



## Case Study

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THE EVOLUTION OF AUCKLAND CASTLE  
A STORY OF NEW HOPE

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# AUCKLAND CASTLE

Nestled on the north-east coast of England, Auckland Castle has been a centre of faith for more than 800 years. Despite its rich history, it was not immune to the C20th and C21st's severe economic decline, and in many ways became invisible. Unsurprisingly Bishop Auckland, the town which had sprung up around the Castle, fell into economic and social decline.

Since 2010 the Castle and town have undergone an extraordinary renaissance. This is an inspirational story of what can be achieved with an almost alchemic combination of vision, faith, and philanthropy, supported by an expert and committed team. Auckland Castle's evolution over the last five years shows what can be achieved in such a short space of time when one man's vision and talent find their true calling.

"Trustees have their uses, and one of the fruits of ours at ACT was the discovery of Tarnside Consulting, whose job was – my interpretation of it, anyway – to keep me concentrated on the need to bring others into the tent of all the talents at Auckland. This they did with brio, and I quickly learnt some basic facts of life: never refuse money, however well meaningly offered; always write thank you letters to kindnesses offered, and pay attention to the susceptibilities of the gate-keepers of the grant-making foundations.

The development of a major project requires teamwork, and we applaud Tarnside for wearing the Auckland colours for the duration."

**Jonathan Ruffer**







## History of the Project

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For almost 170 years, Auckland Castle has been the official residence of the Bishops of Durham, having been the country residence of the Prince Bishops of Durham since the late 12th century. It has been described as one of the best working episcopal complexes in the world. The Bishop of Durham still works at the Castle today. Auckland Castle was built for Prince Bishops who lived more grandly than their contemporary colleagues (the days of the vast households, bespoke pineapple growing facilities and private armies are long gone). As the C21st progressed, the Castle's upkeep was becoming an unjustifiable drain on Church income.

### AT RISK: A UNIQUE COLLECTION

In order to cover the costs of running the Auckland Castle complex, the Church Commissioners announced in 2010 their intention to sell one of the Castle's greatest

treasures, a collection of 13 paintings, 12 by the renowned Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán that had been bought by the Prince Bishop in 1756.

Not only culturally significant, the paintings are also historically and symbolically enthralling in that they depict Jacob and his twelve sons (one of the paintings, that of Benjamin, is a copy). Jacob's sons represent the twelve tribes of Israel, the fathers of the Jewish people: the series of paintings represents the founding of the Jewish faith, a subject rarely painted in European art – even less rarely a focus for Bishop's Palaces.

Bishop Trevor purchased the paintings just after the repeal of the Jewish Naturalisation Act (the act would have given Jewish people basic rights at a time of social and legal prejudice) and brought them to Auckland Castle. He adapted the state Dining Room into an impressive gallery where influential visitors would be

immersed amongst the vast portraits of the founding fathers of the Jewish people. As such he made an unmistakable plea for religious and social understanding.

### **IMPULSE PURCHASES: AN ACT OF ZURBANITY OR A LEAP OF FAITH?**

Jonathan Ruffer, an investment manager whose family were originally from the North East, was at the time thinking how he could support the North East, perhaps in his retirement. He was interested in the paintings as an art collector, but also perceived the potential removal of the Zurbaráns as a threat to the region's history:

*“When I thought about it, I realised that I could be a force for unity up here. It seemed to me that what the Church Commissioners were doing was deeply disuniting, so saving the Zurbaráns exactly fitted the bill... In this part of the world there is a sense that lovely things are never brought up here or, if they are, they are then taken away.”*

So that these paintings would not be lost to the region, Jonathan Ruffer placed £15m in a charitable trust to acquire the paintings and to preserve them in the region for the benefit of the people of the North East:

*“I was the only person in a position to do anything about it. I happened to have £15 million [the price stated]. I wanted to do something for the north-east, where I come from.”*

### **JACOB AND HIS SONS FACING EVICTION**

The paintings were secure, but there was no guarantee that the Castle itself would be retained by the Church, nor that members of the public would be able to go in to see the pictures. It soon became clear that the paintings could not stay in situ unless the future of the Castle was also secured. In 2012 the Auckland Cast Trust, led by Jonathan Ruffer, acquired the Castle and complex. The plan: to restore the Castle and grounds, and create a visitor attraction for the area.





## Restoring a Region

On the surface, this can be viewed as a heritage and conservation project, but the deeper vision is one of bringing hope, pride and economic regeneration to a severely deprived region. At the project's inception Bishop Auckland and its surrounds were facing longstanding social problems, rooted in the collapse of industry.

