

IMPACT REPORT 2026

Restoring communities





The UK's heritage sector is an extensive resource that underpins community identities and local and national economies. Networking, collaboration and partnership are the critical mechanisms that generate value and which underpin our heritage. This report from the Heritage Network helps us to understand the impacts of working together, the value of local action and the difference it makes to all of our lives.

– Professor Mike Robinson, Vice-Chair and Non-Executive Director for Culture, United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO

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This page: delegates on a tour during Conference 2025 © Col Morley
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Challenging stereotypes, bringing buildings to life

This is our third Impact Report detailing our members' achievements in 2025 and providing a snapshot at the beginning of 2026 of the sites they owned and managed, what they are used for and the people they serve. These yearly reports have made a big impression on leaders and decision makers throughout the heritage sector and beyond.

The statistics and stories demonstrate how charities, community organisations and social enterprises working with historic buildings and sites deliver benefits for their communities, adding up to a significant impact on places and people throughout the UK. Community heritage delivers so much: providing facilities, regenerating high streets, creating jobs and volunteering opportunities, and improving wellbeing while also restoring hundreds of historic sites and taking buildings off the 'at-risk' registers.

The picture this report paints challenges stereotypes about the heritage sector. It is not all about grand historic houses opening as visitor attractions (although we have a few of those) but more often about the everyday buildings and places that people have grown up with being re-used as homes, shops, community centres, workspaces, arts venues and spaces to walk, run, cycle and play. Around a fifth of our members' buildings date from the 20th century and less than a quarter are visitor attractions.

Beyond the statistics the stories in this report illustrate the different ways our members are bringing new life to historic buildings and structures; from turning a former chapel into studios for artists and crafts people in St Ives, Cornwall, to saving an outdoor pool in Portsoy in the North East of Scotland; from high street regeneration in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, to creating a multi-use community centre from a disused church in Belfast.

David Tittle,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Members' impact in 2025



£60,626,514
Spent by members restoring
buildings, structures or land



43
properties removed from
'at risk' registers



91
sites
acquired



122,115m²
internal space
restored



209
restoration
projects completed



227 (35%)
working to
acquire a site



231 (36%)
planning a
restoration project



171 (27%)
actively
restoring a site



1,825
sites owned
by members



6,168
employed on
member's sites



634
homes
provided

Members' teams comprise:

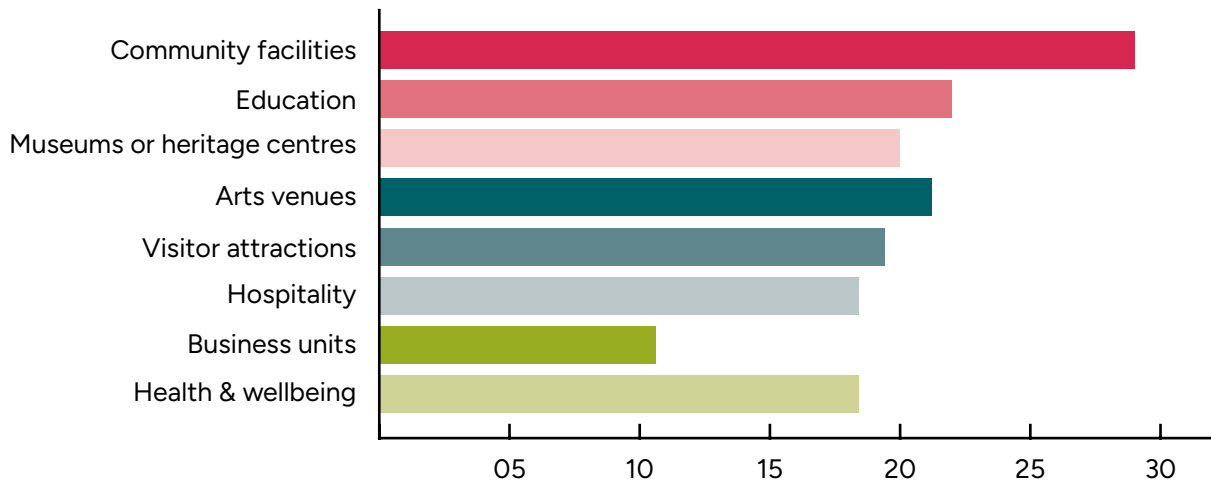
21,789 volunteers

4,435

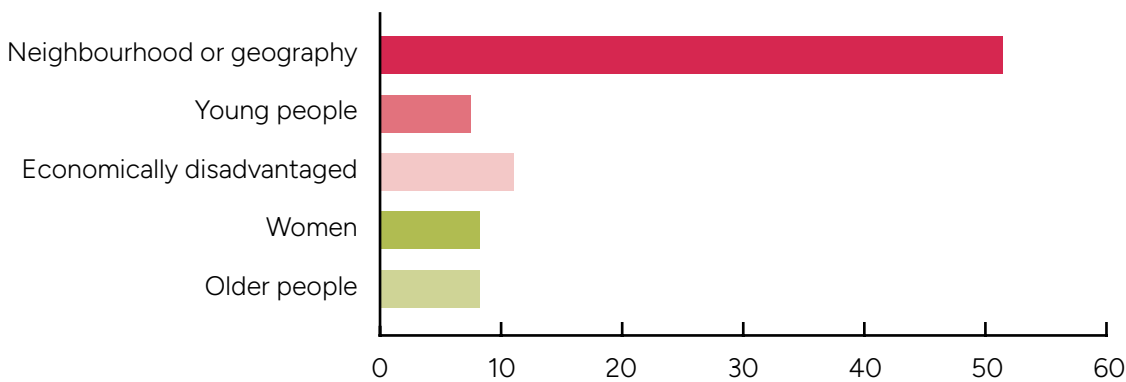
paid employees

Membership profile

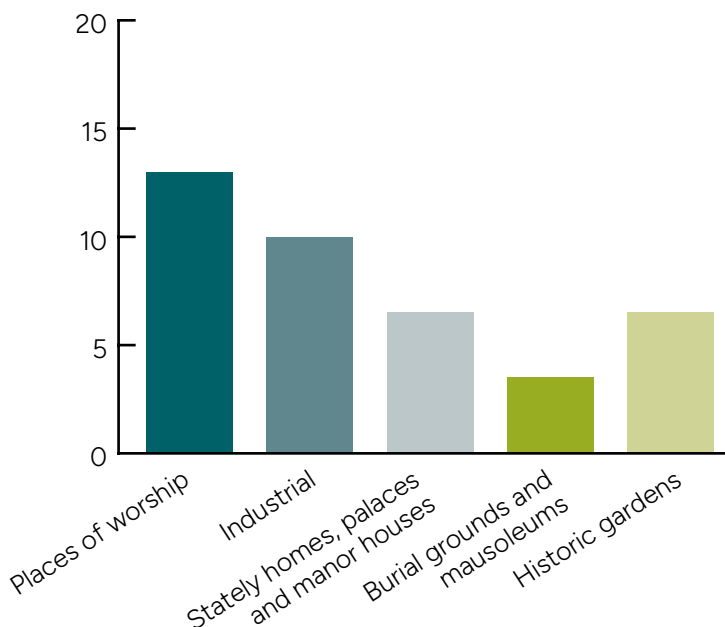
Building uses (%):



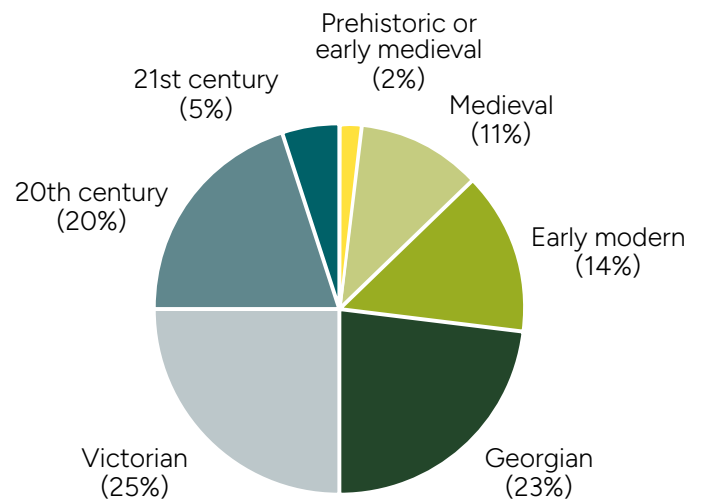
Organisations are targeted at or led by the following communities (%):



Our members' sites include the following building types (%):



Our members' sites were originally built during the following periods (%):



SAVING HERITAGE AT RISK: St Osyth Priory, ENGLAND



St Osyth Priory and Parish Trust is a charitable trust in the southeast of England. Formed in 2016, the Trust's main mission is the preservation and restoration of the priory, putting it at the heart of the community and championing it as a place of economic prosperity, education and wellbeing.

