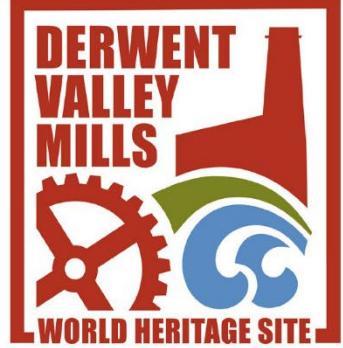


World Heritage news

Issue 24 - 2026

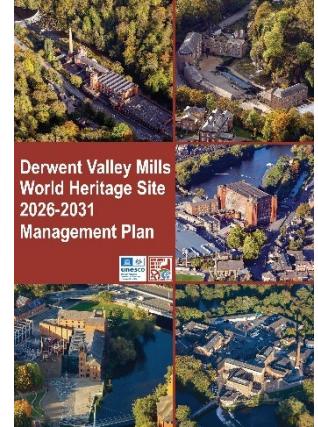
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A New Management Plan for the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site

All UNESCO World Heritage Sites require a Management Plan and the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site Partnership is responsible for compiling the management plan for the site on behalf of His Majesty's Government (who are the State Party signed up to the World Heritage Convention).

Throughout this year the DVMWHS Partnership have been working together to review progress and develop the objectives and actions for 2026 – 2031 to protect, conserve, present and transmit this site in alignment with UNESCO requirements. Thanks go to our sites, organisations, communities and volunteers for all their input and help throughout this process.



The DVMWHS Technical Group and Strategic Boards have agreed the Management Plan and the next stage is for it to go to UNESCO for Technical Review. It is hoped that the new Management Plan will be adopted early in 2026 and we can keep working together to keep the Derwent Valley Mills a great place to live, work, visit and enjoy.

When approved the management plan will be available to read at:

<https://www.derwentvalleymills.org/about-the-derwent-valley-mills/the-management-plan/>

From the Chair: Importance of the Derwent Valley Mills recognised

There have been some anxious moments for the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site in 2025, but good news as well.

Planning permissions for inappropriate development and neglect of buildings at Belper resulted in the Derwent Valley Mills being placed in a 'State of Conservation' in 2022. This led to official visits and recommendations that UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, at their annual meeting in July, discussed at length.



There are now a number of tasks before us to ensure that UNESCO understands the local commitment and appreciation for the Derwent Valley Mills and its World Heritage Status.

But the new East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) Spatial Vision identifies the Derwent Valley Mills as one of seven key locations for growth within the region. The plan will help to enhance the World Heritage Site's status as a growing tourist destination and identify areas of work which will boost the local economy.

Cllr. Robert Reaney, Chair of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site Partnership.

Economic Assessment

In June 2025 AMION Consulting was commissioned by the DVMWHS Partnership to undertake an Economic Value Assessment of the World Heritage Site. The purpose of this assessment is to establish a clear understanding of the current economic value that the DVMWHS contributes to the local and regional economy. It was also to assess the potential future economic value that could be realised through delivery of an emerging Development Framework.

The Development Framework will be a follow up commission using the findings of the economic assessment to help secure funding to produce it. The aim of it is to guide the long-term sustainable growth of DVMWHS, it will set out a coordinated vision for investment, regeneration and conservation across the DVMWHS while safeguarding its OUV.

The Economic Impact Assessment evaluates the contribution of the DVMWHS to the local and regional economy in terms of employment and Gross Value Added (GVA). The economic assessment will shortly be finalised and the early findings are that the DVMWHS currently contributes around £140m to the local economy and it could raise an additional £188m to the local economy with a Development Framework.

Decision date approaches for Belper Mills plan

The DVMWHS Coordination Team, advised by Derbyshire County Council's Conservation, Heritage and Design Service, have been responding to new proposals for re-use of the East Mill and work to prevent further deterioration of the North Mill and other buildings at Belper. A decision on the proposals is expected from Amber Valley Borough Council's Planning Committee early in 2026.

New interpretation at Cromford

If you are visiting Cromford you will now see a brand new interpretation panel in the Market Place. This panel provides a map and information about the history of the village, and there are QR codes to find out more information about Cromford and also about the businesses there too. The stand was produced by an artisan blacksmith and the interpretation panel is a similar design to the panels introduced in the mill communities of Belper, Milford and Darley Abbey, so they all tie in together.



