

Artist Commission for Pontefract Castle, Wakefield



Wakefield Council is pleased to announce a new outdoor artist commission and invites artists, designers, sound artists, architects and performers to respond to the extraordinary historic site of Pontefract Castle near Wakefield, Yorkshire. This is an opportunity to research, develop and realise a new work for one of England's most significant historic sites.

The resulting work will be shown at Pontefract Castle during late August / early September 2021. The commission budget is £15,000.

A short history of Pontefract Castle

From Pontefract Castle's construction in 1070 to its dismantling after the Civil Wars, this once-fearsome fortress dominated Yorkshire and beyond, playing a significant role in the history of the United Kingdom. From battles and sieges, starvation and destruction to royal infidelity and the cultivation of liquorice, numerous pivotal moments have taken place within its walls.

The site was originally a Saxon Royal Manor until the Norman Conquest when **William the Conqueror** granted the Manor of Pontefract to Ilbert de Lacy, a Norman Lord who built the original Castle. The de Lacy family remained on site for hundreds of years and enlarged the castle, making it one of the strongest fortresses in England. **King John** confiscated the castle when Roger de Lacy died, resulting in his son John de Lacy joining the rebel barons which forced the King to seal the Magna Carta in 1215.

King Edward I is quoted as saying *'He who holds Pontefract, holds the **key to the North**'*. The Castle continued to be of strategic importance in to the 13th and 14th centuries and central to the violent life and death of Thomas Lancaster, cousin to King Edward II. He acquired Pontefract but later spearheaded a rebellion against the King and his lead advisor, only to be defeated in the Battle of Boroughbridge. He was captured and imprisoned in Pontefract Castle before taken to a hill north east of the castle to be beheaded. Soon after his execution, **miracles** were reported at the site and parliament petitioned Edward III to ask for his canonisation, where a chapel was eventually erected on the site of his execution.

Richard II was also captured, imprisoned and died in Pontefract Castle. In contradiction to Shakespeare's version, King Richard II was not stabbed in the dungeon but more likely starved to death above the bake house.

Henry VIII visited Pontefract Castle with his wife Catherine Howard. It is alleged that while staying at the castle Catherine began an affair with the king's friend Thomas Culpepper and when the king discovered this, he executed them both.

During the English Civil Wars the castle became a strategic battle point between the **Charles I's** supporters and Cromwell's army of Roundheads, witnessing three separate sieges, all carefully chronicled and now a great source of information on this period. Royalists held the castle for 9 months but when the King lost the war and was executed, they had to surrender and were executed themselves for treason. Evidence of the prisoners taken still exists in the dungeon, **their names can be found scratched into the stonework**.

In 1650 the people of Pontefract petitioned parliament to demolish the castle. Having sustained years of bombardment, thievery and bawdy behaviour the citizens saw the castle **as a source of trouble** and wanted it removed. Their demand for its destruction was approved and funds raised from the sale of raw materials from its demolition was paid to local labourers and to local dignitaries as war debt.

Following its destruction, the Castle went through many uses – including a place for **liquorice production**. Liquorice had been grown in Pontefract since at least the 17th Century and Pontefract cakes became known worldwide.

The castle was a market garden and a recreational park with romantic ruins in the Victorian period. It contained floral borders, shrubs and intertwining pathways along the ramparts, most of the planting was cleared away in the 1980s.

Today, the castle is a family-friendly heritage attraction run by Wakefield Council, with wide open spaces for visitors to enjoy and explore along with new interpretation of the ruins to investigate.

Further information on the history of the Castle can be found at <https://www.pontefractcastle.co.uk/Castle-Stories.aspx>

The history contained within Pontefract Castle is rich and complex encapsulating medieval architecture and the development of the town to its role in the English Civil War. The role of people either, including monarchs, politicians, agitators and ordinary townspeople, shaped its history. We invite artists to explore our heritage and would like to draw your attention to:

KEY WORD/PHRASES

- Executions and miracles
- English Civil War – a time of conflict and political turmoil
- Monarchist Rule – politics of the court and power
- Traces of inhabitants- graffiti in stonework
- Liquorice – gardening, herbs and the botanical
- Green space in an urban environment
- Ruins in landscape
- Pleasure Gardens - recreational space and antiquarian pursuits
- The people – local community pushing for the castle’s destruction, the People’s Voice

PONTEFRACT CASTLE – Today

Pontefract Castle is a significant historic ruin situated in the town of Pontefract, West Yorkshire and consists of a large green area known as the Bailey from which events can be viewed 360 degrees from above. Described as ‘one of the greatest fortresses in England’ it has been one of the most important castles in the North of England. In its past the Bailey was used to grow liquorice and the crop would be stored in the castle dungeons. There are also smaller and more intimate spaces on site, these include the old kitchen, herb garden and two gravelled areas that were previously chapels. The site has special status (a scheduled ancient monument) and therefore restrictions are in place to protect the remains, artists need to be aware that it is only permissible to penetrate the earth by 8 inches for securing or installing works but permission is required from Historic England for anything deeper. Wakefield Council will assist in securing permissions, but it is important to note that these cannot be guaranteed.

