

**AHRC's Heritage Strategic Priority Area:
Future Directions
Update March 2018**

Introduction: AHRC's Future Heritage Strategy

1. Heritage is one of the AHRC's three priority areas, alongside Design and Modern Languages. The on-going development of our strategy for the heritage priority area builds on the substantial heritage related research funded through AHRC's responsive mode research schemes, post-graduate training, international and knowledge exchange funding. It also connects with past thematic initiatives, including the AHRC Museums and Galleries Programme (2005- 10) and joint AHRC- EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme (2007- 12) and with other AHRC thematic initiatives such Care for the Future, Digital Transformations, Science in Culture, Translating Cultures, Conflict, Connected Communities and the Creative Economy. It also builds upon a range of targeted calls and collaborations both in the UK and internationally, including the European Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) on Cultural Heritage and Global Change. The strategy also builds on a range of partnerships across the sector, including for example ten years of AHRC funding for a range of heritage organisations as independent research organisations (IROs), as recognised in the recent report [*A Decade of Success*](#), and through collaborative doctoral awards / partnerships. It also recognises the role of heritage as a key part of the UK research infrastructure, and in forging long-term transnational links.
2. Heritage represents the accumulated diverse collections, material traces, knowledge, practices, skills, places and institutions on which we draw to bring the past into the present and to stimulate reflection on the future. It forms the evolving collective cultural memories of societies, acting as a source of artistic, literary, and scientific inspiration, creativity and enterprise for current and future generations. It contributes to diverse and changing identities and can provide the basis for the exchange (and contesting) of ideas, learning and knowledge between and across cultures and generations. The UK possesses an extremely diverse, broad-based and skilful heritage infrastructure, which encompasses tangible, intangible and digital heritages, in organisations large and small, professional and volunteer and a range of global collections and collaborations. Combined with the UK's research excellence in the arts and humanities, heritage science and technology, this creates rich heritage environments and ecosystems, which support collaborative research, skills and impact within and beyond the UK heritage sector.
3. The AHRC's future strategy involves leadership and support for the continued development of heritage research as a vibrant, innovative, highly collaborative, cross-disciplinary and international research field. It will be informed by on-going engagement with the heritage sector and research community to ensure that it reflects changing research needs and opportunities. It recognises that the research environment for heritage is dynamic and evolving in range of ways, including:
 - wider recognition of the breadth of types and methodologies of research that have an important contribution to the field from across the full range of the arts and humanities disciplines and organisations;
 - the continued emergence of heritage science as a major new research field and the growing importance of cross-disciplinary approaches in

heritage research, and innovative intersections with advances in science and technology (e.g. in scanning, dating, materials, etc.)

- capitalising on the opportunities created for the heritage sector by developments in digital technologies, data management and analytics and in fields such as visualisation, immersive experience, text and data mining, use of AI and machine learning and community engagement;
- the emergence of new requirements for research skills and infrastructure to underpin research innovation (e.g. in terms of data and collections management, access to facilities and mobile technologies, sharing of expertise globally, etc.);
- the strengthening of interconnections between research, policy and practice, both in the UK and internationally and increasing moves towards research co-design and co-production with heritage institutions and practitioners as a part of 'heritage ecosystems' and the growing opportunities for pathways to research impact and wider benefits both within the heritage sector and beyond;
- the growth of participatory approaches to heritage research involving diverse publics and communities;
- the increasing diversity of heritages and the heritage sector and research challenges around sustainability created by the growth in the diversity and scale of 'heritage' assets;
- wider understanding of the cultural, economic and societal value of heritage and heritage research and skills and the innovative uses of heritage (e.g. in creative and digital economies) and emerging policy and practice agendas this is stimulating;
- the growth of international collaborative opportunities and heritage as a global research field, the importance of transnational research agendas and intersections with wider global societal challenges;
- the need to balance and broaden the scope and understanding of the UK regional heritage agenda, including new uses of heritage in education, placemaking, local agendas and interaction with the creative industries;
- increasing scope for research collaboration and innovation with IROs and heritage organisations to address enduring and emerging challenges and support innovation (e.g. in relation to use of collections).

