entirely to Oriental art and antiquities;
- **Newbiggin Methodist Chapel** – the world's oldest Methodist chapel in continuous use (occasional services), opened 1760;
- **High House Chapel, Ireshopeburn** - the world's oldest Methodist chapel still in continuous weekly use, founded 1760;
- **Derwentcote** – the country's earliest and most complete surviving example of an authentic steel making furnace;
- **Binchester Roman Fort** – houses Britain's best preserved Roman military bathhouse;
- **The Pennine Way**, England's most popular long distance path passes through the county;
- **The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** – Britain's first European Geopark, now a Global Geopark;
- **Durham City World Heritage Site** – one of the first to be designated in Europe;
- **C2C cycling route** – the UK's most popular cycle challenge route which passes through the north of the county;

- **Stockton & Darlington Railway** – opened 1825, the world's first public passenger railway;
- **Killhope, The North of England Lead Mining Museum** – thought to be the country's highest paying visitor attraction, now Britain's best preserved lead mining site with Northern England's largest working water wheel. Also houses the biggest display of lead miners' spar boxes in the world;
- **Durham Cathedral** – one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in the world;
- **Raby Castle** – one of Britain's finest Mediaeval castles;
- **Escomb Church** – 7<sup>th</sup> century Saxon Church, one of the finest examples of early Christian architecture in Europe;
- **Durham Castle** – one of the grandest Romanesque castles to survive in England;
- **Durham Regatta** – England's second oldest rowing regatta
- **The Bowes Museum** – houses one of the country's greatest private collections of fine and decorative art.

### **Outdoor and active**

Getting out and active can take many forms in Durham and with its rolling hills of countryside, picturesque market towns and wealth of heritage, it is a must. Below are some of the activities you could enjoy.

### **Where to walk**

There is plenty of scope to explore the county on foot from gentle riverside strolls to strenuous moorland trails.

Covering 40 miles, (64km) the Pennine Way is one of England's most popular and challenging long distance walks, which passes beautiful stretches of river scenery, including High Force waterfall.

There is an excellent network of public footpaths supplemented by over 60 miles of former railway, now reclaimed as attractive countryside paths, offering easy and safe walking from open moorland to shady wooded tracks. Durham Coastal Footpath, an 11 mile walking route from Seaham to Crimdon along the Durham Coast, is now restored to its natural beauty after years of industrial use.

In addition, Durham's Necklace Park offers 12 miles of stunning riverside walks stretching from Finchale Priory to Sunderland Bridge.

### **Where to cycle**

Cycling is available for all ages and abilities in County Durham. Quiet country roads offer easy cycling on gentle gradients to more challenging climbs, especially in the west.

Hamsterley Forest provides some of the best off-road cycling in the area, together with cycle hire facilities. The award winning C2C (Coast to Coast) national cycle route, linking the west and east coasts of England, provides most demanding rides for the experienced and adventurous cyclist and W2W

(Wear to Walney) – a second cross country route which passes through the Durham Dales and Durham City, links Walney Island near Barrow in Furness and Sunderland.

The National Byway is a leisure cycling route that links places of geographical, historic and cultural interest in the County and, the North Sea Cycle Route is part of a continuous 3,500 miles (5,600km) signed route that covers seven countries.

### **What to do on the water**

Durham's reservoirs offer some of the best upland fishing in the North and Durham Coast is renowned for its excellent sea angling. For the sailing enthusiast, the impressive Dales scenery at Derwent and Grassholme Reservoirs come highly recommended.

If you want something a little easier why not hire a row boat and enjoy Durham city as you float along the River Wear. For something more action packed, water-skiing is plentiful in Balderhead.

### **Horse riding in the county**

Moorland, forest, bridleways and quiet country lanes are all there to be explored at a leisurely pace on horseback.

### **Off-roading**

If you prefer four wheels to two then there are two locations in the County where you can enjoy off-roading. Deep Dale Off Road provides an exhilarating 4x4 driving experience near Barnard Castle, while Weardale Off Road offers a whole package of outdoor activities including 4x4 driving, quad biking and archery.

