

Festival Impact Report 2025

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Cover Page

Description: Festival Impact Report 2025 with Heritage Open Days logo, National Trust logo, People's Postcode Lottery logo and a collage of festival event images.

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It's been an incredible year, winning the 2025 Museums + Heritage Sector Impact award early on was a joyous moment. Being recognised for the 'transformative' effect of our community-led work, we brought renewed energy to our ambitious plans for the festival. From new partnerships to micro-grants, we've expanded and diversified our offer to cater for our growing, and increasingly diverse community. The result was our biggest and best festival yet! As ever huge thanks go to our wonderful funders, players of People's Postcode Lottery, and to everyone involved in planning, running and promoting events. Heritage Open Days truly is a nationwide team effort!

Your Heritage Open Days team Sarah, Liam, Alex, Charlotte & Jade.

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, brought to you by the National Trust and supported by Players of People's Postcode Lottery.

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Year at a glance

This year we saw our festival community become the largest it has ever been, creating a festival programme offering more opportunities for people to engage with our heritage than ever before. The community delivered a staggering programme of: 5,879 events offering: 12,039 opportunities to engage. To support such a large programme and community, we focused on working in partnership to offer new training events, resources, and micro-grants. This led to more diverse histories being shared across the festival, and people joining the community. We also implemented

a new media approach and saw an uplift in engagement across the media and social platforms.

“Heritage Open Days is one of the most positive festivals around - celebrating community and heritage, identifiable by joyous pink stuff, both local and national, promoting sharing, structured but highly individual, open to anyone to get involved as organiser or visitor. And still with massive potential to spread and involve more people.” Local coordinator.

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It involves...

- 104 Local area coordinators.
- 2,549 Organisers.
- 8,600 Paid staff.
- 44,200 Volunteers.
- Inspiring 1.3 million Visitors across England.
- £11.9m spent Benefiting local economies.

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Community Impact

Description: This page is a decorative page with an image of a child and adult stood outside by a refreshments table with a canal boat behind them.

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“It gave our community a platform to share stories and culture with local people, and we’ve built new connections and friendships through it. Thank you for all the support and encouragement — it has been a very meaningful experience for us” Local event organiser.

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Who takes part?

The festival continues to be a diverse and inclusive platform for community engagement. We welcome anyone with a historic story to tell, or place to share, to get involved.

- 77% have been involved in the festival before.
- 23% were new to the festival.
- 62% organise events on a voluntary basis.
- 19% self-identify as having a disability.

Graphic: Chart showing types of site:

- Faith Site 25%
- Other 22%
- Charity 17%
- Museum/Gallery/Library/Archive 14%
- Local Government 7%
- Civic Society 3%
- Commercial Site 2%
- Local Business 2%
- Local Society/ Group/Trust 10%

“The HODs team are so encouraging and supportive of all venues, and there are a lot of free resources, webinars and toolkits to help your event planning and delivery”
Local coordinator.

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Benefits to the community

Our nationally recognised promotional platform helps to raise awareness, attracting new volunteers and staff as well as visitors and members. Increasingly we are also hearing how the whole process helps build confidence and skills, strengthens team bonds and inspires new connections.

- Visitors are inspired to support - $\frac{2}{3}$ made a donation where there was an opportunity.
- Sites benefited from an estimated £3.8 million of additional spend, and local area economies benefited from a further £8.1 million.

- 88% of organisers agreed that supporting the community was a key benefit of participating.
- 91% of organisers agreed that meeting new people was a key benefit of participating.

“It was great to attract so many people to our small town who left at the end of the day knowing a little bit more about the history. We had nearly as many people through our door in one day as we would get in 6 months, which is great for our future.” Local organiser.

“Helping at the event is so rewarding. I got to share my knowledge about the reserve and meet lots of new people.” Event volunteer.

“The event gave us a catalyst to work with a local historian and build our local knowledge of the history of the area.” Local event organiser.

“The experience has strengthened my confidence as someone new to heritage volunteering.” Local organiser.

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Case studies

Erewash Canal Association: Community connection was a key focus for this voluntary group as they made full use of the festival’s support to run three fun and informative events, building a stronger team in the process.