This is the culmination of the coordinated efforts of Cromford Parish Council, the DVMWHS Partnership and Cromford heritage expert Doreen Buxton to achieve this long-awaited milestone of introducing the first interpretation panel in Cromford village. The DVMWHS Partnership contributed the stand and Cromford Parish Council covered the costs of the design and producing and installing the panel.

World heritage coordinators Adrian Farmer and Sukie Khaira are pictured with Alex Wall (designer), Cllr Kathy Mitchell, Cllr Pam Ashley and Cllr Jane Richards from Cromford Parish Council, and the new interpretation board.

New chapter for Cromford Mills

Cromford Mills is entering an exciting new chapter as The Arkwright Society secures £1.369m in development funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to begin essential planning and design work to transform its landmark Building 1 and public spaces at the entrance to the site.

Recruitment of the design team is now underway, with work continuing over the next year. Public and stakeholder engagement will form a key part of the project as well as the development of the Activity Planning focused on skills and learning. The Society's Strategic Partnership with the University of Derby forms an important part of this with so many opportunities to support student learning.

The journey ahead is ambitious: the Society will need to raise over £1.5m in match funding while ensuring the site remains open and for the Charity to continue its educational and community focused work. Community and visitor support will be crucial in the months ahead. Every donation, visit, partnership and advocacy helps safeguard these remarkable buildings within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

Learning for Schools in the Derwent Valley Mills and New Visitor Guide

There's so much to see and do across the whole Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

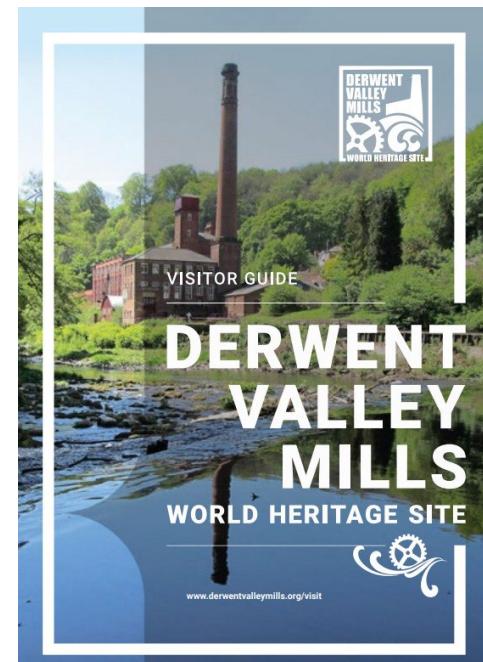
To highlight opportunities for visitors, tourists and schools we've updated and revamped our 'Visitor Guide' and the 'Learning for Schools' Publications.

Originally published back in 2021 using funding from our National Lottery Heritage Funded Great Place we know that things have changed fast! You can check out our [Visitor Guide](#) online where attractions are divided into the northern hub of the site around Cromford and Masson Mills, the central area of the site at Belper and Milford and the southern hub at Darley Abbey and Derby City.

Our [Learning for Schools leaflet](#) highlights the opportunities for pupils of all ages across the site focusing on a wide range of curriculum areas including history, art and design, STEM subjects, geography and highlights opportunities for school visits and trips as well as the opportunity for outreach or in school input including free to loan activity boxes linked to key themes of the Derwent Valley Mills.

A wide range of resources, visits and projects are highlighted on our website here.

<https://www.derwentvalleymills.org/discover/learning-for-all/learning-schools/>



Research Workshop

In March this year the DVMWHS Research Workshop went to the Strutt Centre in Belper. A really inspiring day showcased and shared research of all types relating to the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. The theme of 'threading research together' helped to share different ways and reasons for starting research with some starting from family history investigations, some carried out in collaboration via community groups and some as part of PhD thesis. It was fascinating to explore how these research findings are being shared. This included everything from using findings to inform and influence ministers and land managers to publishing booklets, sharing publications online, yarn bombing and creative responses including weaving.



Research is for everyone and helps to develop our understanding of this site, its importance and its people. If you are interested in carrying out some research we have a DVMWHS Research Framework of themes we would like to see investigated. If you've already carried out some research you'd like to share more widely, potentially for publishing on the DVMWHS website instructions are available and we even have a range of videos from previous research workshops are available to help you here: <https://www.derwentvalleymills.org/discover/derwent-valley-mills-research/>

Georgian river stewardship – lessons to learn

Dr Ian Jackson's PhD hydropower research findings are reaching wider audiences. A member of the DVMWHS Strategic Board, Dr Jackson is the first UK member of AQUA Water Heritage, a European organisation seeking holistic solutions to the stewardship of our waterways, respecting their built heritage, for example clean power generation, enabling fish movement and flood management using existing weirs, sluices and floodgates.



