

Towards a More Open Heritage

Deborah Lamb Director of Policy and Communications, English Heritage

If we want people to engage with their shared heritage, now and in the future, we need first to capture their interest.

Much of this issue of *Conservation Bulletin* has focused on specific examples that show communities redefining their heritage and illustrate what the historic environment sector has done to build its capacity to respond. However, it is important to keep in mind the bigger picture. Heritage is hugely popular, as evidenced by the large number of TV programmes (almost 9,000 hours of transmitted heritage television in 2005–6, see *Heritage Counts 2006*) and the enthusiasm for Heritage Open Days, which are the largest mass-participation event in the country. Heritage is, arguably, one of the most accessible cultural experiences and is literally all around us. It cannot, with any justice, be called elitist.

And yet, as the Taking Part survey makes clear (see Dawes, pp 16–17), there is a significant gap between the extents to which different people participate. We still need to understand more about what the Taking Part figures indicate and analysis is on-going. Obviously, heritage will not be top of everyone's list, but when 45 per cent of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities participate compared with a national average of 70 per cent, we must ask ourselves why is this the case and does it matter?

While heritage may attract some people more than others, it is difficult to believe and to defend that it is less appealing to certain groups of people due to something inherent either in our heritage or in people's ethnicity or economic circumstances. Surely all of us involved in protecting and explaining the nation's heritage believe the beauty, inspiration and education it provides can be enjoyed by everyone.

This suggests that the problem may lie in the way the historic environment is presented, interpreted and marketed, including by organisations outside the sector such as schools and the media.

We also need to be clear why this matters and why we should care. The simple fact is that our historic environment will depend on future generations to look after it. The long-term survival of our rich and diverse heritage will need continuing broad and popular support. But the population who provide that support and legitimise public intervention is changing. The population is aging, with people of pensionable age set

to rise from 18.7 per cent in 2005 to 23.9 per cent by 2025. One in six people in Britain is disabled in some way. Family structures are changing, with more women in paid work and more men spending time with their children. The ethnic diversity of the population is increasing, with net inward migration and a higher birth rate amongst some settled minority groups. We need to ensure that heritage is accessible and valued in a time of change. The historic environment needs all the help it can get.

This edition of *Conservation Bulletin* has highlighted many examples of what we can do to make a difference and broaden support for our heritage. I would also like to touch briefly on the things we should not do and attempt to lay to rest a few myths.

The challenge for those of us in the historic environment sector is to understand the knowl-



Muslim students from the Mulberry School for Girls take part in a visit to the Gurdwara Sikh Sanghat at Harley Grove in East London. Built in 1854–5 as a Congregational chapel, this listed building was later used as a synagogue before becoming a spiritual centre for the local Sikh community.

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Learning conservation and horticultural skills in the Victorian walled garden at Luton Hoo in Bedfordshire. The English Heritage Outreach Department is working in partnership with Luton Borough Council and BTCV to provide traditional craft skills training for young people excluded from mainstream education.
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edge, beliefs and traditions of the diverse communities who created it and the values of today's communities whose support is needed for its continued protection. That understanding will help us manage and tell the stories of our heritage in a way which makes it accessible to a wide range of people and enriches the story for everyone. But how do we get there? My view is we should not be paralysed by fear of causing offence or by the complexity and unfamiliarity of issues. We need to be confident in the value of expertise and courageous in dealing with accusations of political correctness.

An artefact embodies multiple values, reflecting the experiences and culture of different people, but this does not mean the role of the expert is irrelevant. As experts we need to listen to other points of view, engage in debate and open our minds to different ways of looking at things and new evidence. This is nothing new and it is not difficult. Crucially, though, we need to remain confident about the value of the expert in informing and educating people about the significance of the physical remains of the past. This is a two-way conversation from which everyone learns, and the result is informed and active participation in caring for the historic environment today and in the future.