4. The strategy for the AHRC's heritage priority area is seen to be evolving rather than fixed, adapting and responding to continuing consultations, dialogue and emerging developments. As the strategy develops we will aim to lead research collaborations across the diverse heritage sector and with other relevant organisations, both in the UK and internationally, working with partners to support the development of the capabilities, facilities and skills needed to underpin research innovation in this field and build strong pathways to impact¹.

5. The heritage sector forms an integral and vital part of a much wider and highly dynamic cultural and creative ecosystem and economy, and its changing role in UK and global society needs to be considered in wider cultural, social and economic contexts. This strategy therefore interconnects with wider AHRC strategy, including the work of the Heritage Priority Area Leadership Fellow, collaboration with IROs and Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme. The AHRC is uniquely well placed to lead thinking about heritage research in its widest sense and to address cross-cutting, inter-connected and transnational issues.

¹ The strategy deliberately takes a broad view of cultural heritage (incorporating the tangible, intangible, digital, intellectual, artistic etc. and the connections between them) and of heritage-related processes, whilst recognising that there are important research and practice issues surrounding the conceptualisation and use of the term 'heritage'.

AHRC's Leadership Role in Heritage Research

6. The AHRC's distinctive contribution to the future of heritage research will build on:
 - the breadth of our research interests in diverse heritages which cut across tangible, intangible, natural, cultural, virtual and digital forms of heritage;
 - our existing diverse portfolio of high quality, collaborative heritage research, training and knowledge exchange activities, reflecting the UK's strong research base and infrastructure, including the wider heritage sector and the research leadership role played by Independent Research Organisations;
 - the range and strengths of our existing partnerships and collaborations within the heritage sector and the impact pathways that that these collaborations with the sector offer both with diverse audiences in the UK and globally, ensuring the widest possible research dissemination and engagement;
 - the transformative impact of AHRC support for collaborative research training and skills development in the heritage sector, including the 274 doctorates funded through the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme since 2013;
 - our capacity to bring together issues around research capabilities, research excellence and innovation, world-leading heritage practice, knowledge exchange and support for research which addresses user needs and has impact;
 - the significant international reach of our activities and our influence;
 - our ability to work in cross-disciplinary ways both across the arts and humanities and with wider fields of social science, science and technology;
 - the unique capacity of the research we support to place 'heritage(s)' within its wider cultural and historic contexts, to contribute to our understanding of its broader cultural and societal value, and to explore connections between heritage and wider cultural ecosystems and creative practices.

7. The AHRC has an important role in leading research and policy/practice debates which address fundamental underpinning or cross-cutting heritage research issues. These include (for example):
 - What constitutes 'heritage' and who decides what is 'heritage', how does heritage shape - and how is it shaped by - diverse cultural identities and values, and what contribution does it make to economic development, cross-cultural engagement, health and well-being and our visions of the future?
 - How is heritage used to include and exclude certain individuals and groups within socio-cultural collectives, and in what ways can critical approaches to heritage contribute to understanding and intervening in such processes?
 - How can research inform the critical choices that need to be made about what to keep and what not to keep, about the sustainable management of heritage in changing times and to support creativity and innovation in the ways that societies engage with and use heritage, in all its many different forms?
 - What is the role of intangible heritage - and its interconnections with tangible and digital heritage- in these debates, given its current under-representation² in policy/practice debates in the UK? Indeed are such distinctions between intangible, tangible and digital heritage useful?
 - How are the interactions and inter-connections between different forms of heritages (tangible, digital, intangible, natural/environmental, emerging etc), histories and cultures, changing?
 - How do we 'count', 'value' and 'authenticate' heritages in different cultural contexts?
 - How do heritage practices need to adapt to address challenges such as: contested and forgotten heritages; new interpretations and ways of

²In addition to not being included in Heritage 2020 or being a focus for the National Heritage Science Forum, the UK is not one of the 161 states that have signed up to the 2003 UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

representing heritage; changing ownership, rights, roles and responsibilities within and across communities and generations; exploiting the opportunities offered by digital and other technologies and open/big data; uneven distributions of the costs and benefits arising from heritage; and the re-purposing and mis-use of heritage.

