

# valuing our heritage:

a round-table discussion



On 11 September the Smith Institute convened a round-table discussion on Britain's heritage to consider how cultural value is and should be allocated, how to engage the public, and how to increase funding from both the public and private sectors, including encouraging personal donations.



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## Round-table discussion

*John Newbiggin*

I cannot imagine many circumstances in which such a range of heritage organisations and interests would get together – and at such an opportune moment, with a new Prime Minister who is very interested in Britishness, and with a new secretary of state and a new minister for culture. It is also a very significant moment because the government's three-year comprehensive spending review is about to burst upon us and everybody has their own expectations of what that is going to reveal.



There are three questions that it would be good to look at. One is whether we are giving the appropriate value to the various elements that go to make up what we call heritage, given that we are talking about everything from landscapes to town centres to individual buildings, and also intangibles such as traditions and memories, and we are talking about heritage as it is perceived by individuals and by communities and by the nation. What should the priorities of the organisations around this table and the government be and, as importantly, how do we engage effectively with what people value in terms of heritage, particularly when we know that heritage in its larger sense is enormously popular and becoming more so?

Secondly, what are we doing to safeguard our future heritage? Heritage that is valued implies a shared sense of history, and that goes directly to the question of what is our heritage. What is Britishness in such a fast-changing and diverse society? I like Sarfraz Mansoor's line that "Britishness is a work in progress".

Finally, what about the money? We have got traditions of public, private and voluntary giving, and I would put the lottery as the front-runner in the voluntary bit of the mix. What should the balance be between those three pillars? (Because I am sure there is nobody round this table who thinks that the present balance is

what it should be.) A final point: how do we embed heritage in the core script of government? And how do we embed private giving more successfully in the heads and hearts of citizens, particularly those who can afford it?

*Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP MBE*

Do we value our heritage? The statistics that I get as minister say "Yes". Heritage Open Day last year attracted over a million people. We know that seven out of 10 visit a heritage site once a year and one in seven visit once a month. We know that we have got 400,000 volunteers, the biggest volunteer force in the country. We know that the National Trust has a membership of 3.5 million – 10 times the membership of all the political parties put together!

All that is good. But is that enough? We have opened a discourse on cultural values and the terms in which we should define and value our heritage. I am pleased that we have initiated the Brian McMaster review, which will look at how we define and assess excellence. I feel very comfortable with the direction of travel in the discourse around the concept of cultural value. So, whether we talk about intrinsic value, instrumental value or institutional value, or whether we talk about historic, social or aesthetic values, I feel perfectly comfortable with that discourse; value encompasses all these elements. But I feel a little bit less comfortable when you try

and put numbers to it, because, in the end, how we value is a matter of personal judgment. We try and get that judgment from experts, but I do not think we should run away from the partiality in the judgments of what we value.



Secondly, I think that in the debate around the value of culture, the language is dire. It is all wrong. We talk about the "subsidised sector" when we talk about heritage. We do not talk about "investment" as we would with public money going into research and development in the pharmaceutical sector and other areas. We talk about "not for profit" as if somehow that is distinct. And I loathe the term "philanthropy", although what it does is pretty important.

I am also content about the arm's-length principle, but I do think there are questions to be asked about how we involve communities in decisions about what we value. When we talk about democratising decision making, it may make us risk-averse. If you want to ensure that people support your choices, it tends to make you risk-averse. There are difficult questions, in deciding what we value, about whose heritage we are reflecting. Is it the heritage of the rich or the poor? What does it mean for our minority ethnic communities?

And I think there are difficult issues about valuing the past for the present and the future. In London, for example, there is the vexed question of new tall buildings. How do we value the case for world heritage sites against present-day commercial demand? In the end, value is subjective. We have got to be very careful it does not become paternalistic, and I am not sure how we do that.

Then there is the question of how we fund acquisition. There is not enough money. We do not want to be like the USA, where acquisition is totally privately funded. Actually, I do not want to be like Scotland and Wales either. I like the arm's-length principle. So we are trying to find the traditional third way through it.

We have a good tradition of private giving, from institutions like the Wolfson, Paul Hamlyn or Gulbenkian foundations, but we have a real issue about how we increase private giving. I think taxation

is the easy answer. Everybody always talks to me about tax incentives. But I am much more interested in what levers we can employ to promote a real culture change in the role of private giving to our public space, whether it is through better public recognition, or through persuasion or bullying!

We need a cocktail of funding, of which the lottery and the Department for Culture, Media & Sport are only part. That is where I think the debate about regeneration, identity and heritage becomes important. Let me just give you this observation. As the sponsor minister for the regional development agencies at what used to be the Department of Trade & Industry, I was scarcely conscious of culture and the creative sector, whereas I was absolutely conscious of higher education and its role in the definition of place and regeneration. We have missed a trick

there, I think, in capturing the importance of culture and the creative industries to communities.

I think seeing culture and the creative sector as a central part of national identity and regeneration is key. One of my first adjournment debates was about an Iron Age hill fort in Berwick in Elmet, near Leeds, and its excavation and conservation are a fantastic stimulus towards creating community strength. Or, if you look at Glasgow or Liverpool, or Margate with its Turner Gallery, or look at West Kilbride and what they are doing around the crafts industry, there is a whole array of things that create pride in place, identity with place, and a place that people want to live and work in.

My final point is that we must not forget the sustainability agenda and the link between heritage and sustainability.