The project's initial Case for Support highlighted the key concerns: a third of young people in the town claiming Jobseeker's Allowance; highest youth unemployment in Britain; a shortage of employable skills and educational achievement.

As the team got to know the local area they met the people behind the statistics: people in third generational unemployment; children that had never left their estates; families dealing with drug and alcohol abuse. Above all, a feeling of hopelessness.

The Trustees were clear that the restoration of the castle would bring about economic and social regeneration, and beyond that a restoration of local pride, belief and spirit.

“Heritage comes second... People must find a faith, the jobs must come again, the money must flow again... There must be a sense of pride and really feeling what's true, which is that if you come from the North East you come from the best part of the world”  
Jonathan Ruffer

### THE VISION

The unique attribute of this project is how it blends heritage and conservation with economic and social regeneration, backed by the passion and vision of Jonathan Ruffer.

Photo © Kippa Matthews

The motivation for his actions can sound eccentric (“It’s the pearl of great price”... “I’m very God-y”). Yet Ruffer’s belief that art and architecture defines a place and a community, is true: and this notion runs through the project in all its many guises:

“People underestimate the symbolic power of art” he says. He, however, did not.

Initially, it was envisaged that an endowment of £20 million would fund the running costs of the Castle: it would be open to enthusiasts but would, inevitably, remain the domain of the privileged and the few. The paintings and castle would be saved, but there would be no greater good.

Ruffer spoke to people from within the world of museums and cultural attractions and developed a more daring and exciting proposal: to open the Castle to all, with the aim that it could become self-supporting and bring a sense of purpose and hope to the local community. The cost of this would be significantly greater, but so would be the benefits that it would bring.

“And so I went for it. I realised that we have got to make this place a destination.”

## DESTINATIONS DON'T COME CHEAP

Ruffer and his small team developed a plan for a complex of attractions gathered around the Castle. The grand plan was to:

- Restore, redevelop and reinterpret Auckland Castle and its acres of Deer Park;
- Create a national exhibition of Faith, exploring the role of religion in British history
- Develop a gallery showing C17th devotional art (this, extraordinarily, in conjunction with El Prado, Spain’s national gallery and one of the world’s leading art museums)
- Restore the Walled Garden, replanting what was a huge kitchen garden with avant-garde planting and new buildings
- Providing a living working complex for the Bishop of Durham
- Finally – and perhaps most ambitiously – to involve the community in the project.

An initial target of £50 million was set in order to achieve this vision, £10m of which was identified from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and a further £10m to be raised from donors.

An overview of Auckland Castle Trust’s developments within Bishop Auckland.





Since the purchase of the Zurbarán paintings and the Castle complex in 2010 and 2012 respectively, the project has developed and evolved at an astounding pace. Of many additional projects generated by Jonathan Ruffer and his team, the largest and most striking is Kynren, an ‘epic tale of Britain’ performed on summer nights in the open air, with the Castle as a backdrop.

Taking into account the creation of Kynren, a series of other capital projects, a greatly enhanced community engagement plan and other works, the budget for the whole project is now £125m.

‘Kynren, an epic tale of Britain’ is a night-time open-air show on a seven-acre stage (including a lake) that involves 1000 local volunteers telling 2000 years of British history. Kynren has a nightly audience of

8000 and staged 15 shows in its first season in 2016: ticket sales reached £4m.

It takes its inspiration from Puy du Fou in the Vendée region of France, which started as a historical show performed by volunteers and expanded to create a popular day theme park. Puy du Fou now has 2 million visitors a year and has been acknowledged as an ‘economic miracle’ for the area. It is the second most visited theme park in France.

It is the ambition to create a similar park for Kynren, providing a day experience for visitors to the evening shows. Funding for the Park will be sought in 2017. The expectation is that this will come from venture capitalists.

To accommodate the increase in visitors, the local infrastructure needs to be upgraded. There are plans for hotels among

the buildings in the Market Square. There are also plans for cutting-edge energy sourcing through a geo-thermal project. Funding for both of these projects is being sought from the EU.

The ACT has also bought the site of the Roman fort at Binchester, one of the most important Roman sites in Britain, sometimes referred to as the Pompeii of the United Kingdom. Funds are being sought for the excavation of the site in partnership with the University of Durham.



The fundraising for **Auckland Castle** has been one of the **most successful campaigns** outside of London and the South East of England. **Nowhere has secured the support** of national trusts on the scale of Auckland Castle outside London.

