



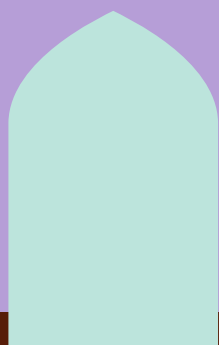
HISTORIC
HOUSES

In Good Hands

Understanding careers in the heritage sector



Abbotstford © Chris Lacey



Foreword

What does it mean to work in heritage? It's a question I've asked myself a lot over my own career, and it's one to which there is no clear-cut answer, which is perhaps part of the joy of this sector. You can be an architect or an estate manager, a marketing whizz or a stonemason, a curator or a data specialist. The sheer range of roles you can do whilst 'working in heritage' shows exactly how much of a cut-through our sector has. Our business may, at its heart, be about caring for the past, but it's also about being on the cutting edge of new technology, developing innovative new business ideas, fostering creativity and representing the UK to the world.

This report is based on responses to a survey of staff working at Historic Houses member places, and in-depth conversations with people working in a variety of different roles at these places, across the UK.

Clear themes emerged. 93% of respondents said they would recommend a career in heritage, whilst 83% said it was 'very' or 'quite' likely they would remain working in heritage in the future. A huge 87% reported being 'quite' or 'very' satisfied with their work. The added bonus of doing a job they enjoyed, with a heritage site as their office, was seen as one of the biggest draws of the role.

But it's not all positive. Respondents pointed out serious challenges: the difficulty of career progression, the scarcity of routes 'into' the sector, wages that were uncompetitive with comparable roles in more commercial sectors. These are problems that will take time to fix, particularly given many relate to underlying external business conditions.

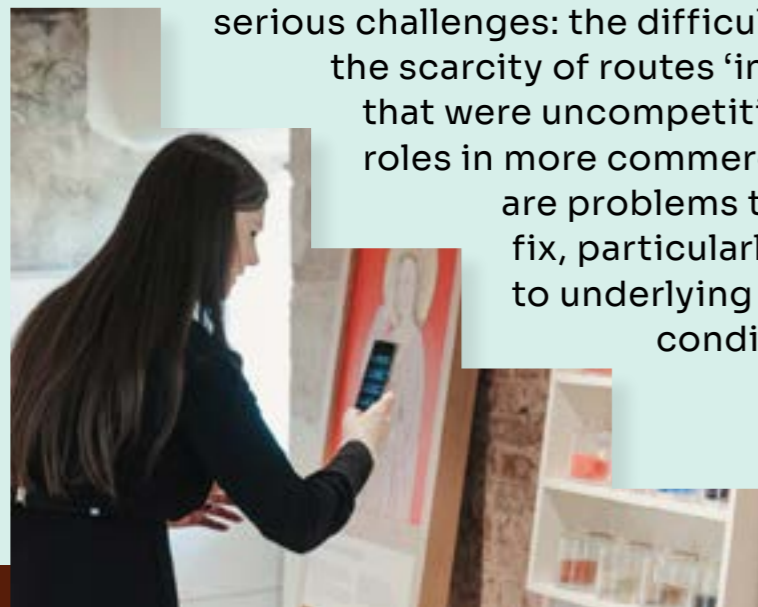


Photo courtesy of
The Charterhouse, Coventry



Work In A Castle is Historic Houses' contribution to helping tackle some of these problems. It's a dynamic new platform that will recognise the diversity of roles within the heritage sector, and offers a more flexible, personal way of finding a foot in the door, or progressing your career. It will also foster new connections for all those working in heritage: sharing ideas, troubleshooting, networking, and benchmarking.
workinacastle.com

A career in the heritage sector is a career to be proud of. I never cease to be impressed by the people I meet at our member places: by not just their skills and dedication, but by their creativity, their innovation, and their passion for their work. Giving more people more opportunities to find themselves working in heritage can only be a good thing for all involved.

Sarah Roller
Director of Policy
& Public Affairs
March 2026



Alnwick Castle © Chris Lacey

The bigger picture

Historic houses and heritage properties are far more than visitor attractions. They are hubs of economic activity, education, and community, which create a network that stretches across the UK and sits at the heart of rural communities.