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

I want to pick up Margaret's complaint about language. Heritage suffers not just from language but from a series of monstrous old prejudices about what it is. It can be beautiful but it is often ugly. It can induce pride but quite often shame. It is not just soothing; it is also toxic and troubling. It is not just ancient; it is contemporary. And it is not just buildings; it is landscape and natural species and industrial structures and intangible things. Objects, places – the traces that are left by human existence and activity are the primary sources in the search for truth about ourselves and our history and our society; our heritage is what makes us distinctive.

If it was just about old buildings or great paintings there would still be a good case for public funding to preserve it and create more of it and look after the greatest treasures. But heritage is far more than that, and we will not get the policy arguments right until that perception changes – not just about the money, though that is important, but the point Margaret was making, which is the

integration of the past into a better making of the future. That is the heart of the matter for me.

I have three ambitions to change the way we think about heritage. First, I want it to be seen as an organic, continuing process and not a sealed container – the point Sarfraz Mansoor was making. It is the Windrush as well as William the Conqueror. It is the Sherborne Missal as well as the Blaenavon industrial museum.

My second ambition is that heritage should not be seen as something way out in the left field for the leisured classes to enjoy when they have got spare time, but as integral to planning and education and social policy. If the Thames Gateway had started from evidence of the past that is in that soil, in those people and in those structures, it would not be looking like it is going to look.

The third point is that we are just waking up to the importance of lifestyle to physical health. Truthful heritage, which means heritage that you can contest and argue over and share, ought to be seen as necessary for mental and spiritual health, just as fresh fruit and vegetables are to physical well-being. "Five heritage experiences a day!"

Measuring value is terribly important if you are dealing with public money, because you have to be accountable. You have to say what you are spending and why. It is a big struggle, and it has been going on for years. We at the Heritage Lottery Fund have just had another go at trying to analyse what are the ingredients of value in heritage. We have come down to four categories: the emotional, historic, social and existence value of heritage. But in the end, of course, the values that you attach to all those things end up being a matter of subjective judgment. Still, people spending public money have to try and lay out the categories to which value is being attached. That is more important than saying, "This one is worth six and that one is worth four."

This is not simple top-of-the-head stuff. It is something deep, about human happiness and meaning and identity, and you cannot put it into boxes. We bought a picture called *Blaydon Races* for the Shipley Art Gallery in Tyne & Wear; it cost £124,000. It is not great art, but when that painting first went on view in Newcastle 99 years ago, police asked the art dealers to close their blinds because the crowds were pressing so dangerously against the windows.

We bought the Wenlock jug for Luton Museum. The New York Metropolitan Museum of Art

wanted it, but it belongs to Luton. The importance of that Tudor jug in that place is something special.

The place-making agenda (as the government now calls it) is critical here, we believe. Heritage ought to be at the heart of regeneration in that sense. You go to Liverpool and look at the *RopeWalks*. Or Big Pit at Blaenavon, where the heritage of that place is brought to life by the people who lived it. We have done surveys about the impact of our stuff on local communities. The last one showed us that 29% of local community members felt their quality of life was better as a direct result of HLF-funded heritage work. And 33% of them felt their area was better as a place to live in than before. I think that is quite significant. This is not fluffy stuff; this is core business for a modern society. That is my message.

Everybody talks about tax incentives, but I am more interested in what levers we can employ to promote a real culture change in the role of private giving  
Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP MBE

*John Newbiggin*

Sandy, with your background in local government and your new role as chair of English Heritage, you are in a very advantageous position to talk about the identity of place.

*Lord Sandy Bruce-Lockhart*

The first thing is that I am impressed with the heritage sector. The major organisations, the National Trust and English Heritage and half a dozen others, are highly effective, and one reason is that the motivation of the people

who work for them is very high.

Secondly, I have been surprised and delighted by the reach of these organisations. As Margaret has said, you have got nearly 4 million members within the National Trust. English Heritage has a high membership, and there are 400,000 volunteers as well. There are 840 civic societies out there, and the reach of the heritage sector into the community, into society, reaching individuals, is huge. It is also highly valued. The figure of 70% of the public visiting a heritage site every year is higher than for visits to libraries.



My final point about the value of heritage is that the latest MORI research shows that one of the key factors in determining your quality of life is your satisfaction with place, the satisfaction with where you live. In the issues that local government grapples with, and in the major challenges that government itself grapples with and tries to deliver locally, I see so many ways in which the heritage sector can be a key part of the answer.

If you take what the recent local government white paper called the "place-making agenda", it is just hugely important. Creating places that are vibrant and prosperous and safe and friendly and cohesive is a wonderful challenge. A great deal of that is about linking the best of the past with the future. If you are going to create places which are distinctive and which have a sense of identity, then you simply have to build into the past. You have to draw out the best of the past and then build on with exciting and inspiring regeneration for the future.

The second big challenge is what some people call social cohesion or community cohesion. We have been in a phase for 10 or 15 years highlighted by multiculturalism, about celebrating diversity. If you actually want to draw communities together you have to have a shared sense of place and belonging to start with, and you build into that a shared sense of ownership and ambition for the future.

This is not simply an issue of race and ethnicity. If we take some of our most deprived communities, they have a very low sense of community, and I think building a sense of place is a start on that.

When we look at regeneration and economy, we need to remember again the huge contribution of tourism and the number of people that tourism employs. The reason that people come to this country is very largely because of our heritage. Take the advertisements for the Olympics: so many of them are actually showing heritage sites in the country.

My final point is this: I think the heritage sector is effective, it is efficient, it is highly motivated and it is absolutely an integral part of many of the government's and local government's and national challenges. But I also think it has huge potential around volunteering and civil society itself.