8. International comparative and collaborative research, and co-design and co-production approaches with the heritage sector and wider communities, will be important to addressing many of these issues. The AHRC already has international credibility due to its former strategic programme on Science and Heritage and its prominent role in European work in this area and the wide range of international collaborations across the globe within its wider research portfolio, reflecting the international connectedness of the UK research community and heritage organisations.

Future Strategic Objectives and Framework

9. We will deliver the strategy and meet the leadership challenge through four cross-cutting and interconnected strategic objectives. These build on, and complement, the current extensive portfolio of activities, and aim to ensure that this cross-disciplinary field is enriched by engagement with a wide range of perspectives from across arts and humanities research fields, wider cross-disciplinary and cross-national perspectives, collaboration with the heritage sector and engagement with wider non-academic sectors:

I) *To further develop heritage research as an innovative and broad cross-disciplinary field.*

Three key dimensions to this are:

- i) ***strengthening cross-disciplinary links between the arts and humanities and the sciences*** (including the social sciences), building in particular on the success of the AHRC/ESPRC Science and Heritage Research Programme and working with other UKRI Councils to support the continuing emergence of Heritage Science as an innovative cross-disciplinary research field, and continuing to provide opportunities for new reciprocal cross-disciplinary engagements (e.g. with the environmental sciences in respect to natural/ environmental heritage, with the social sciences around post-conflict transitions, etc.) which open up new research questions, approaches and applications within the sciences, social sciences and in the arts and humanities;
- ii) ***broadening engagement across arts and humanities disciplines in heritage research*** to ensure that the heritage research field is able to draw on a wide range of cross-disciplinary expertise from across the arts and humanities and informs and inspires the development of wider arts and humanities research;
- iii) ***supporting research innovation and ambition and challenging, critically reflective research***, through both responsive mode provision and through strategic/ thematic or international calls aimed at addressing emerging research challenges, supporting exploratory awards or providing opportunities to bring together diverse and/or international perspectives to discuss contentious research issues.

II) *To extend collaborations, partnerships, knowledge exchange and pathways to impact in heritage research.*

Three key elements to this are:

- i) ***widening collaborations across the Heritage sector*** – developing current partnerships and collaborations (e.g. with IROs) and widening these to other key organisations in the heritage sector and wider cultural ecosystems (both in the UK and internationally), ensuring that research agendas are informed

by organisational and user needs, exploiting opportunities for knowledge exchange and research co-production with the sector and strengthening pathways to sustainable heritage management and wider societal impact from research;

- ii) **enhancing community and public engagement**, further developing the innovative work under the Connected Communities Programme and other strategic activities and partnerships, including supporting developments in participatory, inclusive, co-production and 'citizen heritage' research approaches with diverse communities and heritages;
- iii) **strengthening knowledge exchange and connectivity beyond the heritage sector** – for example, exploring new connections and pathways to impact with the wider experience, creative, digital and knowledge economies and in local, regional and urban economies and clusters, with public policy, with international development agencies, and with emerging social, health and wellbeing agendas.

III) To strengthen global interconnections in heritage research.

Three key elements to this are:

- i) **extending international collaborations**, building on AHRC's leading role in European and wider international partnerships, including the JPI Cultural Heritage & Global Change, and the strong international connections of UK heritage institutions and IROs, to create opportunities to collaborate and share heritage research expertise and data across national boundaries;
- ii) **developing the potential of heritage research to contribute to addressing global challenges**, exploring the potential for internationally collaborative heritage research to contribute to sustainable global / international development and addressing other challenges such as transitions from conflict, environmental change and disaster response, building on opportunities through the GCRF and Newton Fund, exploiting opportunities for heritage research to support enhanced international co-operation and building the evidence base for the contribution of heritage research to addressing global challenges;
- iii) **exploring global heritages**, facilitating international and cross-cultural research to shed new insights on the changing role of heritage in the context of an more inter-connected world and the increasing mobility of people, ideas, data and artefacts, and exploring intersections with issues such as sense of place, environmental and climate change, identity, cross-cultural communication, inclusion and cultural diversity;

IV) To enhance research capability for heritage research as a cross-disciplinary and collaborative field of enquiry.