Whether they are castles, palaces, houses, or designed landscapes, historic properties are, and have always been, important employers in their local communities. In 2022, the heritage sector in England directly employed more than 200,000 workers and supported an aggregate footprint of over half a million jobs, generating almost £45 billion to the UK economy.¹ In 2025, Historic Houses member properties across the UK supported over 12,000 FTE jobs, generating £1 billion in economic benefit.²



1. [‘The Heritage Sector in England and its Impact on the Economy’](#), *Historic England (2024)*, 9.

2. [‘A Fragile Inheritance: the state of the UK’s historic houses’](#), *Historic Houses (2026)*, 8.

Photo courtesy of Stansted Park



More than simply providing a pay cheque, historic houses and other heritage sites function as a cultural infrastructure. Research shows that built heritage and landscape provide tangible economic value beyond spreadsheets, reducing demand on health and welfare systems, increasing productivity, and attracting investment.³

Our research focused on the people behind those figures. We surveyed over 250 representatives from Historic Houses properties across the UK, asking everyone from trainees to CEOs about what it means to work in heritage.⁴

3. [‘Culture as Growth Infrastructure’](#), *Creative UK (2025)*, 4.

4. Historic Houses ran a two-part online survey aimed at employees of member properties and those responsible for recruitment. The survey ran from Monday 9 February – Sunday 15 March 2026 and generated 253 responses (220 general employees, 33 recruitment) from 102 properties. The survey combined qualitative and quantitative questions and could be answered anonymously.



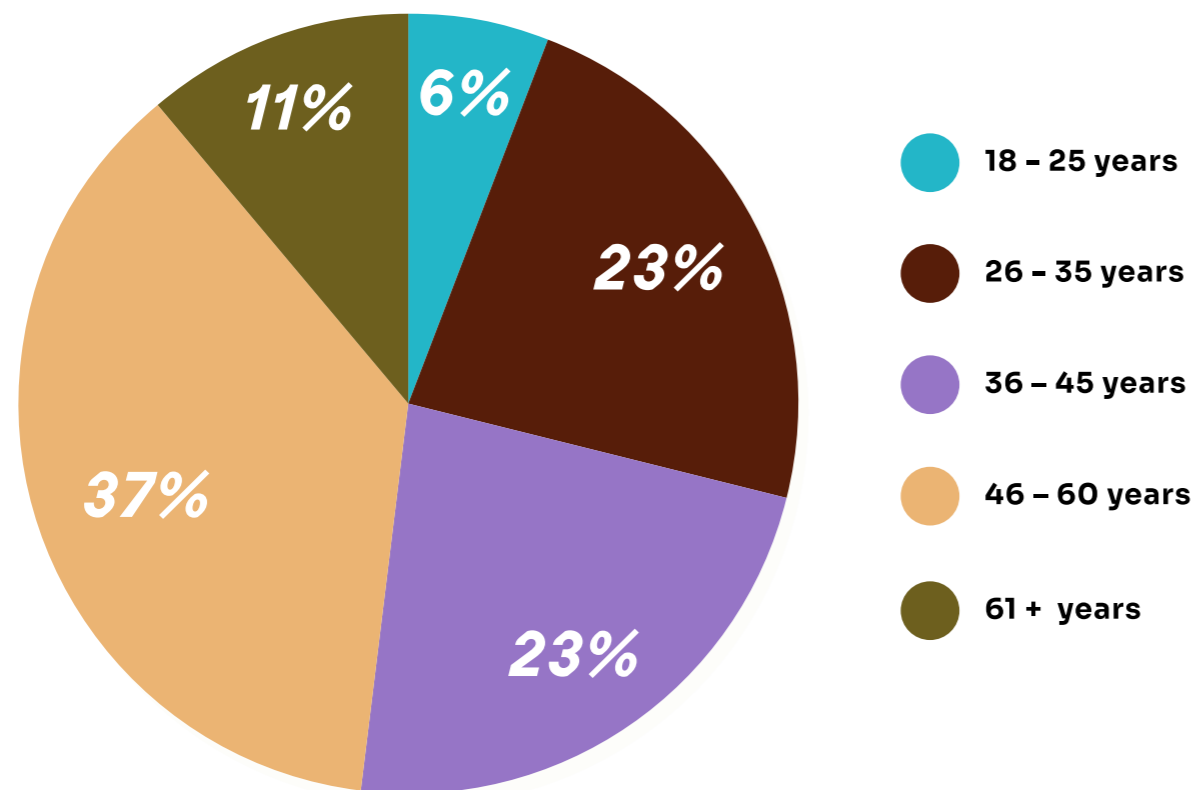
Art restorer © Layton Thompson

A diverse sector...