Speaking at the Association for Industrial Archaeology conference, where he was awarded the Best Dissertation of the Year, concerns were discussed with members from across the UK about the risk to weirs currently under threat through neglect and planned removals as a response to the Water Framework Directive.

Along with Jonathan Davies MP, Dr Jackson discussed his PhD conclusions regarding river stewardship, with Emma Hardy MP, Minister for Water and Flooding, and EA managers. He will continue this dialogue as a Water White Paper is developed, asserting that heritage assets should be part of the solution, not the problem, as perceived by today's river regulator and partners.

Dr Jackson attended the AIA conference at Bradford in September and is seen meeting Brown Professor Emeritus Pat Malone, who he has been collaborating with on the developments in waterpower, over the last four years. Professor Malone is a former president of the Society for Industrial Archaeology and director of the Slater Mill Historic Site.

Link to the PhD thesis [Waterpower in the Derbyshire Derwent Catchment - Derwent Valley Mills](https://www.derwentvalleymills.org/discover/derwent-valley-mills-research/)

Industrial Trail project

There has been some collaborative work being carried out on a national basis which will be completed in 2026. UNESCO UK secured National Lottery Heritage Funding for phase 2 of the Local to Global programme which brings together all the UNESCO designations in the UK – it includes World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks and Creative Cities.

As part of the Phase 2 programme regions were invited to apply for up to £10,000 to deepen and formalise network collaborations. DVMWHS is part of the North & Midlands region, which also includes the majority of the industrial sites. We widened the invitation to the other industrial world heritage sites across the UK and now have 22 partners. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the variety of the industrial sites across the UK using a digital platform, a map that will be available online with a small print run, and also working with Leeds University to create a pilot digital immersive experience. The lead partner is Saltaire World Heritage Site and the project will be completed by August 2026.

Exhibitions recognise contributions of thousands of unnamed women

This year Masson Mills' Textile Museum hosted exhibitions of two collaborative projects by sculptor Rachel Carter and community history group the Legacy Makers.

Standing In This Place and Speak Her Name give a voice and recognition to the contributions of thousands of unnamed women who were the driving forces behind the East Midlands cotton textile industry during Industrialisation.



The supporting artwork, costumes, research about the cotton textile workers and enslaved women, a bronze bust and an art installation featuring over 300 embroidery hoops were displayed within the 1783 mill giving an inspiring background to this project and the textile heritage of our area. *Photo by Zoe Wiltshire.*

Realising the Benefits of World Heritage to Local Communities 2 – WHSs Research

Another project that has begun recently and being led by World Heritage UK is undertaking research to investigate to what extent UK World Heritage Sites understand, and engage, with their local communities to enable communities to participate in, have a voice in, and affect their World Heritage Sites.

It forms part of a wider two-year project by World Heritage UK to strengthen understanding of community participation and its contribution to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

The project will be completed in Spring 2026 and is funded by Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland and Cadw. DVMWHS is taking part in the study.

Belper North Mill Trust continues to grow and develop

In its third year of operation after the closure of the North Mill Museum and Visitor Centre, and through the hard work of the volunteers and staff, the Belper North Mill Trust has grown and developed its heritage-based services of tours, talks, walks, educational activities, and events.

This year's successes include:

- Setting out a strategy to deliver current services and achieve the long-term aim of a new visitor centre.
- Increased customer numbers by 25% on 2024. At almost 1900, that's double the first year.
- Engaged more young people thanks to the growing work of the education volunteers.
- Recruited seven new volunteers.
- Enabled the display of the Belper Collection, notably Arkwright's Water Frame, at Cromford Mills.
- Organised the return and display in Belper Library of the Framework Knitting Machine with Jedediah Strutt's Derby Rib Attachment (see photograph).
- Supported The Belper 250 Steering Group, including producing the 250th Anniversary Calendar and securing a £1,500 Foundation Derbyshire Grant to support the Events Programme.
- Won The 2024/25 Visit Peak District and Derbyshire Award for Team of the Year - a well-deserved acknowledgement of everyone's hard work.
- Earned the Trip Advisor Travellers Choice Award for the third-year running.

Chair of Belper North Mill Trust Ian Hill said: "It's going to be a busy year in 2026 as we celebrate 250 years since the first Strutt mill in Belper. We aim to re-open for tours on Saturday 21 March and continue our full range of heritage activities, adding a walks festival and talk series to commemorate the anniversary.

