

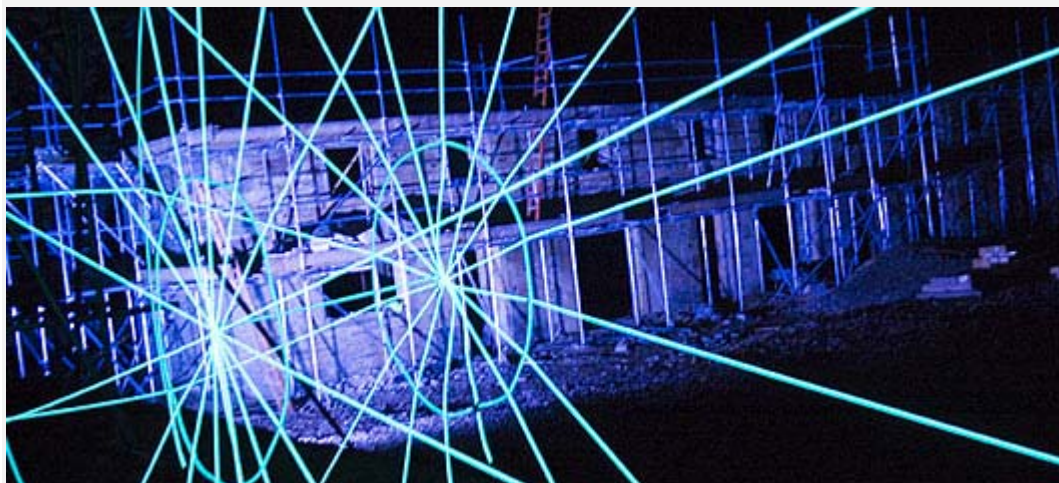
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[Past, Present and Future in Allendale](#)

Posted By: Emer McCourt - November 13, 2007



I had an evening to remember in Allendale. I am happy to report that I am not alone in this. While visiting the [Dott 07 Design Camp](#) sites, Christopher Bacon and his wife Anne told me about theirs. Over thirty years ago, when they were students, they drove up to Allendale from Norwich one day... 'It was pouring with rain; it was wonderfully dramatic because with the rain and the wind, the hills looked like there were giants crossing the mountains, and we picked up all this purple [fluorspar](#) - great big crystals of it; we took them back to his grandmothers house to show her and they'd dried out; like fairy gold they didn't look beautiful anymore because they weren't wet. I'll never forget that day.' Whatever magic they shared on that wet, bejewelled walk, when Christopher and Anne wanted to move house 12 years ago, they chose Allendale. After a visit to the striking Dott 07 Design Camp light installation at the old Allen Mill, followed by some locally brewed beer in The King's Head, I'd move there myself!



Magic is definitely in the air in [Allendale](#). Steve Messam, artist extraordinaire and Design Camp Senior Producer, knows that the worlds of the past and present have been connecting and creating magic in Allendale in dramatic style for centuries... but what of the worlds of the future, dear readers? What of the future? Don't worry; the spirits of Allendale have seen to it that the giant wheel of time turns full circle in this enchanting part of the world: as our bus turned a corner on that pitch black night, two pillars of fuchsia light, shot into the sky from the distant hills: I recalled that scene in [Close Encounters of the Third Kind](#) and braced myself for a connection not mentioned in the press release. Steve had said to be prepared for anything, but an encounter with an alien in Allendale was out of my league. Then all was revealed; as we pulled into Allen Mill, the

heritage site of the old lead and silver smelting mill, we also pulled into the reassuring knowledge of all things, past, present and future, when we encountered Christopher Bacon, owner and project manager of the site. Christopher is armed to the teeth with enough human knowledge of Allendale industrial heritage, to scare even the friendliest alien back to the Mexican desert of Sonora.



Christopher explained that the Design Camp team had erected two pillars of fuchsia light on top of the distant Fells (mountain top) to remind us of the massive chimneys (or flues) that used to spew out the poisonous gases from the burning furnaces on the ground. Back in the 17th Century, the chimneys were connected to the smelting furnace, by miles of tunnels running underground, beneath our feet. Standing there, as Christopher painted the picture, one could only marvel.

**'This site condensed silver from lead and produced 13,000 ounces of silver a year for the Beaumont family... The whole of this site was full of huge furnace buildings, burning night and day... Along the back, there are tunnel entrances to the Flues (the two chimneys on the Fell Top); they were used to take the poisonous gases away. We have this big matrix of flues and tunnels running throughout the area.'** Christopher Bacon, Allen Mill Project Manager



Monica Chong, Vincenzo Di Maria, Jim Rokos and Christina Worsing made up the Allendale Industrial Heritage Dott 07 Design Camp Team. They were deeply struck by the invisible elements of the town's lead mining past. It was their desire to illuminate these elements that was behind each of the light installations in the area. For the one at Allen Mill, the team decided to recreate an impression of the original water wheel pit. Like the other light installations, it was sustained by hydroelectric power from the Allen River.

Alec Murray, Allen Mill site manager, lives in the village. He watched as the Design Team brought the wheel to life.

**'I'm 50 now and I have moved into the village when I was 16, I didn't know all this was here until I started working here. I knew it was a lead smelting place but I didn't know there was as much still history still left; it's all there; it's under that ground, if you just scrap off the surface you find an old building floor, a working surface. We were looking for a drain so we dug down 10 feet and came upon a perfect working surface with cobbled floors... all the walls were there, you know' Alec Murray, Site Manager, Allen Mill**



Rarely, do we consider physical connections between the place where we are standing and another place in the distance. In Allendale, riddled with miles of invisible tunnels, interconnecting waterways and underground mills, it is impossible to ignore. This intrinsic, in-built connection to the physical as well as the historic must go part of the way to explaining the quality of this special place. However, it has often been said that it is the people that make a place and while Christopher Bacon might think he is lucky to have found Allendale, Allendale is certainly lucky to have found him.



Christopher has a second special connection to the place. As a boy, he used to take the train from London, Kings Cross, to his grandparents house called [Deneholme](#), in Allendale. His connection to the town, that started back then, remained alive over the years and he is now spearheading the preservation of the Allen Mill site with an eye to future generations. He has secured pilot funding of £24,000 for the survey of the site for potential development. If it turns out to be a goer, they'll go for a heritage lottery grant of anything from £500,000 to a million for restoration. The Design Camp neon-lit water wheel, struck such a chord with Christopher and other villagers, that plans are in place to make it a permanent installation at the site.



Martin, Anne, Anne's daughter, daughter's boyfriend, Emer and Christopher

With an eye on tourism and leisure, Allendale, considered one of Northumberland's best kept secrets, is almost certainly in for changes. The village recently won the [Community of the Year Award](#) which demonstrates the level of commitment the local residents have to making Allendale a vibrant, self-sustaining community village. With the proposed development of the Allen Mill site for the English Heritage, it is likely that many more people will experience this enchanting village for themselves.

However ambivalent the villagers may or may not be, about others discovering this gem of heritage and tranquillity, may not matter: the word is out. I will be returning to Allendale in search of some of that elusive fluorspar with my husband on New Year's Eve where an ancient New Years Eve ceremony involves a procession of 'guisers' carrying blazing tar barrels on their heads to a midnight bonfire in the middle of the village. My first visit to Allendale will be bringing me back: if that's not extracting the present from the past, I don't know what is. Who said that smelting wasn't alive and well in Allendale?