Historic Houses member properties employ people of all ages and backgrounds in a wide variety of roles, sometimes being among the biggest employers in their local community. Some, like Chatsworth House, boast a staff of around one thousand while others depend on smaller tight-knit teams.

The majority of Historic Houses properties are in rural, and in some cases remote, parts of the UK, and they provide a vital function as local employers. Respondents to our survey repeatedly mentioned that ‘being local’ to a property or place — whether lifelong or after a relocation — was a key motivation for them seeking employment there. Others were delighted at how short their commute to work was!

Figure 1: Age of Employees at Historic Houses Member Properties



Historic Houses places employ across the age groups, providing both a first job for young people in rural areas and a welcoming career change for people close to or at retirement. Indeed, younger people were a minority of those who responded to our survey. Only 6% of respondents were aged 18-25, compared to 48% aged over 46.



A university education was disproportionately represented among survey respondents, with almost three-quarters having at least an undergraduate degree, compared to the national average of around one-third.⁵ However, the proportion of those with technical or vocational training in heritage (7%) was broadly on par with the national average (6.5%).⁶

53% of all respondents told us that they had been with their current employer for at least five years and 45% had been in the heritage sector for at least 10 years. A remarkable 90% of those aged 46-60 had at least 10 years' experience working in the heritage sector, showing that a career in heritage can be a career for life.

5. 33.8% in England and Wales ([ONS Census, 2021](#)) 32.5% in Scotland ([Scotland Census, 2022](#)).

6. 5.3% in England and Wales ([ONS Census, 2021](#)), 7.6% in Scotland ([Scotland Census, 2022](#)).

A career in heritage might have been an unexpected change. Over half of respondents told us that they did not start their career wanting to work in heritage and many said that they did not know about heritage as a career option when they were at school or university. Encouragingly, three-quarters of recruiters told us that they would be very or quite confident to hire someone from outside of the heritage sector.

Around one-fifth began working in heritage following a career or lifestyle change. Some 'fell into it by accident', others were actively looking for a career change from another sector. Those sectors included corporate fields like technology and pharmaceuticals, service professions like education, the military, and nursing, and other cultural sectors such as theatre, museums, and libraries. Several respondents began working in heritage after retiring from a different career. One retired nurse discovered that 'it is wonderful to work with the public when they are having fun rather than being unwell!'

For those who had always wanted to work in heritage, there was a clear sense of it being a vocation rather than just a job. Around a quarter of respondents told us that they had a lifelong love of history, even singling out specific childhood visits as the moment that sparked their passion. People found immense value in not only bringing history to life, but in telling marginalised histories, connecting to the past through objects, and preserving heritage for future generations.