"We're very excited to launch our new book 'The Strutt Mills of Belper and Milford' on World Heritage Day in April, and are looking forward to tasting the Anniversary Ales produced in partnership with the Crich Brewery Company. We continue to work with and support plans to improve and repair Belper Mills with the provision of a new Visitor Centre. We'd like to thank our valued partners, supporters and customers for their continued support."

Full inventory at High Peak Junction

High Peak Junction has seen significant progress this year with the completion of a full inventory of artifacts in its historic workshop. A dedicated team of volunteers carried out the work, uncovering a number of fascinating, long-forgotten items.

Among the discoveries was a set of vibrant harness beads once worn by horses pulling barges along the Cromford Canal, a colourful reminder of the area's transport heritage. These finds provide fresh insight into the lives of the people and animals who kept canal trade moving.

Plans are now being developed to display these artifacts so visitors can enjoy them up close. While access to the workshop remains limited when the site is unstaffed, proposals are underway to create more opportunities for the public to experience this remarkable building and its collection.



Students impress with creativity and employability skills inspired by the Derwent Valley Mills.

Level 3 Art and Design Students at Chesterfield College worked with the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) to respond to professional briefs. The project aimed to develop professionalism, employability and develop skills in their chosen artistic medium. Georgina Greaves from the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) coordination team acted as the “client” for the students providing professional briefs for the students to respond to using animation, illustration, textiles and graphic design. Students visited sites and created products appropriate for on site shops, redesigned the branding for Cromford Mills, created textiles art responding to the Global Cotton Connections of the Derwent Valley Mills and animated and illustrated stories about the mills for children.



The work was of an incredibly high standard and demonstrated how a World Heritage Site can be used to inspire the next generation of artists, designers and creatives.

You can see a full video of the project here: <https://www.derwentvalleymills.org/discover/learning-for-all/learning-adults/chesterfield-college-projects-with-dvmwhs/>

Derbyshire Makes at Masson Mills

Masson Mills hosted a number of Derbyshire Makes Festival events this year including a workshop with artist Christine Thomas celebrating the ‘Standing In This Place’ exhibition, a workshop with artists Bernie Rutter and Amanda Nichol creating banners inspired by the museum’s Jacquard looms and the Women Who Make festival.

The festival celebrated the power of Derbyshire based women who make, inspire and transform. It featured a vibrant market of local female artists and makers, a ‘Sewing Bee’ drop-in workshop led by lead ‘Dare To Dream’ artist Sue Reddish and four inspiring guest speakers.



The Textile Museum Weaving Shed was open free of charge with heritage loom demonstrations and the World Heritage Site team ran mill-themed activities and showcased projects with local college students. The festival attracted many new visitors to the mills and was a wonderful day of creativity, collaboration and connection. The festival is set to return in 2026.

Prestigious visitors at John Smedley

2025 has seen some prestigious visitors to the John Smedley mill at Lea Bridge. These have included a visit from some 50 members of the Royal Warrant Holders Association, TV personality Kevin McCloud and the actor Bill Nighy, with whom the company has undertaken a hugely successful, limited-edition, 'John Smedley X Bill Nighy' capsule collection.



John Smedley garments have been a pillar of Nighy's wardrobe for over five decades. In this unisex collaboration, Nighy brought his eye for detail and enthusiasm to reimagine Smedley's signature silhouettes. A visit to the John Smedley archive, ensured the inclusion of a historically significant garment for the brand - a cashmere and merino Long John (Bill wears a pair on every exterior set during his film projects!)

"If you'd told me when I was 17 that I'd be working with John Smedley to design a collection, I'd have arranged to be more cheerful in my early life....As I got older, and Mod became Modernism they remained an essential item...." Bill Nighy

For the past two years, the Archive has been working to research the history of Riber Castle, John Smedley's home. The team restoring the castle has been fully involved in this work and a fascinating story is emerging. Anyone with stories about the castle or ideally, owning something purchased in the sale of contents that took place in 1893, please contact the John Smedley Archive (archive@johnsmedley.co.uk)

Other initiatives underway include participation in 'WORK Records', a regional project, led by Derby-based Arts organisation 'Animate Projects'. The archive collection is being studied by a group of volunteers, who are looking at working lives, past and present. Their findings will be used to inspire artist Kim Noce, who, during 2026, will be creating a short film inspired by their findings. Watch this space!