The Priory is over a thousand years old and consists of several listed buildings. The Trust is ultimately responsible for regenerating four structures and is currently undertaking a National Lottery Heritage Fund project to restore the Grade II* listed Tithe Barn and the Grade II listed Old Dairy, removing them from the Heritage at Risk register in England in the process.

One of the more unexpected challenges has been engaging the wider community in the project. Whilst residents in the local village regularly use the site, those from the surrounding areas are less engaged. The Trust has developed engagement initiatives that go beyond regular surveys, such as community events that provide opportunities to learn about the project and build a greater understanding of the work and the benefits it will deliver.

Removing these buildings from the Heritage at Risk register will enable the Trust to further develop its community programme, which currently takes place in a temporary education building. By regenerating these buildings, the Trust will gain a space for the community and educational activities, as well as a commercial income stream through

venue hire. This includes more space for local Guide and Scout groups, as well as expanding the schools' programme.



Planning
a project



Educational
facility



Early
medieval

All images © Rebecca Cross





Haverfordwest Heritage, WALES

Haverfordwest Heritage demonstrates how the regeneration of town centre heritage buildings can have a positive effect on the community, providing workspaces, restoring local pride, and helping people rediscover local heritage.

In 2025, the charity progressed plans for the Grade II listed Temperance Hall in Haverfordwest. The exterior of the building was repainted, and it was open to the public as part of Cadw's Open Doors event. Plans for the next phase of regeneration were shared with the community, and workshops and other events were held.

When completed, the building will provide a new art facility for the community, specifically printworks, and include an exhibition space, print and design workspaces, as well as a programme of courses and workshops.

Haverfordwest has high numbers of vacant listed buildings in the town centre conservation area, and this work demonstrates the potential of these structures to play a part in the future.



Planning a project



Community facility



High street regeneration

© Treftadaeth Hwlffordd | Haverfordwest Heritage



Rathfriland, NORTHERN IRELAND

Rathfriland Regeneration have shown how the arts and heritage can combine to provide an asset to a local community. The charity regenerated the Grade B2-listed former bank, Chandler's House, into a community space focused on music on the ground floor and affordable housing units on the remaining floors. It has since become a thriving venue that demonstrates the importance of having a plan for sustainable long-term use.

As the building is centrally located, the charity feels it has brought life back to the village.

Rathfriland Regeneration is a charity that promotes urban and rural regeneration for the benefit of the public in areas of social and economic deprivation.



Completed project



Arts venue



Local community

© Rathfriland Regeneration

NEW USES FOR OLD BUILDINGS: Anne Matthews Trust, WALES



The Anne Matthews Trust provides a place of sanctuary for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, where people can come together in an environment that enables them to have a connection with the natural world. The Trust is based near Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park, and at the centre of its work is the Braich Goch, an inn over 450 years old.

The Braich Goch is used as a community hub where the Trust hosts workshops, educational programmes, residentials, events, community groups and much more. Programmes include agroecology and popular education.

One of these strands focuses on forming connections with the local Welsh-speaking community. The Braich Goch provides a space to build that relationship, and it has hosted joint events and completed community projects on local farming techniques, language, and identity, helping to bring people together through the shared understanding of parallel issues.

The Braich Goch has provided a place that feels like home and supports a sense of belonging, but to continue, it needs extensive repair work. In 2025, a restoration project began, ensuring that the building meets the community's growing needs and becomes energy-efficient. Plans include replacing the heating system, insulating walls, upgrading windows and the drainage system, and creating an accessible room on the ground floor.

Work started in late October 2025 and will continue into 2026, ultimately transforming the building to suit the needs of the Trust. They are future-proofing the building, ensuring that its work can continue and people can continue to benefit from better facilities that the project will bring. One of the ways it can develop is by having improved space to run educational programmes. For example, by training individuals from other organisations in how to support people who have been through traumatising situations, as well as extending the range of activities that local community groups can use the Braich Goch for.



Active
restoration



Community
facility



Early modern
period

Images © Jonathan Selman

St Ives Community Land Trust, ENGLAND



The St Ives Community Land Trust was formed to deliver part of the St Ives Neighbourhood Plan, focusing on providing affordable housing for residents and affordable studios for artists and craftspeople, as well as protecting much-loved and well-known local heritage buildings. The Trust has one part-time staff member, a volunteer project committee and 21 volunteers.

At the heart of the organisation are people who enjoy living in St Ives and want to see it thriving, but also want to ensure that the needs of the local community can be met alongside the tourist industry. According to the St Ives Tourism Association, St Ives is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the UK, with 540,000 day trippers and 220,000 staying visitors who spend around £85 million per annum. Although this is the second-highest visitor-related spend in the UK, the majority of this money does not stay within the local area.