The project has been led and shaped, of course, by **the vision and resources** of **Jonathan Ruffer**. Whilst few people exist with his nature nor resources, a great many charities have ambitious plans and passionate teams which, on their own scale, can promise – like Auckland Castle – big change.

In looking at the Auckland Castle story, we see how a major project develops a momentum of its own – and can identify crucial elements needed to support and maintain movement.



## Funding

### ENGAGING WITH POTENTIAL FUNDERS: IF PEOPLE SHAPE A PLAN, THEY'LL HELP IT TOO

Following the purchase of the Zurbarán paintings, it was at a chance meeting between Jonathan Ruffer and Lord Rothschild that the latter persuaded him to purchase the Castle complex. The Rothschild Foundation went on to make a grant of £1m for the endowment of Auckland Castle.

### INDIVIDUALS NEED TO SEE PASSION... ORGANISATIONS NEED TO SEE PLANNING DOCUMENTS

With a heritage-based project on this scale, the Heritage Lottery Fund was an obvious source for a major award – the first organisational funder, they required a very different approach. The vision and excitement that had enabled Jonathan

Ruffer to win people over needed to turn into a mission statement.

The rigorous process of application for an HLF grant forced the team to define their objectives clearly. In doing so they had to articulate the vision for Auckland Castle and identify and cost projects. Under pressure, Jonathan Ruffer articulated the vision as follows:

“At its heart is the principle that what people think is the determinant of their welfare, nor primarily what they do... In Auckland Castle there is an extraordinary confluence of forces for good, which can be harnessed; this project will take these qualities, and give them practical purpose for the benefit of the community”

This statement, in turn, became the basis of how the Trust communicated its plans with the public.

In May 2013 the Trust was awarded initial support/a first-round pass\* from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards a £10m grant – with this came a £1m development grant to work up further plans. An application for the remaining £9m was submitted in February of 2015 and granted in May of the same year. This was one of the largest awards ever made in the North East.

The project had won new funds, and in the process of doing so developed a clear message about what the project would achieve. Statutory funding also ‘proved’ the concept of the Castle project:

“It’s a flag up the flagpole that says this isn’t an eccentric idea, a sort of folly. Public money of that size doesn’t follow whims and caprices.”  
Jonathan Ruffer

### **A FEASIBILITY REVIEW: IS IT POSSIBLE, AND HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?**

These initial grants and donations, along with the considerable financial support already given by Jonathan Ruffer, gave the project a legitimacy and momentum that would encourage other funders.

However, the team that had been put together was focused primarily on delivering the conservation, curatorial and

engagement aspects of the project. To deliver the fundraising, Tarnside Consulting were appointed to carry out a feasibility study and work with the team at Auckland Castle to execute their recommended fundraising strategy.

Tarnside’s study identified that while the unique aspect of the project – social and economic regeneration through heritage – was one of its great strengths and a very compelling story, its complexity made it difficult to describe succinctly to audiences not familiar with the town or the Castle.

Tarnside, with the Trust, compiled a Case for Support, using the philosophy and aims of the HLF bid and the Trust’s five year plan. The Case for Support was kept deliberately unpolished, at this stage, to allow for potential donors to have an input and increase their feeling of involvement in the project.

### **A FOCUS ON POTENTIAL MAJOR DONORS**

The strategy made it clear that scale of the funds required meant the trust must focus on significant six and seven figure donations or grants. One of the key sources for such funds was identified as charitable trusts and foundations.

A list of potential donors was drawn up and carefully researched for propensity, capacity and possible conduits. The contacts and networks that could be accessed by Jonathan Ruffer and the Trustees of the Auckland Castle Trust meant that they would necessarily play a significant role in the fundraising. As a lead donor, Lord Rothschild could also fulfil the role of a ‘champion’ and open doors to successful approaches.



## EXECUTING THE STRATEGY: MAKING THE APPROACHES

With its extensive experience of fundraising from trusts and foundations, Tarnside were in a strong position to work with the team at Auckland Castle to prepare for, execute and follow-up the approaches and applications to these funders.

They advised on key issues that needed to be considered prior to and during the initial meetings with the trusts; prepared all the key documentation for ensuing discussions and meetings; followed up those meetings to ensure that all points were answered and the formal bid would be at the right level; worked with the CEO, the Director of Operations and the Curatorial Director to prepare the content for the formal applications and submitting them.

The interactions and meetings with the charitable trusts and foundations ensured that relationships were built at different levels between Auckland Castle and the potential donors.