Three key elements to this are:

- i) **supporting the development of people and skills**, building on current collaborative training schemes, including the CDP scheme, and recognising the value that heritage organisations, collections and environments can provide in supporting the development of skilled researchers, addressing strategically important areas of national capability including at both doctoral and early career researcher level, and developing capability for collaborative, co-produced, cross-disciplinary and /or cross-national heritage research;
- ii) collaboration with heritage organisations and IROs to promote increased **recognition of heritage collections, data and related expertise and equipment as important components of the national research infrastructure**;
- iii) **exploiting the research potential of access to technologies, tools, collections, data and facilities**, building on past capital funding initiatives to develop long-term sustainable research use of heritage assets, technologies, collections (both digital and non-digital), data, objects, sites,

and facilities with the potential to transform cross-disciplinary and collaborative heritage research (in the UK and internationally), and building the research skills, collaborations and capabilities needed to exploit the research potential they offer.

10. The range of these four areas is designed to allow for the full scope of arts and humanities research to contribute while also underlining the distinctive place of the AHRC in terms of skills and training; access and support for research leadership and sharing of best practice; and the AHRC's capacity to take an overview of the sector's complexity and act as a partner of choice for key collaborators.

Key Research Areas

11. Drawing on the EU Cultural Heritage Joint Programming Initiative's Strategic Research Agenda, emerging agendas in the heritage sector (e.g. Heritage 2020), The work of AHRC's Heritage Priority Area Leadership Fellow and consultations within the sector the following broad and inter-connected research themes are emerging as key areas of opportunity for arts and humanities heritage research:
 - i. **Values and Heritages** – e.g.: what counts as natural and cultural heritage, how is it chosen, how does this change in increasingly diverse/plural societies, how does it shape identities, how and when are different types of heritage recognised, experienced, embraced, contested, represented or ignored? How is heritage instrumentalised and what are the consequences of this? How does the way societies represent their heritage respond to shifting interpretations of the past and how does heritage influence identity formation and the way in which we learn about and perceive the past and different cultures? What role does heritage play in areas such as cross-cultural engagement, education, faith, popular culture, social cohesion, sense of place, physical & mental health and well-being? How do different cultures value and represent their heritage and how do cross-cultural engagements affect these values and representations? How, if at all, should changing societal and cultural values towards specific heritages, what they represent and their significance be taken into account in the management of those heritages? How is the value of heritage distributed – whose heritage is excluded? How do we value heritage (and measure / evaluate / build the evidence base for, that value)? What are the impacts of the loss of heritage?
 - ii. **Community and Public Engagement, Inclusion and Diverse Heritages** – e.g.: how, why and with what results do people engage with their heritage (and the heritage of others) and why does it matter to them? Whose voices get heard in decisions about heritage management and about what diverse or 'at risk' heritages are conserved for the future? How can academic research be better connected with public heritage activities ('citizen history and heritage') and how can this contribute to better understanding of processes such as commemoration? What is the role of heritage in the formal and informal learning process at all stages of life? How can research most effectively inform the ways that collections and heritage are used in public settings so as to enable the most effective public dialogue, learning and knowledge exchange? How can heritage organisations, sites, exhibitions and collections support enhanced translation of, and public engagement with, arts and humanities research? How can research and practice-based innovation and learning in respect to effective engagement with diverse communities and publics be shared effectively within and beyond the heritage sector and translated between different contexts? What new forms of, and opportunities for, engagement with heritage are emerging (e.g. sensory heritage, heritage

gamification) and how will people engage with heritage in the future (e.g. immersive technologies)?