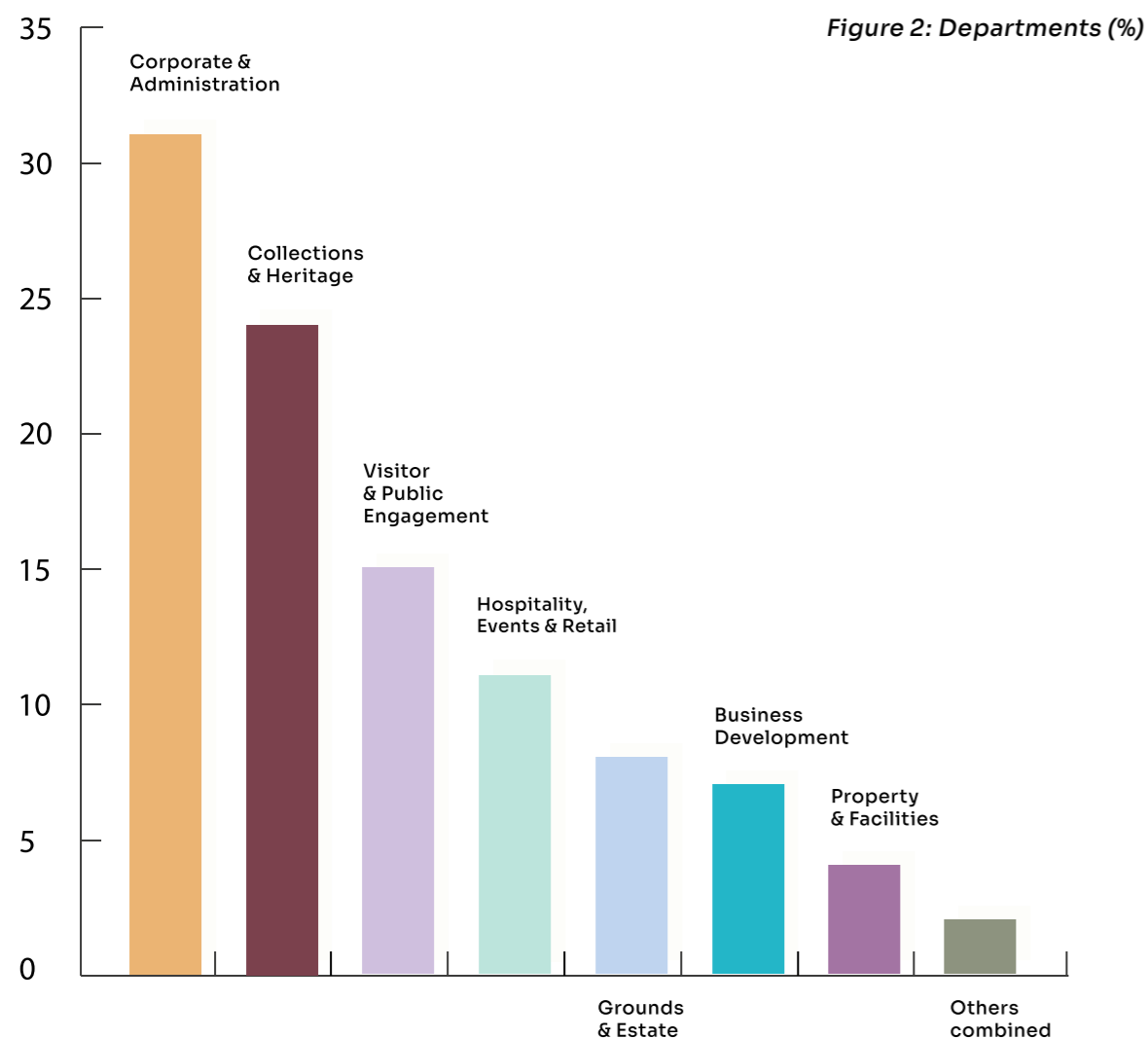
Blenheim Palace © Chris Lacey



...With diverse roles

The idea of ‘working in a castle’ often conjures up images of tour guides at the door and curators in the archives, but for many, the reality can be very different to what you might imagine. As one respondent put it, ‘often the heritage sector is considered academic and stuffy: librarians, tweed jackets, and dust, but there are so many opportunities for people with ‘professional’ skills, creative skills, and masses of really fun roles.’

Only two-fifths (39%) of staff who responded to the survey worked in visitor services and public engagement, or in curatorial or archivist roles. Almost one-third (30%) worked



in corporate and administrative roles including finance and sustainability. Hospitality, events, and retail are important income generators for historic properties and constituted 12% of respondents. Another 12% worked directly with the property and grounds, including as gardeners, housekeepers, and estate workers. Visitor services was nevertheless the largest functional area of the people we surveyed, making up almost a quarter (24%) of respondents’ jobs, from house guides and trainees to managers. This shows just how important public engagement roles are at many Historic Houses properties.

Education and learning was a relatively small but important component of public-facing work. Just over half of Historic Houses member properties employ a dedicated member of staff to lead on learning and engagement.⁷ This reflects the growing importance of meeting the needs of specific groups within the local community, such as working with schools and other learner groups.



Photo courtesy of Marchmont

The proliferation of job titles at Historic Houses member properties was reflective of broader shifts, as houses diversify their income streams. Business development, including marketing and sales, was a growth area, while nature restoration and sustainability roles were increasingly found sitting alongside more traditional ‘estate manager’ positions.

Job titles in public-facing roles also suggested a shift. Houses increasingly employed ‘visitor experience’ teams (rather than the traditional ‘visitor services’), indicative of a shift towards meeting ever-rising customer expectations.⁸ Unusual job titles such as the ‘Flying School Supervisor’ at Goodwood Estate and the ‘Maker of Things’ at Chillingham Castle sat alongside more traditional titles like ‘Warden’, ‘House Guide’, and ‘Head Gardener’, showcasing some of the diversity that working in heritage involves.

7. ‘Historic Houses Annual Survey: Education and Outreach’, Historic Houses (2026).

