

Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens Blue Sky Idea Artist's Brief



Image © Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens

Introduction

This **Blue Sky Ideas** project is led by a group of volunteers from four important heritage sites located in the north east of England – Hadrian's Wall, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens, Belsay Hall Castle and Gardens and Durham Cathedral. Funded by Newcastle University working in partnership with commissioning agency Arts&Heritage, the **Blue Sky Ideas** project invites artists working in all disciplines to respond to these sites with extraordinary, impossible and ambitious Ideas for **projects that cannot, in reality, be realised**. This is an unusual opportunity for artists to think imaginatively, fantastically, without the usual limitations of a commissioning brief. From initial Expressions of Interest,

one idea per site will be selected to appear on the Arts&Heritage website and a fee of £500.00 be paid to the selected artists as well as profiling by Arts&Heritage.

Each site brief invites you to think ambitiously and present the Contemporary Art Volunteer Ambassadors with visionary, unorthodox transformations of the extraordinary sites they have chosen to support by volunteering. We hope that you enjoy consider these fantastic heritage sites and look forward to seeing what you might do with them!

Information about Ushaw

Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens are set in North East England in the high County Durham moorland, four miles to the west of Durham City, between the site of the ruined Priory of Beaurepaire (in Bearpark village) to the east and the ancient village of Old Esh to the west. The name Ushaw suggests the derivation Yew Shaw from the Yew trees that were certainly on this site when the house was first established in 1808, but it is more likely to be from the Old English “Ulve Shaw”, meaning wolf wood.

The house was built here on wild and distant land, behind its walls, because it was originally to be a discreet and semi-secretive establishment at a distance from prying eyes. It was built as a Roman Catholic Seminary for the training of Catholic priests with an English ministry. Its origins were in the English School established in 1568 by William Allen in the university city of Douai, in what is now northern France, after Elizabeth I's 1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity outlawed the Roman Catholic faith in England.

After the French Revolution the English College in Douai was closed and a new Seminary was needed – this site was perfect for its purpose. The first building, in classical style, was built and opened in 1808. The College became a training centre for priests and a private residential school for the education of the sons of wealthy Catholic families. The college thrived into Victorian times, when the architect Augustus Pugin was invited to design its magnificent St Cuthbert's Chapel, built in the collegiate style, which opened in 1848. This was the beginning of the Georgian Victorian neo-Gothic style of the college.

Ushaw is unique in that it has the work of three generations of the Pugin family in its awe-inspiring buildings. The site itself has held within its walls, and away from the world, its own complete self-sufficient estate, with home farm, gas works, cobbler, tailor, post office and all the necessities of a private village. It was a life behind the wall – mysterious and unknown to the local population.

Ushaw also boasts incredible collections of silver, church textiles, religious relics and other artefacts. Its library contains illustrated manuscripts, rare and unusual documents and books, including a first edition of Darwin's “Origin of Species” which was part of the caged restricted section in the library.

The Seminary finally closed to students in 2011 and since that time has flung its gates open to the wider world, telling its story and sharing its treasures with all who wish to see. In the rented office and studio spaces a shoe dyer, suit maker, silversmith and many artists are among those based in the house now. Ushaw has been described as a ‘sleeping giant’,

slowly awakening. There is still much to develop but the main buildings and 500 acres of enclosed grounds, with four acres of formal gardens, now provide contrasting visitor spaces in a dramatic location.

Key words or phrases

Austere	Atmospheric	Spiritual
Secretive	Collections	Aspirational
Isolated	Victorian	Treasures
Lonely	neo-Gothic	Lavish
Cold	Self-sufficient	Embracing
Elitist	Inspirational	

Websites for further research

Official website: <https://ushaw.org/>

Architecture: www.thepuginsociety.co.uk

William Allen: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Allen-English-cardinal>

Who can apply

Professional visual artists, writers, performers, architects, designers, musicians – all individuals who are working in all artistic mediums are encouraged to consider the briefs for Hadrian's Wall, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens, Belsay Hall and Gardens and Durham Cathedral, and respond by describing what they would like to make at these sites if they had unlimited funds and **no restraints set upon** them (such as not touching the fabric of the building/landscape, planning issues etc.). Think big and outside of the box – these projects are truly Blue Sky and invite you to use your own individual creativity! We welcome responses from professional artists at any stage of their career.

What to do next

Send us your Idea. This needs to be a clear description of it (written or visual/sound etc) and why you have chosen to respond to a particular site. We are looking for Ideas that are site specific and we encourage you to seek out the unusual, the overlooked, the hidden and develop a project Idea that is ambitious yet rooted in the site's location and context.

As this stage is not funded, we are not expecting detailed proposals.

The details that we require from you are:

- Your name, contact details and website address if you have one
- A short paragraph about your practice (up to 250 words)
- Why you have chosen your site and what it is about it that interests you as an artist (up to 250 words)
- Your response outlining what you would do. This can include written word and/ or images, drawings, an audio file or a short film clip etc (up to 500 words; do not worry if you do not use the whole 500)

- Please send all of the above as one document / PDF when applying (with a second attachment if your application includes an audio / film file).

How we will select and present your work online

A steering group of nine volunteers who have completed a Newcastle University / Arts&Heritage project called *Volunteer Voices* will be considering all the responses, together with contemporary art curator and senior research associate Judith King. From the initial Ideas, four will be selected (one per historic site) and we will ask those artists for a little more information about themselves so that we can promote them via Arts&Heritage website and through social media. Each selected artist will receive £500. For previous examples of Blue Sky artistic Ideas please visit <https://www.artsandheritage.org.uk/blue-sky-museums/>

It is important to note that you don't have to have had experience of working within a heritage context; we are more interested in showcasing your ambitious and creative responses to the history and location of each of our historic sites. As the Ideas will be presented on the Arts&Heritage website, they should be able to be presented in a digital form. If selected, it is important that you agree to the proposal appearing on the website: this will mean we may not necessarily be able to protect your intellectual copyright, although Arts&Heritage respects that IP and copyright remains with the artist.

We hope that this project will allow the volunteers who have committed themselves enthusiastically to continuing their foray into the contemporary art world to experience the pleasure of seeing how artists can change the way of looking at history.

Deadline

Please email all responses to Becky Orwin at becky@artsandheritage.org.uk by 5pm, Friday 13 May 2022.

We will endeavour to let you know whether your Idea has been selected by 20 June 2022.