As well as being confident we must be robust in challenging accusations of political correctness. English Heritage has recently been criticised for awarding blue plaques to 'obscure' black figures

and for focusing some of our work on the 2007 bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade this year. Only ten blue plaques out of a total of 800 are dedicated to people of African descent. These and other figures commemorated under the scheme should perhaps be more widely known; one of the key roles of the blue plaques scheme is the part it can play in making people aware of the figures who have shaped Britain's history. That is part of the joy of blue plaques – to discover something unknown and unexpected while walking down the street and to connect with the history all around us. Personally, I see no reason why, as a white woman, the history of black people in this country is any less part of my history than castles and medieval churches. That is the universal value of the physical remains of the past. It is something we all share, just by being here.

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One of the major issues for the future is to achieve a greater diversity amongst those of us who work within the sector. This will not only help generate support from a broader spread of the population but also enrich everyone's experience through a wider range of perspectives and values. But how do we get there? My personal view is that simplistic employment targets are not helpful. They can be dismissed as tokenism and can discredit the whole process of recruitment and appointment. It is far more important to look at the ways in which people enter historic environment professions and how we can inspire a whole new generation, in all its diversity, to study history and archaeology. Workforce diversity is closely tied up with issues of broader appeal and the way the historic environment is perceived. This is not an excuse for doing nothing. This issue of *Conservation Bulletin* has highlighted many of the things we can do to change perceptions, including our own.

We need a different approach but one which uses the skills and expertise we already have. This is vital if we are to have the skilled professionals as well as the committed volunteers and supportive public who will care for this country's extraordinary historic environment in the future. [n](#)

A Welcome White Paper, But What Next?

Sarah Buckingham *Head of Heritage Protection Operations, English Heritage*

The government's White Paper for the heritage sets out a radical but welcome agenda for reforming the way we protect and manage our valued historic environment.

The Government's White Paper *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century* was finally published on 8 March 2007. It sets out the framework for a radical reform of the way we protect and manage the historic environment, coupled with clear encouragement to get on with making reform happen.

Modernising the management of the historic environment, bringing it into the mainstream of environmental management, has long been advocated by English Heritage. These aspirations are shared by most of the historic environment sector, and the White Paper has been welcomed, with a remarkable, indeed impressive, degree of support.

Having worked in close partnership with government on the preparation of the White Paper, both the main thrust of reform and its detailed components are warmly endorsed by English Heritage. What is particularly welcome is the fact that this is a vote of confidence in a mature sector, ready to play its role in the reformed planning system and in developing sustainable communities, cornerstones of government's environmental policy. English Heritage is given an explicit mandate to take a lead in implementing reform and partnering the sector into a new era. Provided English Heritage and local authorities are given the resources effectively to take up major new responsibilities and the challenging agenda for change, it is a task that all should relish.

However, the White Paper is a milestone, not a destination, and we can afford neither inertia nor complacency. We have to sustain the momentum for reform. It is extremely heartening, therefore, to report that DCMS is now, assisted by English Heritage, working with speed on the preparation of a Heritage Bill. It is planned that this will be published in draft for pre-legislative consultation in late autumn 2007. The White Paper also requires English Heritage to begin work immediately on the new system in areas such as policy development, capacity building, designation reform, and heritage partnership agreements. Much can, indeed must, be achieved, in advance of the legislation being enacted.

The scope of change is huge and complex, and affects the whole sector. A strategic frame-

work is needed to ensure that the different components of reform are co-ordinated and carried forward, and that the whole sector is engaged – all parts will have to be agents, rather than recipients of change. English Heritage is now developing such a framework.

Finally, we have to acknowledge that reform rooted in political priorities and initiatives will inevitably carry an element of risk. While there are some elements – not least a change of *dramatis personae* at the top – we can do little to control, in others we have more agency. We can start to change our outlooks and practices in anticipation of reform; we can make some reforms happen now; but, most crucially of all, we can insure against risk by sustaining the present consensus. Solidarity will be particularly important as the Heritage Bill sails the choppy waters of Parliament. We have all come a long way, and much has been gained, so there is, otherwise, so much more to be lost. [n](#)

On page 46 Mike Harlow, English Heritage's Legal Director, takes a closer look at the likely mechanics and timetable of the reform process.