8. 50% of visitors to Britain are ‘Adventurers’ or ‘Experience Seekers’, ‘MIDAS Report’, Visit Britain (2022), 9.

Progress is often non-linear

While the majority of respondents (53%) told us that they had changed roles during their time at their current workplace, fewer than a fifth (19%) felt that there was much room for progression, a trend that can also be seen across the broader arts and culture sectors.⁹ What emerged was a picture of a sector that does not provide a straightforward career ladder, but rather offers an ever-changing and versatile career.

Linear progression can occur in the heritage sector. Estate managers we spoke to started their careers as assistant land agents; curators got their foot in the door as collections assistants; hospitality managers started as event planners.

Progression was sometimes achieved by moving laterally or diagonally between departments. One visitor experience manager began work as an administrative assistant; a current archivist started at their workplace as a room steward.

Respondents also experienced widening job remits, when they were asked to take on new responsibilities. While this provided professional development for some, others told us about the stress that wearing a lot of hats could sometimes bring, particularly in small teams with limited support.

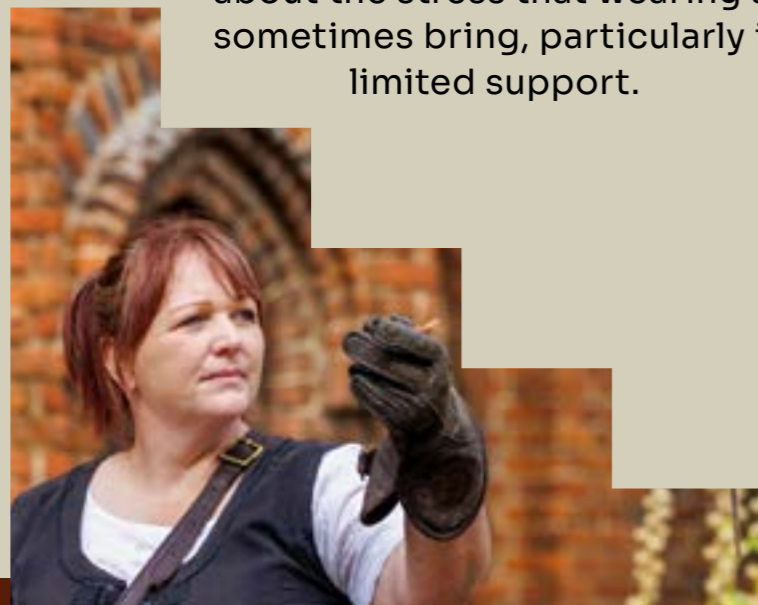


Photo courtesy of Layer Marney Tower falconery
© Jim Carter Photography

Although other research has found that most advertised roles in heritage fall into the mid-career category, our research suggested that mid-career roles were limited.¹⁰ The majority of people who leave arts, culture, and heritage roles move into other occupations with similar professional status rather than experiencing downward occupational mobility.¹¹ Over one-third of respondents said that the lack of clear career progression was what they enjoyed least about their heritage career. It seems clear: without investing in mid-career workers, they could move elsewhere.

Career changes led by transferable skillsets rather than linear in-industry progression seemed to be a growing trend, both for bringing people into heritage and for losing them from it. However, we also noted the lack of clear entry routes into the heritage sector, either for prospective early-career workers or for mid-career changes. Only 5% of respondents entered the sector through an internship, apprenticeship, or by a targeted support scheme.



Abbotsford © Chris Lacey

9. [‘Arts Pay’, Arts Professional & Baker Richards \(2025\), 91–98.](#)

10. [‘Sector Recruitment Analysis’, The Heritage Alliance \(2024\), 3.](#)

11. [‘Who Stays and Who Leaves?’, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre \(2025\), 28.](#)

Success stories



Photo courtesy of Castle Howard
© Tom Arbor

At Castle Howard in Yorkshire, Matthew Wood's career in curation began with a summer work placement, which led first to an internship and then to a full-time role as curator.

Formal training schemes can open doors in heritage-specific disciplines just as effectively as they can in traditional apprenticeship fields like construction. These examples demonstrate what is possible when larger properties invest in their people.