*John Newbiggin*

Given what you have said, why do you think the relationship between local government and the heritage sector has not always been a very happy one?

*Lord Sandy Bruce-Lockhart*

It is not that it is not happy, but it is not on the radar screen of

chief executives and local government leaders to the extent that it should be – there are so many other priorities. But I am convinced that we can do something about that. If people realised what the heritage sector could add to tackling the major challenges that they face in the public sector, then I think we could solve a lot of them.

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*Gregor Hutcheon*

I suppose our starting point is that we know that people care deeply, passionately and in very emotional ways about why heritage matters. We have had a sense of frustration that we have not been able to work out how to use that care and passion in a way that then gets a purchase and focus from those who might support us, whether they are in government or in the private sector.

How do we address the arguments and present them in ways that give us the means of purchase

that we so seek? "History Matters" was something I was very closely involved in, and we are just about to play back some of the findings from the 20,000 postcards written by individuals who felt inspired to say why history mattered to them. We did a "Remember One Day in History", which was basically a blog, trying to reach some slightly newer audiences. And it is very obvious that this emotional response to history and heritage is what really matters. Identity comes through, usually strongly, whether it is individual identity, identity within a place or identity of the nation as a whole.

Some of the other benefits that people are telling us heritage provides are health and well-being. Heritage provides an opportunity to get out and be active, whatever your age. It is an opportunity to go out and do something together as a family in a safe environment. And it provides a sense of our place and time.

Something we get played back to us is the sense that we are "standing on the shoulders of giants", as one 14-year-old put it. There are people who have gone before us and there are people to come after us, and that gives a sense of responsibility, which I think is where the heritage agenda can connect to the environmental agenda. Heritage is not just about access to fantastic places or stories. It is also about a world in which the environment lasts for generations coming after ours.

We could do more to broaden our appeal to reach new audiences, but we need help to do that. You cannot just open your doors and hope that new people will come. I have come to appreciate just how sophisticated you have to be to make sure that you do that in the right way and do not offend or alienate people but bring them with you.

There is also the question of investment in the places and the

things themselves; the benefits that we just talked about flow from real things, and the challenge of looking after those real things is proving ever more difficult.

How do we form partnerships with other organisations and other individuals or groups, whether from the private sector or other sectors generally, to unlock the potential of heritage, whether that is through volunteering or active engagement through learning? One last fact: hardly any people arrive at the National Trust expecting to learn something or coming motivated to learn something, but 97% say they leave having learned something.

#### *Nick Way*

Let me start with a word about the 500 open houses that form part of the Historic Houses Association. Many of them are still family homes. There are works of art associated with the history of the houses; there is, in many cases, land surrounding them, and – to echo what was said a moment ago – the natural environment and the built environment go together; and then there are personal stories that go with the houses and which make them interesting places to visit. But they need to engage with the outside world or they are finished, because their economic survival depends largely on that engagement.

Others have talked about the different ways in which heritage provides value. I would like to mention one or two. The first is existence value or institutional value – the “C” word, “culture”. “Culture” – and “works of art” – sounds rather absolute and is in danger of sounding elitist. What we do know is that if we do not hang on to the fabric of the historic sites themselves, the other benefits that flow from heritage cannot be provided in future. The UK is particularly rich because in so many cases the buildings and their contents are still together, unlike many places in France, for example.

The second, economic, issue has been mentioned: tourism. New tourists coming from China and Russia say the same as American and European tourists have been saying: that historic houses, castles and gardens are a top reason for coming to the UK. The economic dimension also plays out in regeneration: heritage is a lure for inward investment. The minister mentioned the regional development agencies; they put pictures of Chatsworth on their brochures to promote inward investment. People want to live and work near these places. About one-sixth of our members are involved in providing education facilities of one sort or another, and that will become even more important in the future.



Finally, there is the point we have all been talking about: the sense of identity and shared history. Rather than me putting a point of view, I would like to quote someone else, the Jamaican High Commissioner Burchell Whiteman, who wrote in the issue of our magazine commemorating 2007, “I would like to suggest that it is the concept of a shared history that we all now need to acknowledge and to build upon. This year’s commemoration has been a catalyst for strengthening attempts to involve communities who have traditionally not been involved in an historic environment. There is no doubt that many people from black and minority ethnic communities living in this country are under-represented as visitors to historic sites, but I know that many will now have their interest awakened by the splendid exhibits in these houses with direct and tangible links to their countries.”

The regional development agencies put pictures of Chatsworth on their brochures to promote inward investment. People want to live and work near these places  
*Nick Way*

However, we would not all be here today if we did not think there was a risk to all of this. So far we have been promoting a very positive story. If all this is so good, why not just get on and do it? There are risks, and they need to be put on the table. The first one is to the fabric, the physical structure of some of our historic environment. Perhaps not to the most well-visited, but if we are to have historical sites in local communities and near to communities, we cannot rely just on Chatsworth or Blickling Hall. It is the others, the smaller ones, that simply cannot expect to get a return from the market to maintain the fabric

which, in turn, provides other benefits. That is a reason why the public sector or the government and the Heritage Lottery Fund are interested – or must be interested.

The second risk has already been talked about quite a lot: the local authority angle. We are all concerned that the heritage protection review be implemented adequately and thoroughly. We all support

that. Thirdly, there is the risk that heritage will not be at the centre of regeneration, but it should be.

