

From candles to calligraphy: 6 heritage courses to enjoy in the North of England

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Heritage Open Days, England's biggest festival of history and culture, returns this September (9th – 18th) with a jam-packed calendar spanning sneak peaks and shows to walks and talks.

But there are plenty more ways to get involved with the nation's heritage year-round, not least some fascinating courses – we've rounded up six to try in the North, all taught by experienced local creatives and with rich links to the area, whether at venues steeped in tradition or the teaching of centuries-old crafts. Pair with a nearby Pride of Britain hotel for the ultimate short break...



Lancaster Castle, C: Jonny Gios (Unsplash)

Embroidery at Lancaster Castle, Lancaster, Lancashire

Fancy learning embroidery with an expert from BBC's *The Repair Shop*, in Lancaster Castle's famous Witches Tower? Sara Dennis, the show's textile guru, runs a range of classes from the tower in which the Pendle witches were imprisoned while awaiting trial in 1612. She even created an exhibition on their story.

An acclaimed Royal School of Needlework (RSN) tutor, Dennis' many high-profile commissions include working on Cornelia Parker's *Magna Carta (An Embroidery)* and helping to design the White Walker in *Game of Thrones*. She's taught at several historic venues but it's Lancaster she calls home, and the castle in which she now works on private projects alongside running the majority of her workshops. These comprise weekly group classes, plus bespoke sessions that can be tailored to suit: covering beginner basics, specialist techniques and everything in between.

We also recommend checking out Sara's website for a captivating tour through embroidery types and their cultural context, from the misnomer of 'Spanish' black work to fantastical Jacobean crewel.

29 miles from [Northcote](#)

[Find out more](#)



Herdwick sheep, C: Ian Cylkowski (Unsplash)

Needle-felting Herdwicks at Quirky Workshops, Penrith, Cumbria

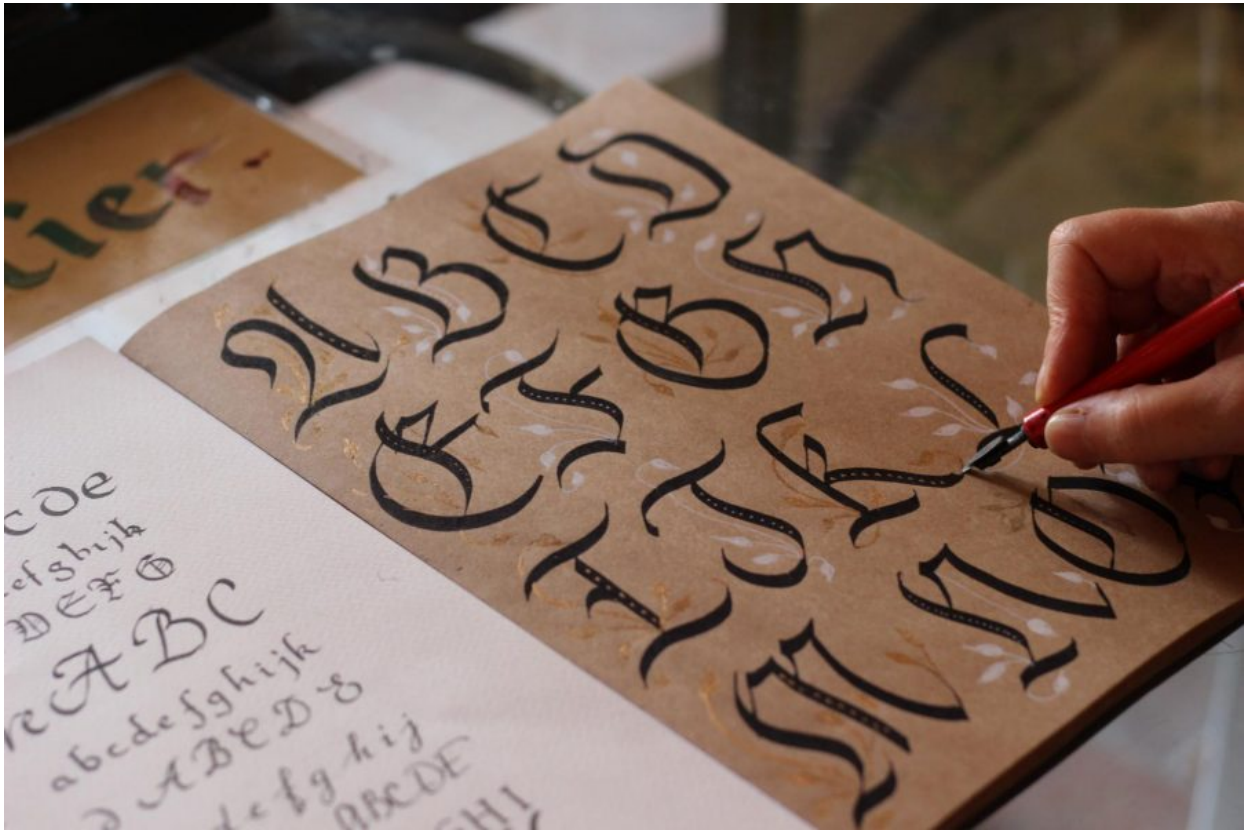
Based in a 17th-century farmhouse in Greystoke village, nestled in the picturesque countryside between Penrith and Eden Valley, Quirky Workshops lives up to its name: offering an eclectic array of courses spanning wire sculpture and watercolour to making triptychs, pizza ovens and even your own longbow.