New tenant at Masson Mills

Masson Mills are excited to announce that a new tenant is currently developing the four-storey former shopping centre. Home by Milestone will be a one-of-a-kind showroom dedicated to Passivhaus principles, sustainable innovation, and smart eco-living. More than just a display space, it will offer a place to discover, learn, and build for the future, powered by the past. Opening in 2026.

World Heritage Coordinators make do and mend for VE Day anniversary

Belper Town Council hosted a commemorative event in the town's Memorial Gardens on Thursday, 8 May 2025 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. The event included a Derwent Valley Mills stall with 'Make Do and Mend' activities and an exhibition about Belper during the Second World War. It was followed by live music from the Belper Jazz Company.

New Parliamentary Group for World Heritage

An All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for World Heritage was formed in June, bringing new focus at Westminster to the need for nurturing and protecting sites in the UK which have Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).



UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation – stripped Liverpool of its World Heritage Status in 2021 following the loss of some of its historic docklands. MPs have voiced fears other UK World Heritage Sites, including the Derwent Valley Mills, could face a similar fate due to unsympathetic development, climate change and flooding.

Jonathan Davies MP, Member of Parliament for Mid Derbyshire, was elected the new parliamentary group's chairman. His constituency includes a large part of the Derwent Valley Mills WHS.

Speaking at the inaugural meeting, Mr Davies said: “UNESCO World Heritage Sites articulate the pinnacle of human existence and the best of the natural world. However, some of the UK’s sites face challenges that risk them being delisted by UNESCO. The special reasons these sites were designated of global importance must be safeguarded for future generations. This group campaigns for that.”

Discovering a lost valley route

A Belper North Mill Heritage Walk did something very different in May.

Cromford and Belper grew rapidly in the late 18th century but there was no road between them along what is now the A6 until after 1818. The only available roads via Wirksworth or Crich involved prolonged steep hill climbs, unsuitable for horse-drawn carriages. In 1810 John Farey recorded in his survey of Derbyshire that the three main landowning families, the Arkwright's, Strutts and Hurts had created a private route along the west side of the valley. Access to it was restricted to people having business with the three families and it was controlled by gates and lodges.



The location of this lost route was identified through research by David Bunting. From Belper Bridge it used Wyver Lane, once known as the “Old Coach Road”, to Lawn Cottage and then through Dairywood Farm onto the minor road from Belper Lane to the wireworks. This section was built by the Hurts and is shown on Burdett's 1791 map. It then continued through Shining Cliff Wood to Whatstandwell bridge. From there the route was probably the Nottingham to Ashbourne turnpike of 1759 up Longway Bank and then along Intake Lane into Cromford.

In May twelve intrepid walkers and one dog set out to retrace this historic route. Two detours were needed where short sections are now blocked. The explorers enjoyed a lunch halfway at the “Family Tree” which appropriately was once a turnpike toll house. The organisation of the walk was an example of the cooperation between the historic mills at Belper and Cromford.

Looking forward to an important commemorative year

2026 is an important year for Belper and the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. It is the 250th anniversary of the Strutts’ first cotton mill opening in Belper, the first step towards the creation of the world’s first cotton mill town; it will be 300 years since the birth of Jedidiah Strutt, the man behind the building of that mill and the work to create a community around it; and it is also 25 years since the Derwent Valley Mills were inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage Site list.



There’s a whole range of activities planned to mark these anniversaries, many of them happening in Belper where a phalanx of volunteers have come together to provide a wide range of events to tell the story of Jedidiah and the town’s development since 1776, under the ‘Belper 250’ banner.

There are also 250th anniversaries at Cromford, for Arkwright’s Second Mill and for North Street, some of the earliest industrial housing in the world. A special weekend, including access to a Landmark Trust property on North Street, is planned for September.

To find out more about these events visit www.belper250.co.uk.

Leaving after 22 years

The coming year will also see the departure of Heritage Coordinator Adrian Farmer from the DVMWHS Coordination Team, after 22 years of service. Finishing at the end of April, Adrian still intends to support delivery of the Belper 250 programme, with numerous talks and walks in the town planned until December 2026.



Contributors: Cllr. Robert Reaney, Sukie Khaira, Georgina Greaves, Adrian Farmer, Ian Jackson, Caroline Bowler, Nicki Senior, Eilis Scott, Jane Middleton-Smith, Ian Hill, Trevor Griffin.

Enquiries: dvmwhs@derbyshire.gov.uk

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