The last point is that there is evidence that when people visit a heritage site early enough in their lives and get interested, although that interest might disappear in the teenage years, it comes back later on and they become supporters. So how to get those kids interested is going to be tremendously important – which means, as the minister said, a cocktail of funding and looking to lots of partners. We are very open-minded: we see the role for private investment. But, as well as being open-minded, I think we would like to be very purposeful about pursuing those possibilities.

*David Barrie*

I very much like the idea that we should all be engaged in a much more active dialogue with the public about what they really care about and that we should identify what people's real needs are. That is something the Art Fund is actually trying to do quite a lot of work on at the moment.

But I would like to focus on acquisitions. A great deal of what matters comes down to the business of actually finding money to buy things, whether it is to put in historic houses, National Trust properties, museums, galleries or, indeed, in other public spaces. It is getting to be harder and harder. Occasionally it is possible to pull together a coalition – as, for example, recently with the campaign for Dumfries House. In fact, nowadays it is hardly ever possible for any organisation acting alone to pull off any significant purchase. Prices are going up at the most terrifying rate and, frankly, the levels of funding are declining. The Heritage Lottery Fund is faced with a very substantial series of cuts in the years ahead.

I think you suggested that tax breaks are “an easy answer”, but we must look at the way in which other countries organise their affairs; there are lessons to learn. The United States, famously, has extremely generous tax incentives – although I do not think anybody here kids themselves that the Treasury is going to follow the US model.

But it is fascinating to look at some of our European partners. Look at France, for example, where four or five years ago legislation was introduced which permits companies to make gifts of major works of art to museums and galleries and get a 90% write-off against their corporation tax bill. In Ireland, in Canada, in Australia, and in many other countries, there are devices that enable individuals to gain tax write-offs against their income tax bill. We have been pressing for this for many years. So far we have made no progress.

One of the things that struck me recently in a conversation with

the vice-chancellor of a university was his statement that we not only needed a culture of giving. He thought we also needed a culture of asking. He said that when he went round the world and compared fundraising at universities in Britain with fundraising at universities elsewhere, especially in the United States, there was a dramatic difference in the willingness to ask and the effectiveness with which the asking was done. I think many of our major museums and galleries are now pretty good at it. But if you go into the regions and you look at smaller institutions, they really have not even begun the process of developing a culture of giving, nor are they good at asking – and they are probably not terribly good, frankly, at doing the thanking either.

*John Newbiggin*

Several people have mentioned the high level of public passion and interest in heritage – and yet here we are around the table talking about how we need to engage people. What are we doing that is wrong? Why are we not doing better?

*Anthea Case CBE*

When we talk about people valuing their heritage, we talk about it in terms of people making visits or of people being volunteers. But there is a whole range between visits and volunteers, which is, actually, people going about their ordinary lives; on the way from their home to the shop, they pass buildings or bits of the natural environment which make them feel better, which they enjoy and which form part of their sense of identity. It is difficult to get a handle on that, and yet it is people's desire to preserve and improve that environment that will improve what the future heritage looks like.

In a survey of why people on new housing estates liked or disliked the place that they lived, people who had a house that was not very historic but slightly older in the middle of their estate felt it gave them a sense of identity that they could be proud of. So I think it is not about putting heritage in a box but looking at it as a wider issue. And that links into the regeneration agenda.

*Dr Tristram Hunt*

I think that is absolutely right. But that involves the DCMS making its weight felt more effectively.

If you look at something like the Barker report on housing supply, it is a textbook on annihilation of place, identity and meaning, coming from the Treasury; a textbook for more out-of-town shopping centres, for all sorts of sprawl, for the developers' option. Despite the excellent Tessa Jowell paper on the historic environment, I think the DCMS needs to have a few more rows if it wants to preserve the historic environment, particularly with the Treasury.

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*David Barrie*

If we are talking about Liverpool's RopeWalks and that kind of heritage-led regeneration, we need to think carefully about some of the social consequences in terms of public access. In the suburbs of Liverpool – in Croxteth and Norris Greens – they talk about downtown Liverpool generation as the "gold zone". Part of that is heritage, the heritage of cobbles, bollards and chains, and redone Georgian houses – all of which we probably want to support. But how do you make that not off-putting, in a sense, to outlying, frequently disenfranchised communities? We all want civic place and identity and heritage and regeneration, but there is a debate which needs to be happening about linking that to other communities.

*Bettina Harden MBE*

Speaking as someone who represents an organisation much funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund – for which, many thanks – we are out there doing our very best to get to that 30% of the population who do not engage with heritage for whatever reason. And we do this through parks, gardens and the landscape. If the great galleries and the wonderful paintings are, if you like, the diamonds, then the landscape, whether it is townscape or green fields and parks, is the setting for those jewels.

The big organisations represented here can look on an organisation like mine as being a sort of crane arm that can be attached, reaching out to people through landscapes. So, for example, you can get a group of 20 different refugee communities, all speaking different languages, in a historic working garden, and they discover that the onion is something that is used in every culture (except, possibly, the Inuit), and then you get them all talking to each other, and they discuss where onions came from and they start looking at onions in terms of design and onion domes – and you are off to the races and suddenly everybody has a connection with heritage.

That is what I spend a great deal of my life doing: finding connections in strange places that engage people. I want to read you an email I got from someone taking a group of carers to Hidcote in Gloucestershire: "I was surprised at the amount of group members who had never been to a stately home and, therefore, the gardens. They did not feel that they would be made welcome. Several members of the group were not aware that access to such places is allowed or affordable. This trip has broken these misconceptions."