A formal application to a trust or foundation is the essential part of this fundraising process. However, the success of such a bid is reliant on the relationship that is built with the key people at the trust or foundation: the founders, trustees, directors and the administrators.

Jonathan Ruffer was key in the success of the applications through engaging with the founders, lead trustees and directors, inspiring them with his vision and a personal investment in the delivery of that vision, while also showing the level of investment that he had made into the project himself. At the same time, Tarnside were building relationships with administrators and managers at the trusts, ensuring that meetings were followed-up and expectations were met.

The success of this approach saw six trusts and foundations award a grant of £1m,



with one of them following up with a further £1m grant.

This was a very good example of peer-to-peer fundraising, as well as demonstrating how relationship fundraising applies to trusts and foundations. This source of funding was the most successful for the campaign.

## STEWARDSHIP: MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

The fundraising process does not end once a grant or donation has been made. Donors should feel valued and have the right to know that the funds they have given are being used wisely and in accordance with the terms of the gift.

Tarnside withdrew from the fundraising process once the internal team were in a position to drive the project forward. With a new CEO and Fundraiser, the Auckland Castle Trust was in a position to build relationships with funders from within the staff team, rather than just through the Chair. Whilst Jonathan Ruffer had been the voice of the Trust in its infancy, there was now the potential for individuals at the Trust to talk to grantmakers about work 'on the ground' as opposed to the overall vision.

Building up in-house stewardship within the team proved to be the key to the second £1m grant described above. While visiting Auckland Castle to see how the project was proceeding following the payment of their grant, the trustee of the foundation found themselves engaged in a discussion with the Director of Operations about the staffing for the catering at the Castle and the challenges faced owing to the lack of local skilled staff.

The Director of Operations was able to speak passionately about her plan for developing a world-class training programme for apprentices in catering, building skills and gardening which was still in its early stages. Enthused by the plan and their involvement in its development, the trustee urged Jonathan Ruffer to submit a further application which would have their full support at Board level. The bid was successful.

### **IT WASN'T ALL PLAIN SAILING**

Further sources of funding that were identified were City philanthropists, the Jewish community, corporate funders, and statutory and regional funders.

One difficulty in engaging City philanthropists was that the financial and personal commitment shown by Jonathan Ruffer for the project meant that even a very large personal donation would be very much in the shadow of Ruffer's own commitment to the project. This, coupled with his own admitted reluctance to asking others directly for help, led to disappointing efforts in this area.

Little traction was gained among the Jewish community: the motivation of celebrating symbolic gestures in Anglo-Jewish history was not compelling enough to secure significant funds from those prospects identified among this group. It is possible that this might have worked better if led by a Champion from within the Jewish community.

In terms of corporate fundraising, success has been achieved with Santander, who are funding the Library in the new Spanish gallery. They are also funding academic research and collaboration through project partner Durham University.

The obvious benefits to the local economy and community would make statutory funding a strong

possibility: however statutory funders tend to have clear strategic objectives and need to see projects that conform to their own long-term vision for an area.

There was considerable opposition to the project initially as Durham had been identified as the hub for activity and funding. However, as the project has progressed and its value and potential demonstrated, the local councils and statutory funding bodies have been showing a greater interest and started to invest in the local infrastructure.

### **WHAT NEXT FOR AUCKLAND CASTLE?**

The main concern is that the Auckland Castle project and its aims of tackling social and economic deprivation be self-sustaining. An endowment model would not work for this project – the amount required would be unfeasibly high.

To contribute to ongoing income Auckland Castle Trust has bought a great many properties in the Market Square just outside the Castle and it is the intention to 'put them to work' bringing in an income and supporting the ongoing projects in the longer-term.

A mining Art Gallery is being developed. Inspired by Jonathan Ruffer's example, a collector who is also trustee of the ACT has donated his considerable and important collection of mining art to the Trust. An application for funding 50% of the conversion costs of one of the Market Square buildings is in the process of being considered.

The Curatorial strategy is being developed with the intention that Auckland Castle attain National Funding Partner status (formerly known as major Partner Museums) enabling it to access significant funds from bodies such as the Arts Council.



## Lessons Learnt

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### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEAD GIFT, AND OF GIVING BY THE LEADERS

Jonathan's commitment, and the few early gifts he secured from the Rothschild Foundation and others, gave the project legs.

Securing early significant and important donations shows other prospective donors that the project is worthy of support. It gives a project momentum and the confidence to proceed with its plans that can then create an excitement with which to inspire further support.