St Barnabas School: Inviting people to explore this historic building and its archive, while offering partner activities at no cost, helped overturn perceptions of the local school. It also led to joyful reunions for past pupils.

Dobcroft Nature Reserve: Inspired by our festival theme this community centre programmes creative activities to reach a wider audience and attract new volunteers, whilst strengthening their own community links.

The Landmark Trust: Opening 15 of their popular holiday homes each year helps this building conservation charity raise awareness of their work, attracting new bookings, supporters and even staff!

“Preparing for the festival also brought us closer as a team. By working side by side with a clear, shared purpose, we created not just events, but also a stronger, more confident Association.” Local event organiser, Erewash Canal Association.

[Read more of our case studies.](#)

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Visitor Impact

Description: This page is a decorative page with an image showing a group of three children and four adults smiling and enjoying hands-on activities at Men in Sheds MK.

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“It was such a joy to have something so special right on my doorstep. My daughter was absolutely thrilled, and seeing her excitement made the day even more memorable. The volunteers, brought such warmth and enthusiasm to the experience. It was a beautiful reminder of how engaging and enriching local heritage can be.” Festival event visitor.

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Who visited?

This year saw a broad and diverse audience, reflecting the festival’s continued appeal across England. The majority of visitors were local to the events they attended, often travelling short distances. Visitors were particularly drawn to sites that offered special programming for the festival. The value of a free festival continues to be clear against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis, with 42% claiming they would not have visited had the event had an admission charge.

“The fact it was free to visit, as I can’t normally afford the entrance fee. I was delighted and really enjoyed our outing” Festival event visitor.

- 79% considered themselves local to the event they visited.
- 35% of visitors came from a C2DE socio-economic background.
- 21% self-identified as having a disability.
- 441,000 visited the festival for the first time.

- 819,650 were repeat visitors.

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Inspiring audiences

Each year the festival generates exceptionally high enjoyment scores. This year visitors rated it 9.24/10, and their likelihood to recommend gave it a net promoter score of 89/100, this compares well to the industry average of 72. Importantly, year on year research shows that visiting festival events inspires and leads to, wider action.

- 91% of visitors said that they learnt something new about their local area at a HODs event.
- 83% of visitors said that visiting a HODs event made them feel more proud of their local area.
- 74% were inspired to learn more about heritage/culture.
- 277k visitors had not been to a heritage site in the last 12 months.
- 59% go on to visit heritage sites more often.
- 8% go on to do more voluntary work.

“We spent a hugely enjoyable few hours at the Botanic Gardens. We had not visited before, but were encouraged to do so by the Heritage Open Days. We were treated to a great tour from a guide, who was very knowledgeable and we learnt so much. Now thinking of taking up an annual membership!” Festival event visitor.

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Our support

Description: This page is a decorative page with an image of a smiling woman in a pink top walking through a gate with pink bunting and green foliage in the foreground.

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“It has been a brilliant experience. I am in awe of how the small national team can coordinate over 5,000 events. The support provided was exceptional — from one-to-

one guidance and webinars to marketing logos, branding, and merchandise, all for free and which helped make our events stand out.” Local event organiser.

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Planning and inspiration

This year we reviewed and significantly refreshed our support offer, updating our online resources and community events programme. This included new social media training and offering small grants to coordinators to encourage more of the valuable local meet ups for organisers to share their experiences. Whilst the festival theme proved our most popular yet, with nearly half of organisers adopting it for events. In addition we worked in collaboration with new national partners, Kids in Museums and VocalEyes to provide greater support to our community in planning family friendly and accessible events. We also reignited our work with Icon to raise awareness of the specialist work of conservators and help inspire the next generation.

- Ran 16 registration surgeries offering 1:1 support. Responded to 837 enquiry forms and processed 1,135 login requests.
- Delivered 8 webinars and 4 local workshops. Contributed to 4 further local meetings.
- Added 17 new online resources and updated 45 others from promotional templates to registration guidance.
- 5,644 views of our Architecture theme page, 1,312 views of the resource pack.