*Professor Ray Pahl*

The messages that are often most significant for people are local messages that relate to the places in which they live. There could be much more integration and co-operation between the different strands of heritage, museums, the arts and so on, in people's significant spaces. In some places the presentation of the significant

past may be very radical – if not subversive – such as local museums celebrating the Tolpuddle Martyrs or Captain Swing in rural areas. Clearly, the past does not necessarily breed consensus!

What seems to matter a great deal to many people is the evidence of ordinary artefacts in museums of everyday life in the past. People are fascinated by the stories attached to ordinary artefacts – they flock to car boot sales and the Antiques Roadshow; objects are frequently discussed in the TV show in terms that emphasise their local connections, adding to a sense of identity. At another level, the wonderful scheme set up by the Public Catalogue Foundation, documenting all the oil paintings in public ownership by each English county, helps to develop a sense of pride and belonging – as well, possibly, as a sense of responsibility towards the arts. What makes us English (or, more controversially, British) is an amalgam of all these local identities. Admittedly, some museum material may be over-parochial, but it is a useful corrective to the assumption that national identity is necessarily created nationally. Heritage is part of an on-going local place-making process.



*John Newbiggin*

Is there an issue here that people appreciate and enjoy the ordinary but do not necessarily value it as heritage in any conscious way?

*Mark Jones*

This concept of heritage is much more problematic than we have been admitting to ourselves today. We live here in London in a city in which more than half of all children are born to mothers who were born outside the United Kingdom. I walk a lot in the countryside and I never encounter, either in a National Trust property or on my country walks or in my visits to English Heritage sites, the new citizens of London who live among them. It is foolish to ignore that as a problem.

It is a big problem, because it means that many decision makers live in an environment in which the "heritage we take for granted" actually is not taken for granted at all. In fact, it is not really of any great interest to those who are drawn to London because London

is a great world city. They are not very interested in the English countryside, or in knowing that Cromwell was born in such and such a place or that a particular house dates from the 18th century.

There is another thing about heritage, which is that it is very particular. I was struck by this when I was in Kyoto – which, after all, is a great historic city – visiting a house that belonged to a 19th-century kimono maker, Sugimoto House. It is wonderful and extraordinary. But I thought to myself: “What is so extraordinary about this is that a house which dates from the 1870s is considered to be something absolutely exceptional.” There, living in a house dating from the 1870s probably means that, if you are lucky, you might get a newer one soon. Our heritage is culturally a very peculiar thing. Of course, we share it with other European countries, but we do not share it with larger parts of the rest of the world.



*Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP MBE*

But where does that take you? In a recent Radio 4 programme, people were asked to choose between saving a colliery museum and saving the Poussins. They chose the colliery museum, and that reflected that sense of identity. It was part of their past so they felt they had some ownership of the colliery, which they probably did not feel towards the Poussins.

What does that mean in terms of the way in which you conduct yourself or the way in which we should think about public policy?

*Mark Jones*

A lot of this is about representation. I am a great supporter of social history and popular culture. Nevertheless, a lot of what is going on in the field of heritage is about a kind of common pride in things like the Wellington Arch, where we are meeting today. If we ask ourselves “What is it?” then the answer is that it has no purpose other than to make a big claim about us collectively, as a country that can afford a spectacularly splendid but useless building in the middle of London.

It is important to realise that that is part of what heritage is about, great gestures, and not about utilitarian things. I think that the Poussins versus the colliery is complicated for that reason. Both of them are important in their different ways. Our ability to retain or our failure to retain the Poussins will say something about our national self-respect.

I am not saying what the right answer is. I can see arguments in both directions. But we should not overlook the fact that when, for example, the board of the Seattle Art Museum Club in the United States gave \$1 billion of contemporary art to Seattle, they were saying collectively that they had a very strong pride in their city, and they expressed that pride through the donation of a spectacular array of useless stuff, contemporary art.

*David Barrie*

I could spend half an hour talking about the issues that are raised by the Poussins, easily, but I suspect that that debate probably will not take place. Decisions will be taken by small groups of people behind closed doors, because that is how the system works at the moment. I think it should change. We need to find ways of ensuring that the decisions that we take – especially those of us who are handling public money – do reflect a real effort to draw out from the public what they actually think.

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

The trouble with the acquisitions argument is that the sums of money are, by a multiple of hundreds, bigger than those that apply to most other areas of heritage, so the comparisons of value are terribly difficult. The short answer to Mark's point, of how you get people engaged in all of this, is: the lottery. It enables everybody – over half the grants that we give are for less than £50,000. That is a lot of engagement at a local level, of all kinds of people; not necessarily getting rural people to go to the city or the other way round, but getting people to start understanding the relationship between themselves and the places and the things around them.

The short answer to how you get people engaged is: the lottery. Over half the grants we give are for less than £50,000. That is a lot of engagement at a local level  
*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

*Josie Appleton*

People read their own thinking into heritage, and that is very variable. I think that there is a danger of trying to overmanage things. “What did you get out of it?” “How did you value it?” I have never been asked by a heritage organisation why I valued something, and for that I am grateful. That is not to say that organisations do not need to have a sensitivity to the public: they do. But there is a danger of being a little patronising. It is all very therapeutic and palliative –

heritage therapy or heritage Prozac. One of the things that gets people engaged or makes something a public issue is the idea that we have a choice: we could choose not to preserve it.

*Anthea Case CBE*

That is also part of the heritage education debate, is it not? The heritage education debate tends to be: How can we mesh in Chatsworth with a key stage in the national curriculum? And people will then go, and of course children do get something out of it and they do learn about their heritage. But what they do not learn about is what makes up towns: why is having this building sitting next to that building good or bad?

