

Young people's engagements with heritage: Tackling inequality & other opportunities for public policy

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Young People's Engagements with Heritage

Tackling Inequality & Other Opportunities for Public Policy

Institute for Community Research & Development and Arts Connect
with Historic England

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Historic England

Executive Summary

Research Brief

Despite the growing presence of youth voice within society, little is known about young people's engagements with heritage. Whilst some research has shown that heritage work does support a range of personal, social, health, and learning benefits, existing evidence is thin. At the same time, there are clear signs of an upswell of interest in heritage amongst young people across both informal and extracurricular settings such as social media, and the street. Understanding the role and value of heritage in generating positive social, economic, and health outcomes is vital in order to inform future activities, to influence public policy, and to better make the case for public investments into the heritage sector.

The Institute for Community Research and Development examined seven case studies across England using qualitative research methods. While distinct, each project utilised heritage to address social exclusion, foster social cohesion, enhance health and wellbeing, and improve the lives of young people.

Key Findings

- (1) Young people's participation in heritage contributes to a range of personal development outcomes (e.g. knowledge and interpersonal skills). The seven projects examined are brimming with possibilities for young people's development, although this is simply *the tip of the iceberg* for heritage potential.
- (2) Heritage engagement offers unique opportunities by which to foster identity and belonging; giving young people the chance to reinterpret and re-present the places in which they live. This aligns with current *Levelling Up* policy ambitions to cultivate communities, local pride, and belonging in deprived places. Heritage allows young people to view places in new ways, to explore new forms of identity and belonging, and to establish new networks of friends and collaborators.
- (3) Participating in heritage programmes can help those involved to confront barriers that lead to social exclusion, and can also make telling contributions towards building strong cohesive communities.
- (4) Heritage can promote social mobility, and may also provide a model through which young people are equipped to stay residing in so-called 'left behind' places, to stake a claim to them, and contribute towards their revival.

Recommendations for Future Funding Activities

- (A) Young people should be invited to explore aspects of their own heritage and/or that which they themselves consider to be important. They should also be engaged in the coproduction of activities from the outset, and empowered to define their own visions for heritage (with the guidance of heritage experts).
- (B) The most effective and transformative work focuses not only upon youth outcomes but also diverse groups of people as well as families, neighbourhoods, communities, schools, and other stakeholders. In particular, approaches which embrace both the intercultural and intergenerational aspects of heritage activities are particularly powerful and should be favoured in future project design. Such work also demonstrates effective value for money.
- (C) It should be a prerequisite of future funding to evaluate activities in accordance with consistent patterns of measuring and reporting in order to ensure that learning is not lost. This should be combined with the establishment of a publically and remotely accessible national central archive that collates details of programmes' activities and outcomes. Such a policy would improve decision-making and accountability, better grow the evidence base, and support further research into new areas.
- (D) Proposed heritage activities should demonstrate meaningful commitments to partnership-working evidencing, for instance, how prospective programmes will work with non-heritage organisations, such as local, regional, and national stakeholders within education, housing, transport and healthcare sectors. This is vital in order to share learning, to build community capacity, and ensure that the broader societal benefits of the programme are maximised.

Authors

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Foreword

For some time, Historic England has been considering how best to facilitate the engagement of young people with the heritage that surrounds us, outside of formal heritage venues, visitor attractions, and museums, as well as how best to support youth and heritage organisations to achieve this.

There is an important and developing policy context for this work. Place focussed policies emphasise the need to empower local communities, whilst the role and value of heritage in creating thriving places is becoming better understood. It is also increasingly recognised that young people have important roles to play in society, as well as in the decisions which affect them and their communities. Despite this, the benefits of, and mechanisms for, engaging young people in their local heritage has not been established.

Notwithstanding this, there have been significant innovations in this area. Notably, through the National Heritage Lottery Fund and its ground breaking [Kick the Dust](#) programme (and its precursor, [Young Roots](#)), as well as multiple smaller local programmes run by youth and heritage organisations. Evaluation of our own work delivering [Heritage Schools](#) to two million children over the last ten years has convinced us of the important role that heritage can play in creating senses of local pride, identity, and belonging, whilst our partnership with the [Volunteer Police Cadets](#) identified how young people can take social action on behalf of local heritage. Historic England's 2020 *Heritage Counts* report gathered evidence which highlighted the relationships that exist between heritage engagement at a young age and the shaping of wider educational horizons, the development of skills and opportunities for professional development, and the potential for heritage engagement to enhance both self-esteem and confidence.

