European Heritage Days as a resource for Democratic Participation

The power of grassroots heritage events with examples from England, United Kingdom

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European Heritage Days

Journées européennes du patrimoine

European Heritage Days at a glance…

51,000 Events

21 million Visitors

Hundreds of thousands of Volunteers

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Architecture

- A joined-up approach
- 50 years on from the European Architectural Heritage Year
- Themes help to shape events
- Shining a light on community stories – by communities – for communities

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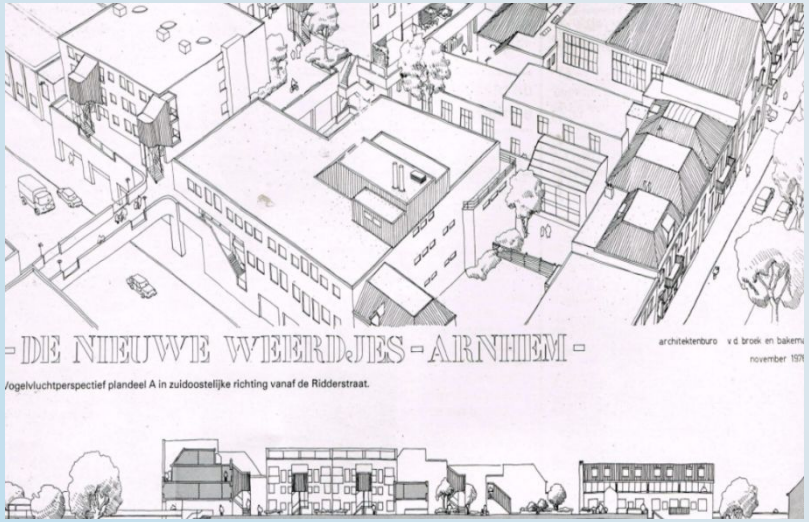

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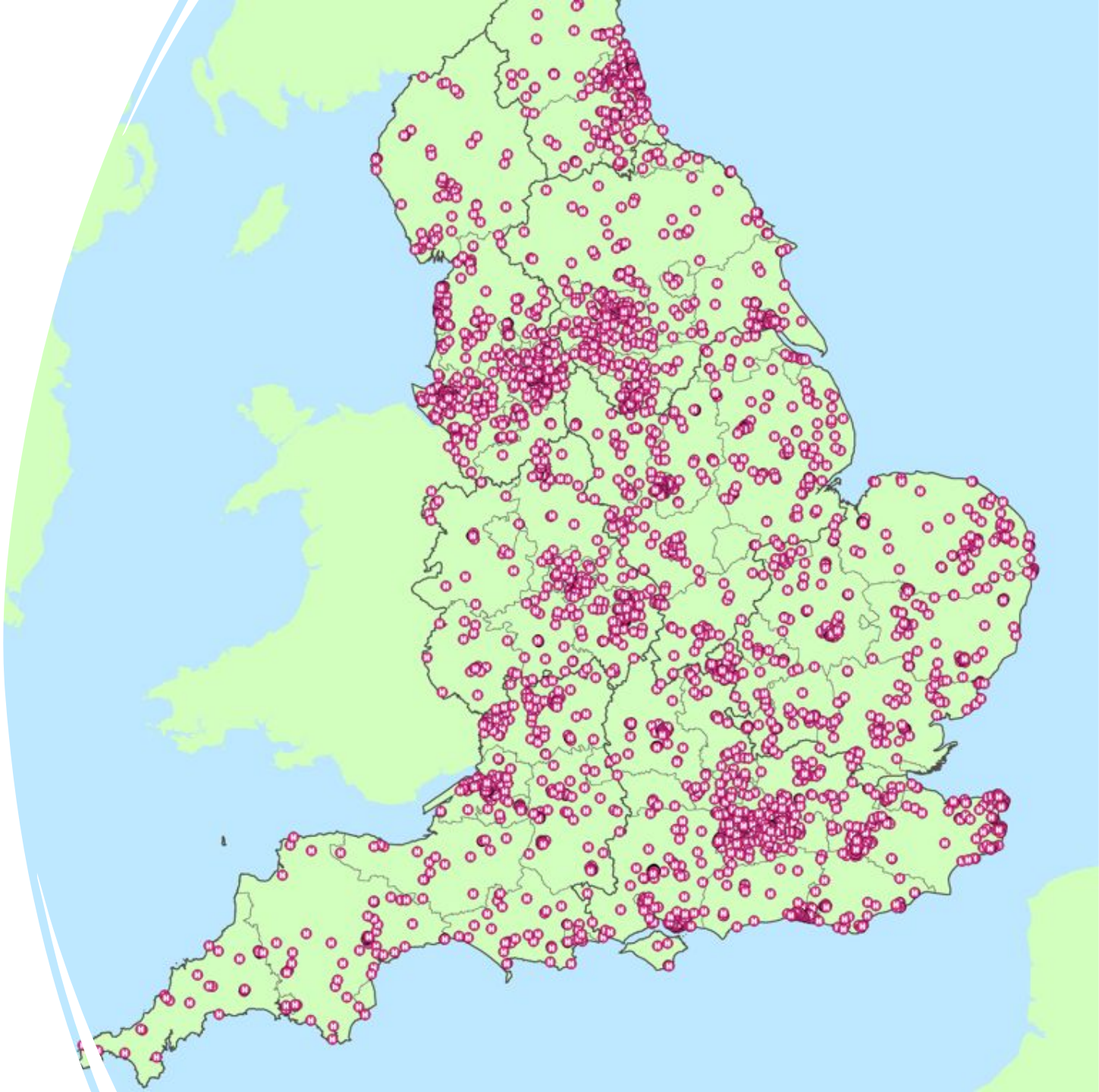
Heritage Open Days 2025

1.3 Million visitors

At 5,879 events



The power of a grassroots platform

We continue to see growth across the festival as a platform & network with:

100	2,549	8,800	44k
Local coordinators	Event organisers	Paid staff	volunteers

£11.9m

Spent in local economies across England!