We also need to harness some of the expertise and enthusiasm of the voluntary sector to actually do things in their locality; not to take children on bus trips to the nearest castle but to take them into the streets of the village or town where they are and have the discussion there.

*Ken Worpole*

I think streetscape is the essential thing. The Landscape Partnership Scheme of the Heritage Lottery Fund created networks of different organisations doing different things, but they shared a common landscape. If you take Hackney, for example, you have got Sutton House, Abney Park Cemetery, St John's Churchyard and the Hackney Empire – all very large lottery projects, completely disconnected from each other. Maybe we could have a system in which every large grant has to provide a contribution to the townscape that knits one place to the next.

Then, if you could link that to the "safer, cleaner, greener" agenda, which is all about creating walk-able, clean, tidy communities, you would have a combined agenda of heritage and well-being and health.

There are other issues around the idea of connections. The Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment has done studies on new housing estates in three regions of Britain, where the majority of residents claim never to have walked off site into the neighbouring environment. They see them as gated communities that they use as dormitory suburbs to drive in and out of. They travel elsewhere to go to places of meaning, but where they live has no meaning whatsoever. That is worrying for housing policy – and it is certainly worrying for the Thames Gateway.

*Deborah Lamb*

I want to pick up some of the themes about the need for greater public consultation and greater involvement. There is a risk in suggesting that if only we talk to people more, and involve people

To get the funding we want, there needs to be a shift in thinking about the way in which heritage really does relate to place making, identity, the notion of Britishness  
*Professor Ray Pahl*

more, then things will all be fine and lovely.

Some of this stuff is difficult and uncomfortable and challenging, and some of the decisions that need to be taken are difficult. How many buildings that have been lost do we now regret? Fifteen years ago English Heritage did a lot of work to promote the warehouses in Manchester and it was deeply unpopular; no one could see any use for those buildings at the time. Now they are marvellous and wonderful and part of the character of the place. How do we make sure that we get the right things for the future

when sometimes those decisions might actually be unpopular and difficult today?

*Professor Ray Pahl*

If we are going to change the way the government thinks about heritage and get the kind of funding that people round the table want, there needs to be a shift in thinking about the way in which heritage really does relate to place making, identity, the notion of Britishness and so on. I think you are quite right to say that it is not a matter of simply doing public opinion research saying, "What do people want?" It needs a whole shift in the way the thing is presented.

*Dr Tristram Hunt*

If you are thinking about a rigorous script or a story about Britishness and British identity, you do need to be involving the academic community. There is a schism between the heritage world and professional academia at the moment. Because if you look at where the cutting edge of history is today, it is much more about the global story of Britishness over the last four centuries, and integrating that into the heritage world is often very difficult.

The 2007 abolitionist commemorations are something of a model in heritage presentation, in terms of combining very rigorous academic research and the best historical scholarship with the best elements of the heritage industry. When you think about the abolitionist debate and the great surge of interest in it from across Britain and you contrast that with the total lack of interest in 1707 and the Act of Union: nothing bubbled up about 1707, whereas an awful lot bubbled up about 1807. I think there needs to be a very good research exercise on the lessons of 1807 as something of an intellectual model.

*Josie Appleton*

Sometimes people expect heritage to do too much. Someone referred to Barking: I went there as a political journalist to do a report during the local elections, and what you saw there was people expecting public art to solve all the problems of the community – a very demoralised, working-class community that

had lost all its identity, and where there were real issues over housing and all this kind of thing – and what had they done but thrown expensive public art at the centre of a roundabout! It was not even that good.

If you expect too much of heritage, then you do not see what it can do but you end up being disappointed, and with a gap between what you think and what the public think. You start to think, "A community is expecting us to bring them together, forge a local identity and solve the problem of the fact that there are no factories down the road any more and no one has jobs any more." Heritage is just not going to do that.

On the point about concentrating on the 30% who do not get involved with heritage: there is a danger here, which is the term "hard-to-reach groups". It is almost as if the more somebody doesn't want to go, the more you want them to go. There are stages in people's lives when they do not want to go to historic houses. It is fine that some people do not want to do that. When you recognise that not everybody is going to want to come, you can better value the people who do want to come. Just because they are "easy to reach" does not mean that they are less valuable.

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

But there is a key difference in the Barking example. To buy new art and stick it in the middle of a roundabout is not the same as saying, "Understand the place you are in. Understand what happened here before and what you brought to it." The past is a different matter, and the right of people to inherit the past they stand on and the story they bring to that past is a totally different thing from saying, "We are going to commission this sculpture to make something good" – or not good.

What about the 30% who are excluded – or who choose not to come? For me, the purpose of getting them involved – and I think it is slightly different from the government's aim – is that we actually need them in order to complete the story. It is not a question of making them go to see a house. What we need is their thread in the tapestry, and their participation can be in all kinds of different ways. It does not have to be to buy a ticket and go and see something. But without that 30% of people engaged in weaving the story of Britain, there is a bit missing from it.

As for stages of life, the staff of the Heritage Lottery Fund elected to start a new programme aimed at adolescents. I thought they were completely insane. I was wrong. It has been hugely popular



and very successful. If you sit people down and ask them strategic questions – "Why does this matter?", "What is it for?", "What does it mean to you?" – they come out with exactly what we put in our strategic plan after many, many months of consultation with experts.