News from English Heritage

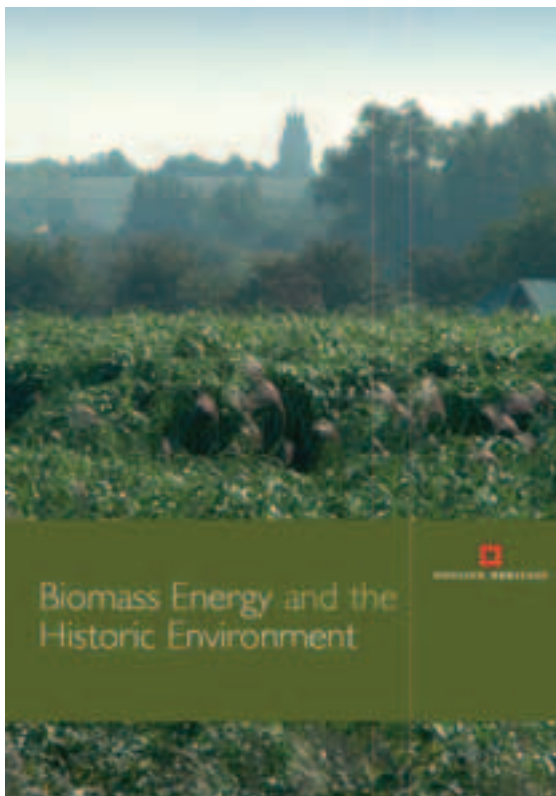
Biomass energy and the historic environment

In December 2006, English Heritage published guidance on the implications for the historic environment of energy production from biomass, as part of its growing range of guidance on climate change and its impacts.

Biomass fuel includes a wide range of plant materials and biodegradable waste, but particular attention is currently focused on energy crops, grown specifically for the purpose of energy generation. These include short rotation coppice woodland and exotic grasses, such as *Miscanthus*, which can grow to more than 3 metres.

The guidance addresses concerns about the potential archaeological and landscape impacts of biomass crop production. It is intended for developers of biomass energy projects and those, including local authority planners and their historic environment advisers, involved in strategic planning for renewable energy, in the determination of project-specific applications, and in the grant-aiding of new projects. The guidance is available at: <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/category.11122>

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HELM and Historic Environment Champions

Historic Environment – Local Management (HELM) is English Heritage's capacity building programme for historic environment professionals and non-heritage professionals. HELM was identified in the DCMS White Paper *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century* (published in March) as a key means of building capacity in local authorities and promoting understanding of the proposed new heritage protection system.

Historic Environment Champions provide leadership for heritage issues within their local authority. A well cared for and managed local historic environment improves everybody's quality of life, and Champions can make a real difference in unlocking this potential. In April 2007, almost 60 per cent of Local Authorities (227), four National Parks and the Greater London Authority had at least one elected-member Champion.

Through HELM, Champions can keep up-to-date, develop skills, share ideas and build partnerships. In July 2007 there will be four conferences on Heritage Protection Reforms. These will focus on the strategic issues, steps towards implementation and how Champions can support these. For more about Historic Environment Champions, to read the latest publications or see if your local authority has a Champion, visit the HELM website (www.helm.org.uk) or email: champions@english-heritage.org.uk.
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Suburbs

Many suburbs remain attractive and sought-after places to live more than a hundred years after they were built. *Suburbs and the Historic Environment* is aimed primarily at local planning authorities and examines the trends that are putting pressure on local character and identity in many historic suburbs. These include higher housing density in new development, the buoyant housing market and consequent demand for new houses and piecemeal and incremental change.

The document presents a series of case studies where local authorities have come up with innovative and successful solutions to suburban planning issues. It sets out English Heritage's advice on sustaining historic suburbs, and contains a check-



European Heritage Heads Forum

The second meeting of the European Heritage Heads Forum (EHHF), whose secretariat is provided by English Heritage, was held in Prague on 10–11 May 2007. The heads of 21 European heritage agencies came together to discuss significant issues affecting the cultural heritage sector. The concluding statement agreed that EHHF should:

- Refresh its commitment to HEREIN and encourage the Council of Europe to ensure that HEREIN meets the heritage sector's current needs.
- Make available current research on thermal efficiency and historic buildings.
- Work towards publication of case studies illustrating the economic and social benefits of investment in the historic environment.
- Propose ways in which members of EHHF can influence the development of EU legislation, recognising cultural heritage.