Despite this, Historic England identified a lack of a significant body of evidence with regard to either the impact of heritage engagement upon young people outside of school, or which examined the unique benefits that engaging with heritage brings.

Historic England commissioned Arts Connect and the Institute for Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton to look at the nature of existing

evidence via both a literature review and to undertaking field work with young people. The research was designed to help us understand more deeply the nature of young people's engagement with heritage, and especially with regard to social outcomes including wellbeing, social cohesion and senses of place. It was also designed to help us identify the specific contributions that heritage brings and enable recommendations to be made for future policies and work.

We warmly welcome this report, the contributions that it makes to addressing gaps in our existent knowledge, and hope that the wider sector will utilise the findings to better describe and expand the unique roles that heritage can play in transforming the lives of young people.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Context

In late 2021, Historic England commissioned the Institute for Community Research & Development (ICRD) and *Arts Connect* to explore young people's engagements with heritage through a two-part study. First, a comprehensive literature review of existing evidence concerning young people and heritage was conducted (see [Blamire et al., 2022](#)). This entailed the collation of academic and policy-related literature as well as analysis of 'grey' literature including individual programme and project evaluation reports, case studies, and examples of project outputs (e.g., videos, books, blogs, and reports). The latter were accessed via a call for evidence circulated across youth and heritage sectors.

The **key findings** were:

- (1) Whilst there is a rich and well-established body of evidence concerning the benefits of arts-related activities for young people, the evidence base for heritage is somewhat less developed.
- (2) Existing research on young people's engagements with heritage is not robust, and remains confined to individual project evaluation reports which are not immediately accessible or actionable to the sector as a whole.
- (3) While there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that this work is effective in engaging young people and does support a range of personal, social, health and learning benefits, there is insufficient empirical evidence to support these claims.
- (4) Despite clear signs of a recent upswell of interest in heritage matters amongst young people, little is known about the more informal, extracurricular, and place-based heritage activities which young people engage with.
- (5) The importance of young people's engagements with heritage is rarely brought into conversation with regards to key policy agendas such as mental health and wellbeing, inequality and, more recently, so-called 'left behind' places and

Levelling Up. It is therefore unclear as to precisely what policy contributions are afforded by heritage in these areas.

- (6) Despite a considerable amount of work and resources being invested in this area, it is not well-established as to what outcomes arise for young people *within place*, nor how heritage might contribute towards constructing place-based forms of identity and belonging within young people.

Given this, the ambition for Stage Two was, therefore, to engage with a range of heritage projects and programmes led by diverse groups of young people located in distinct areas of England. The aim was to identify and explore innovative examples of heritage practice with young people, and to critically assess the specific outcomes that emerged as a result of their activities. Sections 1.2-1.4 consider further the existing evidence base for heritage, young people, and public policy. Section 1.5 then outlines the lines of inquiry for the fieldwork, while Section 1.6 notes the structure of the report.

1.2 Understanding the Importance of Heritage

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need for greater representation amongst young people within society. At the same time, arts-related activities have gained increasing prominence as a means by which young people can express themselves, and research highlights a myriad of positive social impacts resulting from participation in the arts including personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment, local image and identity, and health and wellbeing ([Matarasso, 1997](#); [Konlaan et al., 2000](#); [Fancourt and Finn, 2019](#)). There is also a strong correlation between higher levels of neighbourhood deprivation and lower levels of engagement with the arts, culture, and heritage ([Mak et al., 2021](#)). Concurrently, arts activities have been shown to effectively address issues of social exclusion and inequality ([Newman and McLean, 1998](#); [Belfiore, 2002](#)).