Yet for something truly Cumbrian, you can't beat needle-felting a Herdwick doorstop. 'Herdys' are a hardy sheep breed native to the Lake District, famously championed by local children's author Beatrix Potter, and their docile expression and fluffy grey coat also make them very cute: the perfect subject for a charming but sturdy doorstop.

This popular day-long course is held regularly by esteemed artist Annis McGowan and includes a two-course Aga lunch plus home-baked goodies (you can opt for a farmhouse cream tea too).

19 miles from [Armathwaite Hall Hotel & Spa](#)

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Calligraphy, C: Samir Bouaked (Unsplash)

Calligraphy at Newcastle Arts Centre, Newcastle, Tyne and Wear

Among the medley of classes offered by Newcastle Arts Centre, from fashion illustration and painting to drawing and modernism, you'll find those focused on calligraphy. Otherwise known as 'the art of beautiful writing' – stemming from the Greek words 'kallos' (beauty) and 'graphe' (writing) – calligraphy incorporates various styles, from expressive copperplate to the elegant slant of italic, and is a handy skill if you want to add some flair to those greeting cards or invites.

Western calligraphy flourished in ancient Rome, which adds a special resonance to learning it at the Newcastle Arts Centre; it's based on Westgate, a road that follows the course of Hadrian's Wall, and itself stands on the site of a Roman milecastle.

17 miles from [Seaham Hall](#)

[Find out more](#)



Flameworked marbles, C: National Glass Centre

Glass skills at the National Glass Centre, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear

The National Glass Centre is the ideal place to discover Sunderland's significant glass-making past: from Saint Benedict Biscop, who first brought glass to Britain in the seventh century, to the world-renowned likes of Pyrex and Hartley Woods over 1300 years later. But it also hosts a variety of making and decorating sessions so you can explore this magical molten craft yourself.

Alongside private classes like one-to-one glass blowing, these include a lively calendar of group events that varies throughout the year. Think sandcasting glass animals, making flameworked marbles, learning the art of stained glass and more besides. Many are family friendly, and all take place in the centre's studio – home to talented resident glass makers whose work you'll find in the well-stocked shop.

6 miles from [Seaham Hall](#)

[Find out more](#)



Candles, C: Rebecca Peterson (Unsplash)

Candle making at Cheshire Workshops, Beeston, Cheshire

This workshop is mainly for families (although adult group bookings are available) so is ideal for some alternative fun with the kids.

Formerly known as The Candle Factory, Cheshire Workshops has been making candles for over 50 years, and personalised candles are still available to buy. Family workshops are the focus now, often experienced as discount packages that include a range of crafts. Combined with Cheshire Workshops' onsite cafe and scenic Sandstone Trail location, close to an array of nearby attractions, these make for popular days out.

During candle workshops, participants also learn about the vibrant history of candle making and Cheshire's place within it: from ancient civilisations like the Qin Dynasty of China, which manufactured whale fat candles from around 200 BC, to the forming of Tallow Chandlers Company of London – sealing chandlery's place as one of the UK's great guild crafts – and the relaxing fragranced varieties commonly found today.

12 miles from [The Chester Grosvenor](#)

[Find out more](#)



Book, C: Aaron Burden (Unsplash)

Bookbinding at Fabrication, York, North Yorkshire

Yorkshire abounds with heritage courses, from stone carving in Halifax to textiles with the Stitch Society in Saltaire's old cloth mill and even blacksmithing with Forge Four at an old industrial hamlet in the 'steel city' of Sheffield. But for something in the enchanting city of York, don't miss a trip to Fabrication: a craft institution which sells work by local artists as well as hosting a creative workspace and classes. Bookbinding is a regular favourite, aptly considering bookselling has long been a popular trade here according to the [Coney Street Heritage Project](#). Other centuries-old skills – many taught at Fabrication Leeds' branch – span leatherwork to coppersmithing and ceramics.

2 miles from [Middlethorpe Hall & Spa](#)

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