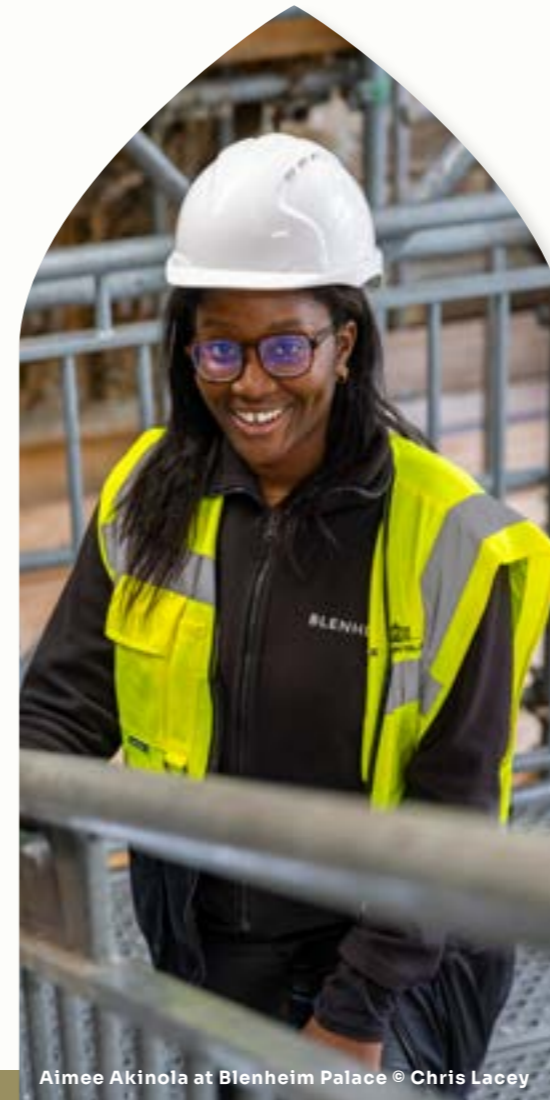
Targeted training schemes at properties can address a broad spectrum of skills needs. At Blenheim Palace, Aimee Akinola is midway through a master's degree apprenticeship in construction management, having completed a first apprenticeship on site.



Aimee Akinola in discussion at Blenheim Palace © Chris Lacey



Photo courtesy of Matthew Wood



Aimee Akinola at Blenheim Palace © Chris Lacey

With a background in architecture and the built environment, Aimee, *'loved historic buildings, but wasn't really sure how to get into it, or if a job existed in that field.'*

Blenheim's scheme gave her a clear route in and, in doing so, helped address one of their most pressing skills gaps.



University education is far from a pre-requisite for a career in heritage (despite the high proportion of degree-educated respondents in our survey), and indeed a degree does not always provide the skills necessary for running heritage sites.¹² ‘On the

job’ learning might be just as important. One respondent with a master’s degree who works in collections described themselves as being dissatisfied with their experience working in heritage, wishing that they had known how little their academic success would matter in the day-to-day work. Two-thirds of recruiters told us that they found it difficult to hire staff and that they struggled to find skilled craftspeople when they needed them.

Positively, this suggests that targeted investment in upskilling and vocational training could have a real impact on career longevity and satisfaction in the heritage sector. Existing schemes have proven successful both in addressing skills gaps for employers and in providing apprentices with valuable professional experience and qualifications. Apprenticeships targeted in local areas have been hugely popular, and this was reflected in the experience of people who had completed similar schemes at Historic House member properties.¹³

12. ‘Apprenticeships in the historic environment sector: Examining employer interest and barriers to implementation’, *Historic England* (2023), 40.

13. ‘The Class Ceiling’, *Rise Associates* (2026), 22.

Financial worries are sharpening, but the sector remains rewarding

The high cost of living and fall in real household incomes in recent years have created challenges for all sectors.¹⁴ The majority of recruiters recognised the pressure for higher wages, and more than two-thirds of respondents flagged pay as their least favourite aspect of their career in heritage. Job security was a less significant concern, although 15% had doubts about their long-term prospects.





Powderham Castle © Chris Lacey

Research shows that the modal starting salary for a heritage role in England and Wales is £25,000 - £29,999.¹⁵

In comparison, the median average salary for workers aged 18-29 across all sectors was £28,322 in 2025.¹⁶ With the rise in national minimum wage FTE for workers aged 21 or over to £23,132 on 1 April 2026, most younger workers beginning their career in heritage are paid well above minimum wage and in line with or above the national average.¹⁷

Other research has highlighted that concerns about wages are endemic in the arts, culture, and

tourism sectors generally.¹⁸ We found that heritage work provided compensating advantages including high levels of job satisfaction and a sense of purpose. Nevertheless, of the respondents to our survey who were unlikely to remain working in heritage or were unsure about their future in the sector, almost two-thirds cited pay as a deciding factor, often with regret. 'It's hard,' said one respondent, 'I love the sector and I love what it represents, but I also have to consider my finances.'



