

# Heritage groups in Derry

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**Spectacular sunshine and blue skies were the perfect backdrop to the quarterly THI Forum hosted by Derry's Walled City Partnership [WCP] recently.**

An opportunity to share knowledge and experience saw thirty people representing various Townscape Heritage Initiatives [THI] across Northern Ireland - and associated funders and advisors - get together at the Verbal Arts Centre.

A guided walk revealed the Partnership's visible track record as one of the city's leading regeneration delivery vehicles. Resplendent in the bright autumn sunshine, this route highlighted twenty one old buildings given new life since 2002 (and some of the thirty four buildings still eligible for grant through THI Phase II).

Happily, the one rain shower of the day coincided with visits inside the former Northern Counties Hotel - the local THI flagship project.

Participants from Derry, Ballymoney, Donaghadee, Draperstown and Portaferry exchanged tales of their achievements, progress and aspirations - and offered ideas and solutions to help with future challenges.

The group also heard an overview of the Walled City Partnership's emerging education programme, designed to raise awareness and appreciation of heritage among



Representatives of various Townscape Heritage Initiatives [THI] across Northern Ireland - and associated funders and advisors - were in Derry last week for the quarterly THI Forum hosted by Derry's Walled City Partnership. (2809PG01)

a wide range of audiences - from schoolchildren to community groups, professionals and construction tradesmen and women.

Walled City Partnership was also delighted to host a visit to Derry and the THI Forum by the six recipients of the 2012 Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings [SPAB] Scholarship and William Morris Crafts Fellowships.

This diverse group of young architects, engineers, stone masons, and brick layers (two of whom are female) took the THI Forum on a whistlestop tour through a selection of the hundreds of buildings and historic structures across

the UK and Ireland, visited and worked on by them over the past six months - part of their intense 'hands on' practical training in the repair of historic buildings and conservation philosophy.

Commenting on the international traditional building skills deficit, both within the trades and the professions, structural engineer, Justin McAteer, the first ever SPAB Scholar from the Irish Republic, referred to the fact that only three SPAB Scholars and 2 SPAB Crafts Fellows exist in Northern Ireland.

He encouraged any Northern Irish architecture, structural en-

gineering and building surveying graduates and qualified crafts apprentices interested in developing expertise in repair of old buildings to consider applying for these highly regarded training programmes in 2013.

The THI Forum also discussed the SPAB Scholars and Fellows' views on the approaches being taken to conservation in Derry and concluded the afternoon with an information session on opportunities for THI partner funding.

**Mary Kerrigan is Education Officer with the Walled City Partnership.**