“We’re so proud to have partnered with Heritage Open Days over the past few years, and really value the platform the programme gives conservators to engage the public in the magic of conservation and what it can tell us about our heritage, communities and histories.” The Institute of Conservation.

“It was great to have small and large providers there and to hear all their ideas and views. As a severely sight impaired user myself, I found the whole event easy to navigate and take in.” Webinar attendee.

“Really useful training, lots to take away and implement.” Webinar attendee.

<The page shows screenshots of example organiser resources such as the theme pack, a Kids in Museum's webinar, and top tips for co-creation with young adults.>

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Reach

Our national support focuses on amplifying reach, ensuring as many people as possible can benefit from festival events. We know that 18.3 million people are aware of Heritage Open Days, approximately 40% of the adult population in England. But there is still much work we can do. Our audience research shows that there are 14.8 million visitors who are interested in visiting the festival but don't know about it. It's clear that low cost high-impact marketing remains crucial to unlocking new audiences.

"The promotion was excellent. I really enjoyed the social media campaigns which were creative, imaginative, fun and engaging." Local event organiser.

4,100+ pieces of coverage: Media interest in the festival continues to grow, with a diverse mix of national and regional coverage. As seen in: The Guardian, The Independent, BBC News, This Morning, The Times, Money Saving Expert, Which? and Time Out.

3 million page views: 52% of visitors find events through our website. 16 spotlight posts highlighting over 160 events.

10.8 million views: We've seen strong growth across socials, with 35% of visitors finding us through them. 10,383 new followers added to our network, now at 98k followers.

20,000m of bunting: We sent out more than 48,000 items of branded collateral to help decorate events - including enough bunting to wrap around the London Eye 47 times!

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Sharing under-told stories

This year we took positive steps towards our long term aim of improving the diversity of the festival. Our work focused on Global Majority, LGBTQ+, and disability

histories, as these are currently significantly under-represented. We piloted a micro-grants scheme offering £350 and 1-2-1 support to help 27 organisers - both new and existing - create events that highlighted under-represented stories and communities. See examples of funded events below.

We also continued to seek and share unsung stories beyond the festival through our website. After spotting two interesting talks at Nottinghamshire libraries this year, we recently published a post from Oxygen Arts highlighting the history of Black British Ballet.

“Wow! Amazing, moving stories that should be better known!” Blog reader.

A Forgotten Princess: Irene Duleep Singh: Following World Suicide Prevention Day, this event explored the tragic life of Princess Irene Duleep Singh and how attitudes to mental health have evolved over the past century.

LGBTQ+ audio trail in Liverpool: This audio trail focused on overlooked LGBTQ+ stories from Liverpool's past. From historic community spaces to places connected with notable LGBTQ+ figures.

Cultural Games Workshop: This event explored the cultural significance, history and traditional storytelling connected to two ancient games - Ayo (also known as Oware) from Africa and Mahjong from China.

‘Rights not Charity’: Following their successful micro-grant funded event highlighting the history of disabled suffragettes, the Pankhurst Museum are now writing a blog post so that we can share their research to a wider audience.

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Youth engagement

This year we teamed up with agency Beatfrecks to ask younger audiences to ‘Look Up’ and take a moment to pause, notice and wonder – looking up and away from their phones, toward their local area, into their histories and ahead to their futures.

To deliver the campaign we worked with a variety of creators who posted on Instagram and TikTok. Posts achieved over 3 million impressions.

The campaign was also supported with out-of-home posters and stickers in Manchester, Bradford, and Newcastle encouraging people to visit the festival website.

Additionally, after 5 years of our youth engagement programme New Wave, we established an Alumni network to connect previous participants.

<The page shows screenshots of six reels produced as part of our Beatfreeks work along with two poster designs from the project and a screenshot of a video produced by young people at The Warren in Hull.>

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Looking forward

Next year we will continue to expand our support for the community to inspire audiences, enabling more people than ever to care for and engage with local heritage.

Building on this year's success we will:

- Continue to work with partners to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of the festival.
- Develop our micro-grants offer to continue improving the diversity of the festival.
- Expand our youth engagement work.
- Grow our reach through marketing campaigns.