*Nick Way*

We found that where access has been made wider it has been enjoyed and it has remained widely enjoyed. There are examples of historic houses in town centres that have run season tickets or a free ticket scheme and people have used those places to meet and to have a cup of coffee. They do not pay anything to get in because they have season tickets, but they come and they do not need to explain why they come. We all know why. These are places that we enjoy going to – not to solve all our daily difficulties, but for a break, renewal. That is quite important.

There are not that many places or things liked and enjoyed by such a wide proportion of the population as heritage. So it is worth putting effort into. I feel we have got to the stage where we need to identify with what areas of activity public policy needs to be involved; where it can stay out and where it needs to get involved.

Obviously, it will not be the same action for acquisitions as it is for access, and it need not be the same action for different parts of the historic environment. We just need to be a bit imaginative, and maybe have a range of measures. It is worth making the effort.

*Bettina Harden MBE*

There is one issue of government responsibility and public policy that I would like to raise. The rush to produce biofuels is going to present a serious problem in relation to preserving the environment. The money you get for participating in an environmental landscape scheme is done on the basis of profit forgone. But the profit from

growing biofuels – everybody knows the price of wheat has trebled in a year – is soon going to become an issue, where farmers and landowners are going to say, "If I abandon my environmental

There is a danger in the term "hard-to-reach groups". It is almost as if the more somebody doesn't want to go, the more you want them to go  
*Josie Appleton*

stewardship scheme I am going to make more profit." The government must address the issue of how to go on supporting the beautiful landscape that everybody I talk to – of every caste and persuasion – values about Britain.

*Paul Myners CBE*

From Tate's perspective I can point to what we have done in terms of visitor numbers, in terms of quality of visits, in terms of our work in education, outreach and developing diversity of audience. There is much that is going on that is very good. I think government made a significant contribution here: free access to museums is something that I think will be here forever, along with the national minimum wage and civil partnership and several other things.

I think there is more that can be done by DCMS that could be helpful to us. One thing would be to improve the quality of its own communication with us. There is very little accountability or explanation as to how DCMS allocates grant-in-aid. That is something to which the minister could attend and which would be very helpful. I also think we would benefit from greater trust than we currently enjoy. I find it very difficult to reconcile that we appoint as trustees people of considerable excellence and reputation drawn from diverse audiences, and then have to go to DCMS to get even the smallest decision approved, particularly on compensation, where trustee groups should take responsibility.

On funding: we will not be able to add to Tate's collection of contemporary art in any meaningful way as a consequence of our grant-in-aid. We can be very clever in buying early – and Tate directors, over many decades, have been; if they were hedge fund managers they would have earned huge interest! They bought Damien Hirst early. They cannot afford to buy him late. But there are people who own Damien Hirsts who could be persuaded to give their art and money to Tate, but they need the inducement to give and they need the encouragement to give in this country. If you speak to the major auction houses and galleries, they will tell you they have seen an explosion in the value of art bought but that that explosion is largely being driven by non-domiciled purchasers. They may well be bought in London and they may well be kept in the UK, but they are not owned by British people.

Many of these people are wobbling on the margin when it comes to giving. "Do I give my great art to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, or the Tate in London?" If I am an American who has worked in London for 20 years and I give to MOMA or Los Angeles, I will get the tax

I would challenge the minister to explain why, if tax is the "easy answer", she needs to look for a harder answer! The easy answers are generally the best ones  
*Paul Myners CBE*

offset at that point as a consequence of something which I was only able to buy by virtue of the fact I did not pay a lot of tax when I worked in the UK. And so this art leaves us. We need to think about that and we need, within government, to get real about it, to understand what is really going on.

The concept of hypothecation is well accepted by this government: accepted through Gift Aid, accepted through academy schools, accepted through a decision which was never fully explained, as far as I am aware, to encourage

matching government support for donations to our great universities without the same facility being given to the arts and culture. I find it very disappointing that the Goodison report has gathered dust and little has been done about the proposals; it is not even mentioned now by government.

I would challenge the minister to explain why, if tax is, as she says, the "easy answer", she needs to look for a harder answer! The easy answers are, generally speaking, the best ones. And if she wants an easy target I would refer her to non-domiciled foreign residents in this country, who at the moment are avoiding paying approximately £4 billion of tax. So this is an area for the government to look at, to find some hypothecated transfer of value by asking whether non-domiciles should make a greater contribution to sustaining our cultural excellence, which is clearly one of the things that attract them to live and work in this country.

*David Barrie*

The reality is that public funding for all of these activities is in decline, and it seems very hard to imagine circumstances in which that decline is likely to be reversed. The question is: how do we manage that? The voluntary sector plainly has a hugely important role to play, and private giving has a hugely important role to play. Paul has mentioned getting money out of foreigners who are living here, and I have talked about tax reliefs. There are things that are on the table that the government actually has not responded



to. The arguments are pretty overwhelming. We need to press those much, much harder.

The income tax relief issue has been on the table, to my knowledge, for at least 15 years. But there are some other easy answers as well. We actually do have some quite effective tax reliefs already available: acceptance in lieu, for example. The government could do more to market them. The truth is that the whole system is dominated by the commercial art market and, frankly, the commercial art market has very little interest in promoting the use of these tax incentives; they would much rather see people sell at full value on the open market. Why does the government not do more to promote things like acceptance in lieu? Why does it not do more to make it clear to people that there are very effective mechanisms for giving cash and getting 100% tax relief? There are a lot of people around who still seem to think that is not possible.

If we want people to give more, then we should give them more recognition for giving. It is blindingly obvious, really, that people like to be thanked  
*Mark Jones*

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

But there is a political problem, and that is: why should we be seen to be helping fat cats?