Photo courtesy of Inveraray Castle

15. 'Sector Recruitment Analysis', [The Heritage Alliance \(2024\)](#), 3.

16. 'Average UK Salary By Age In 2026', [Forbes \(2026\)](#).

17. Table: 'The UK minimum wage', [National Minimum Wage, moneysavingexpert.com \(2025\)](#).

18 'The Class Ceiling', [Rise Associates \(2026\)](#), 6.

Entry to the sector can be especially difficult for people from low-income backgrounds, a problem not limited to heritage but exacerbated by a reliance on the widespread involvement of volunteers. As one respondent put it, 'not having volunteering experience puts you at a significant disadvantage to your peers, however, having the time and resources to volunteer is a luxury not many people have.' Other people echoed this sentiment, saying that it was hard to progress without 'working for free'. Targeted upskilling and training at the two critical junctures of early-career recruitment and mid-career retention could therefore address both growing skills gaps and people's frustration with pay and development.

Above all, 93% would recommend a career in heritage, with one respondent saying that 'I have tolerated previous jobs as a source of income but working in heritage has made me genuinely happy.'

'93% would recommend.'

'Working in heritage has made me genuinely happy.'



Alnwick Castle © Chris Lacey

For the vast majority of our respondents, the benefits of working in heritage consistently outweighed the low pay. 87% said that they were ‘very’ or ‘quite satisfied’ with their experience of working in heritage. Several told us that they would only leave when they retired and even then, reluctantly. The work itself was highly rewarding, and the sense of satisfaction derived from working at a historic site set a career in heritage apart from comparable roles in more corporate environments.

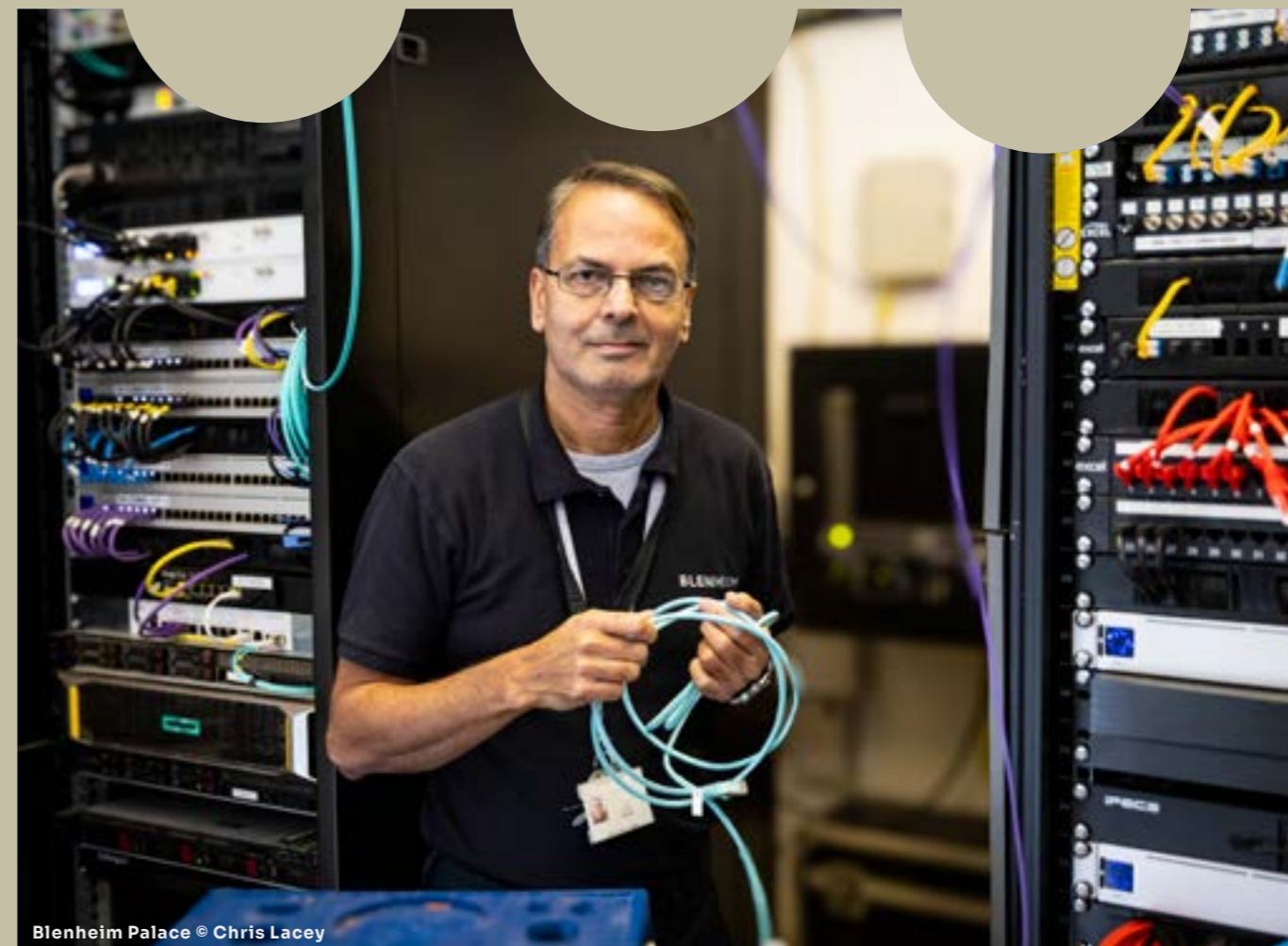
The community that people gain through working in heritage was also seen as a key benefit, with almost two-thirds saying that their colleagues were one of the main things they enjoyed about their work. Respondents told us that it ‘felt like home’ to find work alongside likeminded people who shared their passion for history and heritage.

