

Accessing Aidan

**Press Release**

**(No Embargo)**

Bamburgh Bones is delighted to present the grand finale for the ‘Accessing Aidan’ project. This three-year National Heritage Lottery-funded project will culminate in an entertaining and informative conference in Bamburgh over the weekend of Friday 20th and Saturday 21st May. The conference is free and open to all.

Accessing Aidan is a remarkable partnership project that has seen the development of the crypt of St. Aidan's Church, Bamburgh into a beautiful community and interpretation space telling the story of Anglo-Saxon life in the village, having been awarded a grant of £355,600 by the National Lottery in 2019.

Patrick Norris, Chair of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one of the lead partners of the project, said “This conference marks the culmination of the project and is a celebration of everything that has been achieved. It begins on Friday evening with a ‘poetry, pies and pints’ evening and the launch of ‘*A Hut A Byens*’ - a collection of new poems written by nine local poets; the title –meaning ‘a heap of bones’ - referring to the ossuary created in the crypt of St Aidan’s that houses over 100 skeletons from the 7th century.”

On Saturday morning, there is the opportunity to take part in a series of workshops looking at several aspects of Bamburgh’s Anglo-Saxon history, plus tours of St Aidan’s Church and of the archaeology of the Castle.

An afternoon of talks and tales then follows all about the Bamburgh Bones project and Anglo-Saxon Britain. Guest speakers include archaeologist Sarah Semple, architectural historian Robert McKibbin and author and historian Max Adams.

The grand finale of the conference will take place in the Kings Hall in Bamburgh Castle, where archaeologists Professor Charlotte Roberts and Graeme Young will be talking about the discoveries from the Anglo-Saxon graveyard hidden within the sand dunes a few hundred meters south of the castle walls, followed by Professor Clare Lees and Tom Clark – both of whom appeared in the recent BBC series ‘Art that made us - who will explore the Old English language spoken in Bamburgh at that time, as well as giving a reading from 'Beowulf'.

The event is free, and refreshments will be available over the weekend. Booking is essential and the full programme can be found on via Eventbrite website by searching ‘[Bamburgh Bones Conference](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bamburgh-bones-conference-tickets-327968772427)’.

For more information, visit the Bamburgh Bones website: <https://bamburghbones.org/visit/events/> or call 07966 330465

**Ends**

**Images:**

Crypt door and projection, Crest Photography

Grille and Ossuary Boxes, Crest Photography

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**NOTES TO THE EDITOR**

**Accessing Aidan**

The aim of Accessing Aidan is to develop the Crypt as an appropriate and high quality new interpretive and community facility for Bamburgh, which will deliver an enticing, inspiring and coherent experience for a variety of audiences. Ultimately, we aspire that more people who visit the village will understand Bamburgh’s significance in Anglo-Saxon times, a period often called the Golden Age of Northumbria.

The Accessing Aidan project will provide a new safe public access into the crypt, allowing it to become open to visitors on a daily basis. It will also create new interpretation in the crypt and in the church to enable visitors to learn about the story of St Aidan, the Golden Age of Northumbria and the characters who now rest in the Bamburgh Ossuary. The new visitor experience will be supported by new website which will include the ‘digital ossuary’ where people will be able to learn more about the skeletons and their excavation. A range of project activities including guided tours and walks, talks and lectures, school activities, outreach events, storytelling, creative writing and arts, an Academic Symposium and a high-profile travelling exhibition, will bring the heritage stories to life and allow the project to engage new audiences and reach beyond Bamburgh.

**Bamburgh Heritage Trust**

Bamburgh Heritage Trust (BHT) was formed in 2012 to provide education, interpretation and information about the history and heritage of Bamburgh. In 2016 the Trust was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, managed by a board of charity trustees. BHT is supported by three partner organisations working together to address the heritage need and develop a more holistic heritage visitor experience.

**St Aidan’s Parish Church**

St Aidan’s Parish Church is the only church in the village of Bamburgh. It stands on the site of the original place of worship founded by Saint Aidan in 635. Almost no trace of that wooden building can now be seen (other than, perhaps, the beam in the Baptistery which St Aidan is reputed to have been leaning against when he died). The greater part of the current church was built in around 1200, with some extension in the 14th century. As well as being the Apostle of Northumbria, Aidan is rightly regarded as the Apostle of England. This parish church is therefore not only the “mother church” of the modern-day Diocese of Newcastle but also central to the history of Christianity in this land. The PCC manages the Church which includes the Crypt.

**The Northumberland Coast AONB**

The Northumberland Coast has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) since 1958 in recognition of the quality of the landscape. AONBs are a national landscape designation and together with National Parks they make up our finest landscapes. The Northumberland Coast AONB covers 135 sq kms between Berwick and the Coquet estuary. The area is best known for its sweeping sandy beaches and open views, rolling dunes and rocky cliffs, isolated islands, dramatic castles, ancient relics and rich wildlife.

**The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership**

The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership is a broad partnership of representatives from local authorities, statutory organisations, interest groups and the local community. The Partnership guides management of the AONB, offers advice to land managers and the local community and takes action to improve the wellbeing of the AONB for all those who value it, now and in the future. To carry out this work, the Partnership employs a small team which is hosted by Northumberland County Council and jointly funded by Northumberland County Council and DEFRA.

**AONBs**

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), along with National Parks, are considered to be the most special landscapes in the country and belong to an international Protected Landscape Family. There are 38 AONBs in England and Wales, and a further eight in Northern Ireland.