*Mark Jones*

The argument for the differential treatment of non-domiciled residents is that in order to be internationally competitive we need to be a place where very rich people want to come and live. And the idea that there are any major collectors of contemporary art who are not international and who are not aware of international



tax relief is just wholly unrealistic. You have to be very rich to be a major collector and all very rich people live an international life. That is how it is. There is no pool of specifically British donors who will give within a British context.

However, can I make a small suggestion? If we want people to give

more, then we should give them more recognition for giving. It is blindingly obvious, really, that people like to be thanked. One of the ways in which they like to be thanked is by being given an honour. If we think that giving contributes to our national well-being, then we should honour the people who give. I would love to see honours lists in which many more people were singled out for having made a big contribution through giving.

*Dr Tristram Hunt*

I think that is right. The minister seemed to be saying, "We have got no power at the DCMS, but we can make some statements." So if she is going to make some statements and going to use the power of her office, then it is exactly that kind of recognition that would be useful. As well as praising those who give, they should also blame those who take away. The classic example is Wandsworth Museum, closed by the local authority. The DCMS should flex its muscles a bit more and just be braver.

*Paul Myners CBE*

Liz is absolutely right. Buying works from landed gentry for the National Gallery carries with it some communication challenges, but I think government and others need to be more willing to argue that this is in the national interest.

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

That is the hard argument to make. It is easier to make the general argument, about why heritage is something for everybody, than to specifically address that in the context of either Old Masters or contemporary art of a very exceptional nature.

*Mark Jones*

I suspect it actually does in the end come down, to a large extent, to altering public opinion. Politicians ultimately do respond to public opinion. I do not think there is a great ferment of distress and anxiety about the lack of tax reliefs to encourage people to give works of art. We need, I suppose, to find mechanisms for raising public awareness about these problems and making people sufficiently upset that they start writing letters to their MPs and causing a stir.

*Harry Reeves, DCMS representative*

The minister has been called away on a personal matter, so I am standing in for her. This has been a fascinating discussion, and I am going to resist the temptation to leap to the defence of DCMS, although there are one or two things I do want to say about the department and its role. What a lot of the discussion

comes down to in terms of the role of DCMS is something about effective advocacy for all of the cultural sectors at all levels of government, whether it is national, local or international. I think Tristram said it earlier: that we need to punch heavier as a department in discussions with other parts of government. I think that is absolutely right.

The difficulty that we face is, however, several-fold. One is spreading ourselves too thinly, and we are addressing that through the current capability review and the follow-up work. We need to focus more on areas where we can make a difference, and things will be emerging on that in the near future. But at the heart of it is the issue that John mentioned at the beginning, about where heritage sits in the government's perception of what it is for.

When we talk to the Treasury about tax issues, and to the local government department about planning and the way that heritage should be taken account of in the planning system, we are often doing this in a bit of a vacuum. It is seen as a one-off issue. It does not belong in a wider perception of the role of heritage in community building, in place making, and in developing our understanding of ourselves as a nation, in that Britishness agenda. I think that wider discussion and that wider appreciation of what culture can do for the various things government wants to achieve is just not there at the moment.

It is absolutely right that you will look to DCMS to be the advocate, whether it is on specific, narrow issues like the sort of tax issue that we talked about, or on these much broader ones, but we cannot do it on our own. We need to be having this kind of discussion but with planners at the table and with local authority chief executives. We have got to bring all those people into the discussion; they have got the money and very often they have got the policy levers that DCMS does not have.

*Dame Liz Forgan OBE*

The institutions represented at this table are really quite expert. But we do not have the access across government that the DCMS has. If we had that access, that would, for me, be the most important thing, because then we could actually look in the eye somebody who was responsible for planning or local government or building roads and argue that it's not a bloody Roman camp in the way of a regeneration plan but something that speaks importantly about the nature and identity and distinctiveness of the place – a huge asset to successful regeneration.



*Paul Myners CBE*

I agree that one of the assets that DCMS has got is access to a phenomenal pool of talent of people who are committed and dedicated to what they are doing. Tate is a very large organisation. We have 8 million visitors a year and £100 million a year of expenditure and employ nearly 2,000 people. This is a complex enterprise.

The dedication of people who work in Tate and the dedication of people who give their time and support to the Tate is, I am sure, paralleled by every other organisation represented at this table. Most other governments do not have that pool of goodwill, enthusiasm and commitment to tap in to. Most other secretaries of state and ministers would give their right arm to have that degree of commitment, and I think DCMS under-exploits it.

So far the Prime Minister has yet to connect intellectually his notion of British identity with institutional fabrics, be it through landscape, art or design  
*Dr Tristram Hunt*

We had a recent gathering of the chairs of the national museums and galleries, and there were very lofty statements made from DCMS about a wish to have regular gatherings and improved dialogue and fit-for-purpose governance. What has happened since? Absolutely nothing. Now there has been a change in government and a change of ministers, reconnecting with that enthusiasm would be a real positive.

*Dr Tristram Hunt*

I know the Prime Minister is interested in Britishness, but so far he has yet to connect intellectually his notion of British identity with institutional fabrics, be it through landscape, art or design, or whatever. I think we need something from the Prime Minister over the next six months.

*John Newbiggin*

Several of you have commented on the knowledge, expertise and passion of the organisations represented round this table. If one thing comes out of this afternoon, it does seem that there is the potential for a more forceful and concerted dialogue with DCMS and with the government at large. It has also been a fascinating discussion. Thank you all for coming.

### **The Smith Institute**

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