- iii. **Sustainable Management of Heritages** – e.g. : are the paradigms of heritage protection that have served us well in the past fit to respond to the challenges of the future? What new paradigms are emerging for managing / curating/ governing / making decisions about /engaging with/ safeguarding/ adapting heritage or dealing better with the potential loss of heritage in a rapidly changing world? How does heritage management need to adapt in the face of pressures such as those from infrastructure and urban development, more mobile populations and environmental change? What can we learn from sharing sustainable practices and data across national, organisational, sectoral and other boundaries? What new challenges are emerging in relation to sustainable heritage management in the digital / information age (e.g. born-digital heritages, impacts on management of analogue collections)? Can community engagement lead to more sustainable management of heritage (crowd sourcing, owners, volunteering, philanthropy, etc.)? What is the relationship between natural and cultural heritages? Can an ecosystem approach for be adopted for managing heritage? How can environments, climates, landscapes, places and spaces that people use be sustained, while respecting historical integrity /taking into account changing societal needs? Can more integrated approaches be adopted which reflect diverse needs and pressures and which also factor in responsibilities to future generations?
- iv. **Future Heritages, New Uses/Re-Use of Heritages and Exploiting the potential of Digital and other Technologies**– e.g. : how can heritage be used as a resource for cultural, social and economic wellbeing, beyond tourism and conservation? Can heritage help us to imagine and shape different futures for society? How can we identify, and conserve, the emergent heritages that will be of value to future generations? How can we support innovative uses of tangible and intangible heritage, heritage skills (e.g. crafts)? How can digital and other technologies create new opportunities for using heritage for example through new creative content or immersive experiences? How might the emergence of big data innovation support new ways of using heritage collections, archives data and assets? How do we ensure that new technologies do not reinforce existing biases and inequalities? What can heritage learn from experience in other domains (e.g. environmental protection, recycling) and what wider applicability might heritage methods and approaches (e.g. forensic archaeology and linguistics) have for wider society? How might heritage resources (e.g. archives, collections, objects, sites, historic buildings) and institutions be transformed by opening up new forms of use, and how they are to be resourced, managed and made sustainable? How does heritage fit into wider debates around open access, ownership and exploitation of data?
- v. **Intangible, Emerging, Hidden and Contested Heritages** – e.g. : how might emerging forms of future heritage be identified more effectively? How are new heritage discoveries reshaping understandings of the past and of other heritages and their significance? How might intangible heritages be more sustainably conserved and exploited in the future? How can arts and humanities research contribute to processes which uncover 'hidden' heritages, rediscover 'lost' heritages, make greater use of under-explored or reserve collections, understand 'entangled' heritages and/or enable the re-valuation and re-interpretation of under-valued heritages? What new challenges, opportunities and conflicts do emerging and intangible heritages raise for heritage management and organisations? How can we better understand the interconnections and inter-dependencies between tangible,

intangible, natural, cultural, virtual and digital heritages and are such distinctions between forms of heritage useful? In the context of increasingly diverse forms of heritage, how can research inform the priorities and decisions made by heritage practitioners for example about what to collect and preserve (including contemporary collecting) and what not to preserve?