### **Hot air ballooning**

If you want to enjoy the county from up high, nothing can be as relaxing as enjoying the view from a hot air balloon. There are a number of reputable companies offering the service in Durham, enjoy an hour in the air and finish the trip with a glass of champagne.

### **Farm experiences**

Life on the farm is a major attraction for visitors to the region, especially those with families. Why not spend a day seeing how a farm works at Hall Hill farm, feed the animals and depending on the season, even shear a sheep!

### **Gardens**

Beautiful gardens are plentiful in North East England and Durham has a real mix. In the Beamish Valley there is a hardy perennial nursery and wildlife garden at the Beamish cottage gardens while Eggleston Hall gardens offer 4.5 acres of winding paths, borders, a stream, walls and 16<sup>th</sup> Century churchyard. For something a little more unusual, try Durham University's Botanic gardens. Set in countryside and mature woodland it contains plants from North America, the Himalayas and China as well as examples from the rainforest and desert.

## **Zorbing**

Zorbing is one of the newest outdoor extreme sports and involves people travelling downhill or on water in a giant plastic ball. Zorbing runs can be as long as half a mile or as short as 200m, with the zorber inside able to control the ball by running, as a hamster would on a wheel, or simply allowing themselves to be tossed around by the momentum of the sphere. Zorbing is available through Fury Events, one of Durham's leading adventure sports providers for groups and individuals, see: [www.furyevents.co.uk](http://www.furyevents.co.uk)

## **Skydiving**

If falling from the air at 12,000 feet sounds like fun, then the skydive academy at Peterlee parachute centre is definitely for you. It offers basic courses, tandem free-fall courses, accelerated fall courses as well as tuition in free fall skills.

## **Railway Heritage**

If you're something of a rail enthusiast or are simply looking for somewhere fun yet educational to take the family then Durham has a wealth of rail-related activities to enjoy. Beamish, the North of England open air museum lets you step back in time with its recreation of a town, colliery village and railway from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In Shildon, Locomotion – the national railway museum houses over 60 vehicles and features a children's play area and interactive displays, while the Weardale Railway takes in all of the beautiful scenery in the county as it runs through the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Beauty. In addition, the Tanfield Railway is a 3-mile steam railway and the oldest existing railway in the world, based on a section of the 1725 Tanfield Waggonway trains which have a variety of 100-year-old Victorian carriages.

## **Outdoor Spectator Sports**

Over the years Durham has established itself as a leader in traditional sports including cricket, rowing and horseracing.

Over the summer months cheers can be heard across the county as the team at Durham County Cricket Club bat their way to glory. Over in Sedgefield it's the horses' turn to gallop their way to victory and in the heart of the city the Durham Regatta is held annually. Held in June, the Regatta dates back to 1834 and see rowing races and fairs over two days.

## **Weardale Outdoor Centre**

Weardale Outdoor Centre is the largest Rural Centre in the North East of England allowing exclusive unlimited access onto a 400 acre Estate for the purposes of education and training. As well as providing education and training courses for schools and colleges, Weardale Outdoor runs family friendly and group activities including orienteering, clay pigeon shooting, archery, team building, bushcraft and survival skills and wildlife safaris.

## **Picnic Sites**

When the weather does occasionally decide to be fine there are endless picturesque spots for a picnic in the county.

The top 10 picnic sites in County Durham are as follows:

1. **High Force** (Upper Teesdale) – eat al fresco on the rocks opposite the base of High Force, England’s highest waterfall which thunders 70ft (21m) over the Whin Sill on the River Tees.
2. **Pow Hill Country Park** (Derwent Reservoir) – a picnic area set in the moorland overlooking Derwent Reservoir, one of Britain’s largest inland reservoirs.
3. **Bowlees Picnic Area** (Upper Teesdale) – a picnic area with four small waterfalls and a footpath to Gibson’s Cave and Summerhill Force, one of the smaller waterfalls feeding High Force.
4. **Raby Castle** (Staindrop) – Eat in the grounds of a dramatic 14<sup>th</sup> Century castle which has been home to Lord Barnard’s family since 1626.
5. **Hamsterley Forest** (Bishop Auckland) – There are many picnic areas set within Hamsterley Forest, giving you the chance to eat in the middle of a 5,000 acre mixed woodland.
6. **Carricks Picnic Area** (Edmundbyers) – a picnic area set alongside the River Derwent, near the head of the Derwent Reservoir.
7. **Allensford Country Park** (Consett) – a picnic park in a sheltered riverside setting with woodland walks, children’s play park and shop. Magnificent views of the Derwent Valley only minutes from the North Pennines.
8. **Causey Arch and Picnic Area** (Stanley) – Picnic at the world’s oldest surviving railway bridge (built 1725-26) which stands over a rocky gorge and has woodland walks and access to Tanfield Railway.
9. **Parkland at Dalton Park** (Murton) – 55 acres of landscaped parkland adjacent to Dalton Park Retail Outlet Centre containing three signposted trails, seating and picnic areas.
10. **Hardwick Country Park** (Sedgefield) – Based on an 18<sup>th</sup> century landscaped park and designed by James Paine, Hardwick Country Park contains a lake, various picnic areas and a variety of water birds to create the perfect picnic setting.

## **Peace and tranquillity**

In 2007, Visit County Durham created and launched the UK’s first-ever ‘Peace and Tranquillity Week’ following research by the Campaign to Protect Rural England which highlighted rising stress levels among the UK population and emphasised the need to preserve the natural areas which offer peace and tranquillity to the public.

County Durham was highlighted as being the fourth most tranquil county in

the UK and the North East of England was found to be its most tranquil region.

In 2008, Visit County Durham invited bestselling international lifestyle author Carl Honore, author of *In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is challenging the Cult of Speed*, to open the week and assess Durham's claim to be one of the most relaxing places to visit in the UK.

The week included 27 themed events taking place across the county and encouraged people to take time out from their busy schedules and relax at castles, heritage sites, museums, and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

These events included a massed Tai Chi demonstration at High Force, England's largest waterfall, free stress and relaxation consultations, guided meditation walks and performances by Harpists and String Quartets in tranquil surroundings such as gardens and museums.

Here are just some of the reasons why Durham is the perfect place to retreat, relax and savour peace and tranquillity.

Come on over and sink into the deep peace of our unspoilt countryside; the heather-covered expanses of Teesdale and Weardale, where your reverie will be disturbed only by the cry of a curlew or the bleating of sheep. Feel yourself unwinding in the dappled shade of the Woodland Walk at Killhope, or the stillness of Cow Green Reservoir, or surround yourself with the lush greenery of Crook Hall and Gardens or Raby Castle's sweeping parkland - just the thing to restore and revive.

Take a Sunday morning stroll along Durham City riverbanks, taking in the amazing views of the cathedral and river from Prebends' Bridge, or escape for an afternoon's fishing on our upland reservoirs, lulled by the gentle ripples on the water.

Take time to restore your spirits far from the pressures of 21st-century life. The ruined Egglestone Abbey is the perfect picnic place, and you can spot Roman inscriptions in the walls of Escomb Saxon Church on stones taken from Binchester Roman Fort. High House Chapel at Ireshopeburn is the oldest Methodist Chapel in the world still to hold continuous weekly services, and of course Durham Cathedral is the most awe-inspiring of sanctuaries: step through the great doors and the view down the nave will take your breath away with its sheer scale and beauty.

All these experiences are balm for the soul, so it's just as well we provide equal pampering for the body at the Serenity Spa, the internationally-acclaimed retreat adjoining the 5-star Seaham Hall Hotel.

**Images and Contacts:** Images of Durham are available by contacting Matthew Moore, Senior PR Executive at Visit County Durham on 0191 383 7419 alternatively, email [matthew.moore@visitcountydurham.org](mailto:matthew.moore@visitcountydurham.org).