The next meeting will be held in Copenhagen in May 2008.

For further information visit the website www.ehhf.net

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Heritage Counts 2007

Heritage Counts 2007 will look at the trends in key indicators of the state of the historic environment since 2002. It will also explore the theme of learning and skills. Drawing on material from across the historic environment sector, it will explore the sector's contribution as a learning resource for schools. It will assess the policy response to concerns over shortages of some skills that may adversely affect the sector. It will look at the skills needed within local authorities to enable them to deliver the Heritage Protection Review and specific issues around the skills and training needs of volunteers.

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Tall buildings and World Heritage Sites

Revised English Heritage and CABE *Guidance on Tall Buildings* was published in June 2007. It updates the original document of March 2003 to reflect changes to the planning system and the experiences CABE and English Heritage have had in evaluating planning applications for tall buildings.

Central to the revised guidance document is

list for local authorities to consider when developing strategies to successfully manage change in such areas. Printed copies are available from English Heritage Customer Services (quoting 51323) on 0870 333 1181 or at customers@english-heritage.org.uk.

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Coastal towns

The English seaside is unique, but many of the fragile remnants from its heyday are not well understood and appreciated. Work is underway on a policy statement provisionally entitled *Regeneration in Historic Coastal Towns*. This will look at the economic and social issues facing coastal towns and communities, and how the historic environment can play a part in the efforts of local authorities to regenerate them.

Publication of the policy statement will coincide with a two-day English Heritage conference on the future of the England's seaside resorts. Seaside Heritage: Colour Past, Bright Future will be held on 16 and 17 October 2007 at St Mary in the Castle, Hastings, East Sussex. For more information and booking details, please visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/seasideheritage or contact Helen Charlton of Sussex Arts Marketing on 01273 882 112 or at helen.charlton@sam-culture.com
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Clevedon's Grade I listed pier has been the focal point of this historic seaside resort since it was first opened in 1869. During 2007 English Heritage will be using a major conference and new policy guidance to highlight the social and economic challenges now facing England's coastal towns.
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the recommendation that local authorities adopt a 'development plan-led' approach to tall buildings. This calls on local authorities to devise a development plan specifically related to the construction of tall buildings. These plans should be explicitly clear about where tall buildings should and should not go and must identify these areas in advance. Local authorities should also consider commissioning detailed urban design frameworks, to inform the decision-making. This will also include the need to assess impacts on important views and skylines.

Owing to their high profile and local impact, tall buildings should set exemplary standards in design and sustainability, and the revised guidance places sustainable design and construction as a crucial facet of these design standards. The document makes it explicit that proposals should exceed the latest regulations for minimising energy and reducing carbon emissions over the lifetime of the development.

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Socio-economic value in the Yorkshire Dales National Park

In 2006 English Heritage, in partnership with Defra and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, commissioned an evaluation of the social, economic and public benefits of different programmes of repair to traditional farm buildings and drystone walls in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

In the six-year study period more than 500 farm buildings and 191 km of drystone walls were repaired. It is estimated that these works created 74 jobs in the National Park and its wider local

area, and resulted in a total injection of between £7.08 million and £9.12 million to the local economy – with every £1 spent on repair work on buildings resulting in a total output within the wider local area of £2.48. Copies of the full socio-economic reports are available at www.helm.org.uk

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Places of worship fabric needs survey

This summer, English Heritage is publishing the results of a survey on the repair and maintenance needs of listed places of worship in England. Based on a sample of places of worship in six areas of the country, the reports build on a similar study conducted in 1994 (*Conservation Bulletin*, July 1998). The initial findings were a key part of the *Inspired!* campaign launched in May 2006 and the full reports now provide a valuable overview of the state of our historic places of worship, thirty years on from the introduction of grant aid for churches.

The first report, looking mainly at Anglican churches, estimates the total repair needs for the 14,500 listed places of worship as £1.42 billion over the next ten years, with the bulk, £925 million, needed within the next five years.

The second report widened the sample of non-Anglican places of worship, but reaches almost identical conclusions about the scale of repair needs. For copies of the reports, go to www.english-heritage.org.uk/inspired/ or email churches@english-heritage.org.uk

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