- vi. **Changing Heritage Economies** – e.g.: how can research further enrich heritage experiences and encounters and enhance the contribution of heritage to the growth of the experience economy? How can we better realise the potential for inter-disciplinary and collaborative heritage research to inspire creativity and innovation which contributes to the creative economy? How can we better understand the role that heritage plays in cultural ecosystems and clusters, place-making, infrastructure developments and local, rural, urban and regional economic development and to the digital economy? What new opportunities and challenges do emerging forms of heritage raise for future heritage economies? What new economic models might emerge for heritage 'ownership', curation, collaborative working and copyright/ intellectual property? How might heritage research exploit wider economic opportunities, for example in international markets or emerging fields of technology (for instance around Open/Big Data, or the Internet of Things)?
- vii. **Heritage, Contested Pasts and Conflict** e.g.: how can research inform the management of heritages at risk from conflict/ fragile or aid 'recovery' from the loss of heritage? What role does illegal trade in heritage artefacts, or the use or destruction of heritage play in conflict contexts? How is heritage 'appropriated' or exploited in the perpetuation or prosecution of conflict? What role can heritage management and commemorative processes play in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation processes? How should public engagement with 'contested heritage' or heritage relating to 'difficult pasts' be managed? How can we better understand the relationship between heritage and identity and the ethics of engagement with heritage and issues of social justice, inter-generational learning and coming to terms with the loss of heritage? Can community engagement with diverse heritages support inclusion and positive inter-cultural dynamics and post-conflict reconciliation?
- viii. **Global Heritages, International Development and Global Challenges**– e.g.: How can heritage economies contribute to international development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals and/or to the development of aid and humanitarian strategies or 'cultural diplomacy'? How can research inform approaches to addressing the challenges for heritage created by international development, globalisation, rapid urbanisation, climate change and high mobility? Can critical heritage research play a role in facilitating tri-sectoral partnerships/collaborative governance in pursuit of tackling global challenges? How can research help uncover and address differences between local, regional and international cultural values relating to heritages? What role does heritage play in the wellbeing of diasporic and displaced communities? How might issues of international justice, legacies of the past and displaced heritages be addressed in the future? What approaches are most effective in unlocking the potential of new heritage discoveries and uncovering hidden cultural heritages to contribute to international development? How can better management of heritage in post-conflict contexts contribute to international development? How might heritage tourism be sustainably developed? How might local community engagement in the management of heritage in diverse development contexts develop in the future? How could heritage assets, including heritage skills and knowledges, heritage organisations and minority heritages, be sustainably developed to support international development?

Taking Forward the Strategy

12. Substantial amounts of heritage research will continue through AHRC's responsive mode and training schemes and through AHRC's current research themes and programmes.
13. In addition, new opportunities will be explored in relation to:
 - the potential to secure capital funding to enhance research capability and access to collections, objects, technologies and sites and to support the development of heritage research as a cross-disciplinary and collaborative field of enquiry;
 - thematic research linked to current or potential emerging future research areas and AHRC and wider cross-Council strategic priorities;
 - the potential contribution of heritage research to global challenges such as international development, urban living and conflict;
 - international collaborations and partnerships, including with other funders of heritage research in Europe and globally and with leading heritage organisations around the world;
 - partnerships opportunities and innovative approaches to supporting collaborations with the heritage sector, community engagement, knowledge exchange, co-production and pathways to impact;
 - supporting the development of research skills, leadership and careers, with particular attention to the potential to support early career researchers.
14. We have appointed a Leadership Fellow for Heritage Research, Professor Rodney Harrison (University College London) to provide leadership and support taking forward the strategy as well as to advise on emerging areas, partnerships and opportunities and on the future development of the strategy. Professor Harrison is undertaking a number of activities exploring aspects of the priority areas outlined above as well as contemporary debates and potential future emerging themes; further details of the Leadership Fellow's activities can be found at: <https://heritage-research.org/>
15. Examples of outcomes from developments under the strategy could include:
 - new partnerships and ways of working in collaboration (e.g. business sector with heritage organisations; new disciplinary alliances around the subject; innovative collaborations across cultural and/or national boundaries);
 - new/ more integrated ways of understanding and managing heritage;
 - new/ more integrated ways of sharing practices between institutions/ organisations/ groups practitioners in UK & overseas;
 - new / more integrated methodologies of critical analysis of heritage & heritage research/practice;
 - new research questions, perhaps bringing together digital/data approaches and heritage management/use – through identification & pursuit of new research themes and their consideration from 'multidisciplinary' dimensions;
 - new insights into ethical questions (e.g. because of involvement of business or diverse communities, or in response to conflicted heritage);
 - new infrastructure to enhance provision of physical and human capital in heritage sectors, particularly enhancing 'citizen heritage';
 - new systems of information gathering about the effects of past/existing funded research projects and parallel projects funded by other research organisations in UK/Overseas.