The Trust's latest project, St Peter's Street Studios, will ultimately create workspaces for local artists and craftspeople. The studios are based in a former chapel built in the 1800s that has served the community in a variety of ways since then. Having purchased the building in 2024, the Trust was able to progress plans in 2025 and worked with the architects Studio Skein to develop plans for 11 studios which have now received List Building Consent.

Involving the community is an important part of the project, and to ensure the building remained in use, volunteers held regular open days for the public last year. The community could view the space, see the project plans and attend events. These have included local history talks, exhibitions, and a Christmas storytelling session.

There is a strong sense of accomplishment amongst the people involved in the Trust of what's been achieved in 2025. Morag Robertson explains, "Owning St Peter's Church is giving our community hope and confidence that we do have the power to save buildings which are important to us, and we can help provide local people with what they need to make a living and a life here."



Planning
a project



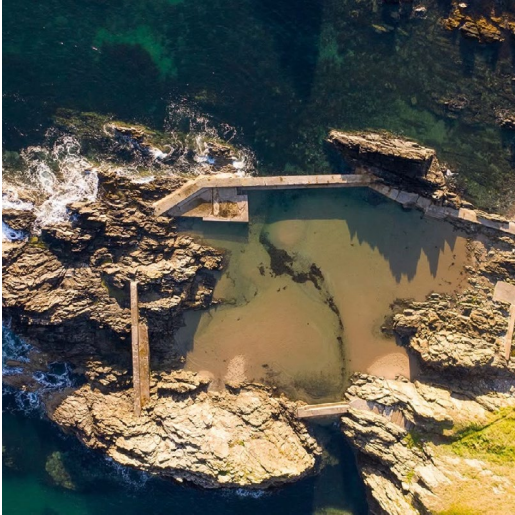
11 business
units



21
volunteers

Image, left © Alban Roinard

Image, right © Janet Axten



Portsoy Outdoor Pool, SCOTLAND

Portsoy Outdoor Pool is a tidal pool, challenging us to think about what 'heritage' is, both in terms of its appearance and age. It's not a building, and it was constructed in the 1930s, but it connected a community and was important economically and socially.

It was opened in 1936 and was used until its closure in 2001, meaning it's in recent memory for some residents. The pool was an important space in the local community where people gathered for both social and fitness purposes. It initially closed due to maintenance issues and has not been opened since.

In 2025, the charity has been campaigning to secure a community asset transfer of the pool. If successful, this would allow restoration works to take place and the pool to be reopened as a space for the community once again.



Working to buy a site



Community facility



20th century period

© Portsoy Outdoor Pool



Sailortown, NORTHERN IRELAND

How many ways can a church continue to serve its community when it's no longer a place of worship? Sailortown Regeneration in Belfast shows how a building can be used and how important a particular building can be to a community.

The organisation is developing plans and funds to regenerate St Joseph's Church. Currently the deconsecrated church operates as a 'meanwhile use' space, hosting live music, local craft groups, yoga and a choir, and is used for venue hire.

In 2025, the 4th annual Sailortown Festival was held with over ten thousand attendees. The aim was to reinvigorate this historic community and create a cultural fringe area on Belfast's Maritime Mile. A key focus in the future will be providing educational and skills development to resident young people and their families.



Active restoration



Geographical community



Former place of worship

© Sailortown Regeneration



John Rae Society, SCOTLAND

The John Rae Society in Orkney, despite its small size, have progressed its development plans for the Hall of Clestrain.

The project will ultimately see the birthplace of Arctic explorer, John Rae, transformed into a thriving visitor and educational centre that highlights Orkney's contribution to science and the study of the natural world. Archaeological works carried out in 2025 have helped inform the design work for the first stage of the project: making the Category A listed building watertight. Alongside an Historic Environment Scotland grant, the Society has raised £102,000 from other sources and donations.

The Society also invested in training for their trustees to carry out the remainder of the project and ran outreach programmes in local schools to gain the support of the local community.

Ultimately the foundations put in place by the training of trustees, the community buy in and the development phase stands the Society in the best place to deliver the plans.



Planning
a project



10
volunteers



Georgian
period

© Andrew Appleby



For us, it's how you can bring a place which has been so badly deprived, and so neglected, into the future, whilst retaining the connection to the community.

– Sailortown Regeneration

Network news

This was a year of growth for the Network.