The site lends itself to outdoor work and we are looking forward to receiving ideas that will animate the site in unexpected ways, responding to its history and location. This does not have to be in a literal way, we are interested in an artistic response that brings the spaces alive by different means.

THE COMMISSION

The Wakefield district has a rich and diverse heritage with a growing portfolio of sculpture and artist-driven public realm works and interventions. Wakefield Council want to place greater emphasis on this as one of the district’s distinctive and attractive characteristics and are now looking to strengthen this by growing a programme art commissioning alongside the development and delivery of major events and festivals to showcase the district and inspire local people and visitors to participate and engage with culture and heritage.

As part of this approach Wakefield Council is committed to looking at Pontefract Castle's history and current significance in different ways and is very receptive to artists' exploring the rich history of Pontefract Castle's site and the role it has played in shaping the town. We are open to ideas and welcome responses from artists working in all disciplines and are looking forward to considering unusual, imaginative and creative ideas. Please bear in mind that when developing your initial idea that community is very important to this area and there are exceptionally good relationships between the commissioner and the local communities. The selection team would be interested in any commission ideas that involved the community in some way, either by shaping the work or by celebrating it.

The commission needs to be an outdoor work, and artists need to be aware of take in to consideration weather conditions in late August/early September. It is likely that the commission will coincide with the planned district wide Festival of the Earth which will engage people to think and act creatively on issues of climate change and the need for positive steps to individually and collectively reduce our carbon footprint and environmental impact. This signature festival will be of two weeks duration and the commission, depended on its scale and nature, can be in place for this full period or just part of it.

The commission team will support artists in any way that they can and have been involved in developing this commission brief. We can offer the following support to artists:

- A Technical Support Team
- Learning and Engagement Team
- Curatorial support
- Photograph Image Library

BUDGET

Pontefract Castle's commissioning budget is £15,000 excluding VAT. The budget needs to cover all artist fees, travel and accommodation costs, making of the work and the installation and de-installation.

We do have a modest budget for technical support and will try and support you through our technical team to install works.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS BRIEF – What to do next

Please send an **Expression of Interest** that should be no more than one side of A4 that briefly outlines your practice (up to 300 words approx.) and how you feel your approach relates to Pontefract Castle. It would help us to understand what it is about the site and its history that interests you. Please also include an outline of an idea for a new work- this does not have to be in great detail at this stage but really needs to give us some idea of what you might do. We understand that ideas may change as research deepens, but the selection team do need to understand what you are proposing in order to make shortlisting decisions. Do remember to keep language accessible and understandable for those who may not be familiar with contemporary art language.

A small shortlisting team will look at Expressions of Interest and shortlist 4 ideas that we would like to develop further in to a full proposal. Shortlisted artists will each receive £600 to research and develop a full proposal which will go into more detail about the idea and how it will be installed and realised.

Access to the site is free, but be aware we have a system in place for limiting the numbers of visitors in line with covid restrictions to ensure your health and safety.

NB: We will be offering specific site visits to meet curatorial staff to shortlisted artists during the proposal stage

TIMESCALE

We envisage the commission to be scheduled within our public programme during late summer next year and dates will be agreed between the artist and ourselves when appoint we the successful artist.

SHORTLISTING & INTERVIEWING

The deadline for receiving Expressions of Interests is Monday 16 November. We aim to shortlist during the following two weeks and 4 artists will then be informed and asked to develop their ideas, we will pay each artist a fee of £600 to do this.

If you have not heard from us by Friday 27 November please assume you have not been shortlisted. Please note that as a small team we will not be able to give detailed feedback to everyone.

The 4 shortlisted artists will be interviewed by a small team including Wakefield Council and Arts&Heritage. Please be aware that interviews will be held on **Thursday 17 December** by zoom.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Please send your Expression of Interest, up to 8 jpg images of recent work (this would help if it was as a short PowerPoint) and a summary CV to Becky Orwin, Arts&Heritage Coordinator, becky@artsandheritage.org.uk. If you are sending film, please edit to 3 mins. Please be aware that we will not be able to access websites when we shortlist.

ACCESS

If you have any access requirements visit the Pontefract Castle website for information, or if you wish to speak to someone then contact Ian Downes, idownes@wakefield.gov.uk

Deadline for receiving Expressions of Interest is 5pm, Monday 16 November

GOOD LUCK IN DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA FOR THIS MAGNIFICENT HISTORIC SITE, if you have any questions about this commission please contact Becky Orwin, Arts&Heritage becky@artsandheritage.org.uk