If Trustees give, they create a culture of giving, and can make a greatly more compelling ask of others. The request "this is a wonderful project, will you donate?" is greatly undermined if the person asking has not seen fit to give themselves. Conversely, the question, "Will you join me in supporting this?" is compelling.

### INVESTING IN FUNDRAISING EXPERTISE

Auckland Castle had vision and reach from the outset: it had an excellent small team, who were bound up in the

development and the HLF process. There was no-one with the experience of major donor fundraising, nor the time to get involved.

Nascent projects and organisations often do not have the resource or experience required to maximise their fundraising potential. Investing in professional fundraisers can take the load from the 'in-house' team.

Consultants can use their experience to identify the most effective strategy to achieve campaign goals and execute that strategy, guiding and advising the members of the team involved in the fundraising activities. This process is best done early: funders usually have substantial lead-times and won't retro-fund.

### PERSONAL INVESTMENT IN A PROJECT IS KEY

Jonathan Ruffer created the Auckland Castle project, and his vision and commitment have moved others. Regardless of your role, be it team member, director, leader, donor, prospect or beneficiary, feeling personally invested in the project will inspire a stronger attachment, a more passionate involvement in the success of the project.

When a team member understands their role in the fundraising process and how important they are to the success of an approach or application, their input will be stronger - be it: the leader whose passion and vision are the driving force of the project and who can inspire others by his example; the donor who feels that they are playing their part in a worthwhile and exciting cause; the curator whose curatorial strategy and vision inform the content of a bid; the planner who shares their ideas for the future honestly and candidly with a prospect.

### **ASK FOR GUIDANCE FIRST, MONEY SECOND**

Before the project had really begun, the Rothschild Foundation committed £1m to the project – Lord Rothschild had proposed Jonathan Ruffer commit to the larger scheme. Ruffer followed Rothschild's advice; money followed thereafter.

Working with Tarnside, Jonathan met many other potential funders. The ask: 'I'm new to this, who should I talk to? Is our document any good?' To a person, each read the document, thought through potential funding. One major UK philanthropist checked some statistics and revised the wording; others contributed in other ways. Now inextricably involved, and feeling appreciated, each gave generously.

People like to be valued for their knowledge and thoughts: people greatly enjoy being consulted for their opinion, before they are asked for money. Research shows, indeed, that philanthropists are driven by a desire to use their expertise, and have involvement with a project, its leaders and beneficiaries. Many projects would benefit greatly from listening to their supporters and prospects more. It can be all too easy to talk.

### **BUILDING STRONG AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROSPECTS AND DONORS**

Ultimately, people give to people. Get to know the donor, let them get to know you. Understand what they are looking for and make sure that you can deliver it. Learn what their expectations are and deliver on them.

If you are successful, make sure that they know how grateful you are for their support and keep them informed of how their donation is being spent. If conditions have been applied to a gift, ensure that they are met and that the donor knows that they have been met.

If you earn a donor's trust and fulfil or exceed their expectations of you, not only is it likely that they will continue to fund your work, they may well become your advocate or champion and persuade their peers to follow your example. Past donors are also the best prospects for future giving.

### **THE IMPACT OF A STRONG CHAMPION**

A strong champion can be a double-edged sword. While their advocacy and personal and financial commitment may drive and guide the project, it can also lead to complacency among prospects. Why should they give when the funds could easily come from the champion? Within an organisation it can also engender a culture of entitlement, where plans proceed without the due consideration of where to find funding because ultimately the funds will be found.

The question can be asked whether, without Jonathan Ruffer's involvement, would the Auckland Castle project have been possible? The answer is unquestionably 'no'. However, without his lead giving, his tireless efforts and his determination for the project to succeed would it have been possible to raise the more than £17.5m achieved in so short a time? The answer again is an unequivocal 'no'.

### **ENDNOTE**

It is unlikely that we will see a project like Auckland Castle again, nor that many charities will embark on a campaign of this scale. Yet the evolution of the project provides valuable lessons for organisations of all shapes and sizes. One wealthy backer can guarantee funding: they can't promise to win over major funders and institutions, nor to bring a community with them.

Auckland Castle and the projects that surround it have won trust and funding with ingredients that create successful projects the world over:

- a committed and inspirational figurehead able to catch people's interest
- a compelling mission and message, explaining why it's needed and why it will work
- a sound strategy for fundraising that focusses on developing relationships (listening to donors, not just communicating 'at' them)
- a skilled team who buy in completely to the organisation's plans.



Consultancy  
of the Year  
2015 & 2016



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