The early months of 2025 saw our team of seven busy with a mammoth staff recruitment process as we grew our team to thirteen thanks to increased support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. For the first time we have a Marketing and Communications Officer, a Business Development Manager, Development and Outreach Officers in all four Nations, a dedicated Finance Officer and a Heritage Trainee in England (meaning we had three heritage trainees in the team). The new staff began work in May or June making an immediate impact on the number and success of our events (102 events attended by 1,890 people), the level of contact and support we could offer members and our engagement with partner organisations and the wider sector.

We helped community heritage organisations to succeed via:

- Dozens of learning and networking events.
- Weekly newsletters with vital information on events, funding, tender opportunities, jobs and sector news.
- Our Toolkit of essential guidance and information.
- Our response to dozens of support requests, providing advice and information or signposting to other members or sector experts.
- Our conference in Bradford which attracted over 250 delegates from all over the UK and provided a unique forum for discussion, networking, socialising and showcasing heritage regeneration in Bradford and beyond.

Our membership topped 1,000 for the first time with particularly strong areas of growth being our Partner (i.e. business) membership, local authorities and our membership in Northern Ireland. 'Networks within the network' were established for both businesses and local authorities. The meetings for local activists trying to save church buildings and our group of Mill enthusiasts, both of which started in Scotland but are drawing in people from elsewhere in the UK, showed another aspect of this 'network of networks' approach.

Less tangible is the growing recognition we received from leading agencies and partners in the heritage sector and beyond with multiple offers of support, invitations to events and requests for our views.

During the year we delivered our Heritage Toolbox contract for the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, in partnership with Locality. This was a programme of in person and online learning and networking events for smaller heritage organisations in West Yorkshire. The programme showed both the need and potential for local heritage capacity building programmes and as the year came to a close, we secured a contract to deliver a similar programme in North East Lincolnshire in partnership with longstanding member Heritage Lincolnshire.

Delegates at Heritage Network Conference 2025. © Col Morley



1,056
members



102
events



1,890
participants



47
networking, training or
informational events



166
member
support cases



c.22,000
online toolkit
downloads/views



Working with young people

Throughout 2025, we have expanded our work with young people.

We launched 'Step on Board', an initiative that introduces 18–30-year-olds to trusteeship through training and matches them with our members as shadow trustees for 12 months. We received 58 applications from young people and 14 from host organisations in the first cohort.

Our Youth Forum continues to flourish with 300 members, 7 special interest groups, and a new steering committee. One highlight was helping the National Lottery Heritage Fund to pilot their Future Heritage Leaders Programme.

Through our 'Digital Heroes' programme we matched 5 volunteers with 3 organisations. The young volunteers worked on projects such as database management, website updates and streamlining, search engine optimisation, content creation, and social media coverage of our annual conference in Bradford, helping us and our members to thrive.

2025 was our fourth year offering paid heritage traineeships. The 12-month placements are designed to help young people into a career in the grassroots heritage sector, creating a pipeline of future heritage professionals and complementing our wider work with young people and career changers.

This year our trainees have:

- Overseen the Youth Forum and Digital Heroes
- Developed and launched Step on Board
- Been involved in outreach and member casework
- Represented the Network at the Museums and Heritage Show, various conferences and parliamentary receptions
- Organised and hosted events
- Co-ordinated the Network Academy
- Developed marketing and communications for events and commissions
- Written and researched impact stories
- Helped to recruit our 2026 trainees by reading applications and being on interview panels
- Presented to our board of trustees

The traineeships are designed to expose trainees to everything we do and give them ownership of mini-projects when they're ready. Their work also involves engaging directly with members, funders and the national agencies across the UK.

*Images, opposite: Digital Hero at Heritage Network Conference 2022.
© Damien Wootten*



58

Step on Board
applications



14

Step on Board
host applications



300

Youth Forum
Members



26

dedicated Youth Forum /
young person events



5

Digital Heroes



3

paid traineeships



*The Youth Forum is a really good place
for peer support and connection.*

– Youth Forum member

*At a time when many major heritage bodies
are rethinking how to make heritage more
relevant to young people and engage
them in new ways, Heritage Network's
approach supports long-term connection
for young people with heritage, positioning
them as a genuine sector leader.*

– Pam Jarvis, Director, sam–culture



Images, from top left:

- Volunteers from Highland Park help at Hall of Clestrain © Andrew Appleby
- A workshop in Temperance Hall © Treftadaeth Hwlffordd | Haverfordwest Heritage
- Alice Ullathorne speaks at Heritage Network Conference 2025 © Col Morley;
- Heritage Network staff team 2025 © Lindsey Mackenzie Parker
- John Rae Society member with a Clestrain Candle Sconce © John Welburn ABIP
- St Joseph's Church at night © Sailortown Regeneration