Feeling like you are a part of a bigger story that spans generations is another unique benefit to working in heritage. For some this came from playing a part in the history of a place which might have extended for centuries. For others, it was more personal. One respondent told us that they were working to ‘ensure that the places I visited with my grandfather are still there for my children’s children.’

Historic places can ‘get under your skin’ in a way that other workplaces simply do not. People found value in the places themselves, the people they worked with, and the sense of being trusted to play a part in something irreplaceable. Or, as one respondent put it: ‘the magic of these historic places never dims.’



Powderham Castle
© Chris Lacey



Blenheim Palace © Chris Lacey

A map, not a maze

A career in heritage is, for most people, a deeply rewarding and long-lasting one. People come into it from almost every professional background, driven by a desire to find real value in their working life. That sense of purpose and passion is the sector’s greatest strength.

Passion alone cannot sustain a workforce. Our research has revealed some consistent issues among heritage employees. Entry routes into the sector can be opaque, and even after a job has been found concerns can remain about pay and progression. This risks giving the impression that a career in heritage is accessible only to a relative few. This needs to change.

Our research suggests three key areas to prioritise for employers in the heritage sector:

1. Provide a map, not a maze, for a career in heritage.

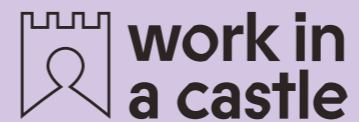
Only 5% of respondents to our survey entered through a formal scheme, and academic qualifications alone do not equip people with the skills they need to thrive. Investing in targeted training and clearer pathways is an investment in the longevity of careers — and of the properties that depend on them.

2. Recognise that passion and goodwill alone are not enough.

Across the sector, job titles and responsibilities have not always kept pace with the demands placed on staff. Standardised salary frameworks, clearer contracts, and transparent job descriptions can improve retention and foster greater job satisfaction.

3. Raise the profile of what working in a historic property really entails.

The sector's outdated tweedy image bears little resemblance to the realities of careers that span marketing, hospitality, estate management, and much more. Raising awareness of what heritage work actually looks like in schools, universities, and among mid-career professionals, could be one of the best investments that the sector could make.



Addressing these challenges requires collective action. Historic Houses is committed to playing its part: Work In A Castle is our new, free platform connecting people who want to work in the independent heritage sector with those already doing so.
workinacastle.com

But it is one piece of a much larger picture. We urge government as well as employers in the heritage sector to take note of the recommendations in this report.

Historic places will only thrive if the right people are in them. Those people are waiting to be found. The task now is to show them the way in, and to keep giving them a reason to stay.





HISTORIC HOUSES