A sustainable model for enabling democratic participation

- It's all about creating local ownership & a sense of pride
- 83% felt more proud of their local area after visiting an event
- 2/3 were inspired to make donations

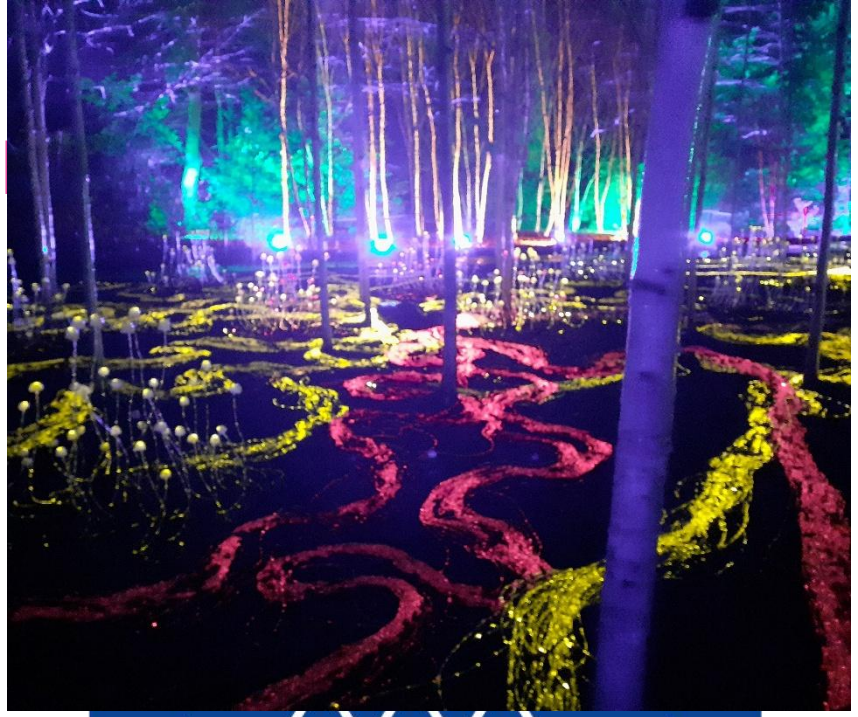
277k
visitors had not been to a heritage site in the last 12 months

59%
go on to visit heritage sites more often

8%
go on to do more voluntary work

“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.”

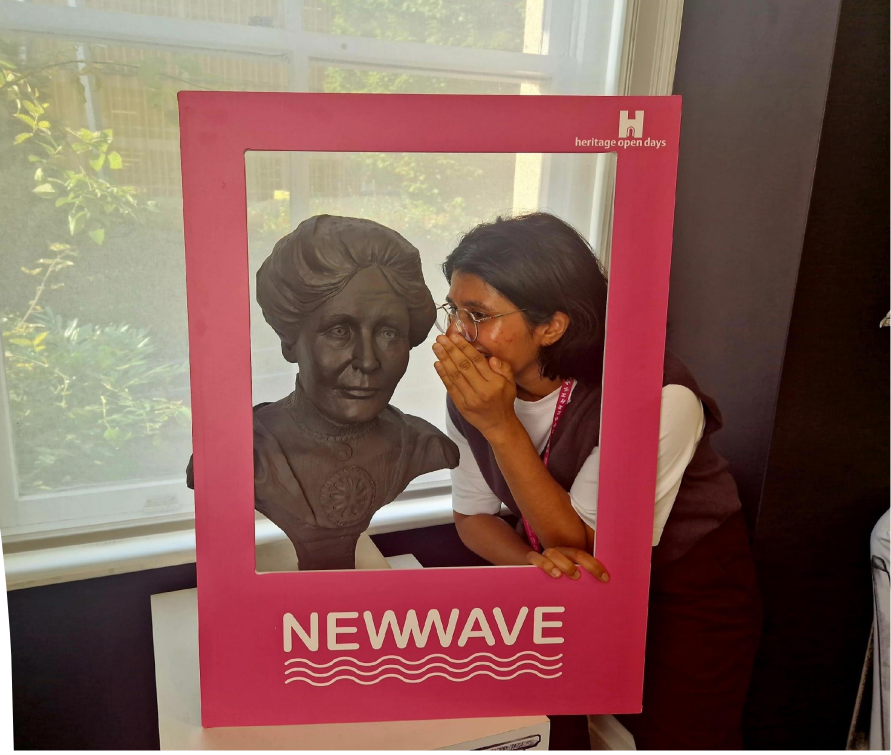
Festival event visitor



East Anglian
Air Ambulance
KW69 NAE
East Anglian
Air Ambulance

Inspiring the next generation

- Young people DO care about heritage & their local area
- There are barriers though (e.g. cost, transport, free time)
- We need to do more work to engage younger audiences and make sure they can access heritage



Meet Joseph!

heritage open days

Heritage as a resource

- HUGE tendency to underestimate the power of culture in unlocking democratic participation
- We need to keep doing more of this work, it is vital in empowering more people to feel democratically engaged.
- Very low cost model – with high potential to do even more!