The evidence base for heritage is somewhat less developed. Some research suggests that engagements with heritage can have positive impacts not only for individuals but also societies. [Wavell et al., \(2002\)](#) propose that such engagement has compelling impacts upon personal acquisition of skills, confidence and self-esteem, creativity, cultural

awareness, and cognitive abilities. [Long et al. \(2002\)](#) have also demonstrated how cultural and sport-based heritage can contribute towards social inclusion, renewal, and regeneration through people gaining greater stakes in their communities. Equally, [BOP \(2011\)](#) highlights how visiting heritage sites and participating in heritage projects enables people to connect with each other and form new friendships and networks; leading to increased levels of civic pride, mutual understanding, and social capital within communities (see also [Heritage Counts, 2017](#)). Other research has emphasised the positive health and wellbeing outcomes associated with heritage, including enhanced senses of belonging, self-worth, and motivation, and reduced anxiety ([Pennington et al., 2019](#)). The social benefits of heritage spaces such as parks and green spaces have long been established ([Dobson et al., 2019](#)). Cumulatively, such evidence has led policymakers such as [DCMS \(2017: 8\)](#) to recognise that “the social benefits of heritage range from increased social cohesion and a greater sense of identity to improved wellbeing and better learning and skills outcomes”.

Although the benefits of the natural environment to health and wellbeing are well established, the roles played by the historic environment are less well-articulated. Indeed, it is “possible, indeed likely, that many projects carried out across the sector have resulted in positive public value, yet the methodologies and language to articulate this has not yet been sufficiently developed” ([Historic England, 2018: 9](#)). [Graham et al. \(2009\)](#) concluded that there were no major studies which had directly linked the historic environment with a ‘sense of place’ and social capital. Moreover, where research has explored this link “the outcomes were limited by patterns of self-selection and mainly reflected the experiences of groups that were predominantly older, white, retired, well-educated, and based in more prosperous areas” ([Historic England, 2018: 30](#)).

1.3 Capturing the Value of Young People’s Engagements with Heritage

There has been considerably less research on the relationships that exist between heritage and young people, particularly any outcomes that arise from when young people engage with heritage. [Jones \(2017\)](#) argues that qualitative social research methods are not typical within heritage practice, while [Bradley et al., \(2011: 7\)](#) discovered “virtually no earlier work on the views of young people on their local environment[s]”. These findings are echoed by [Historic England \(2018\)](#), which identified a distinct lack of work

particularly concerning aspects of intangible cultural heritage. Finally, the academic and policy-focused research which does exist typically fails to capture those diverse settings that sit outside of the remit of formal education, heritage venues, and museums, through which increasingly novel forms of heritage engagement are seemingly taking place (for instance, across the youth sector). The consequence of these factors is that existing knowledge of young people's engagements with heritage is not particularly robust, and instead relies primarily on staff self-reporting and individual project survey data; it remains largely confined to *ad-hoc* project evaluation reports which are neither immediately accessible nor actionable to the sector as a whole. As a result, the vital learning that can be garnered from these diverse forms of engagement with young people is less visible.

These findings are particularly concerning given the ongoing underrepresentation and marginalisation of young people within many 'formal' heritage settings ([Lakey et al., 2017](#); [DCMS, 2019](#)). Work by *Kids in Museums* has identified a range of practical barriers to the participation of young people including cost, the (un)availability of public transport, a lack of parental influence, and limited collaboration between local communities, schools, and museums ([Whitaker, 2016](#)). Other research has identified a paucity of youth-friendly activities within heritage spaces, and a widespread perception amongst young people that heritage venues do not tell stories that are relevant to them ([Manchester and Pett, 2015](#); [Ecclesiastical, 2020](#)). It is worth noting that children and young people have, historically, not been welcomed within heritage sites, as a consequence of being seen as 'unruly' and in need of control (Gill, 2017). In particular, young people from minority ethnic groups, socio-economically disadvantaged people, and those with disabilities remain the most marginalised within these spaces.

Such factors foster the contemporary view that some heritage organisations need to better understand where young people are 'at', rather than the other way round. The three national heritage bodies; Historic England, Cadw, and Historic Environment Scotland each have dedicated activities and programmes for schools and young people. However, more can be done. For instance, [Habib \(2021\)](#) proposes that cultural and heritage institutions must create safe spaces for young people from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds to explore and celebrate the very meanings and complexities of their

own lived experiences. Adoption of this approach would require institutions to present a more emancipatory and transformative approach in order to radically democratise these spaces of heritage (see also [Museum Detox, 2022](#)). These perspectives portray young people as highly engaged political subjects capable of defining their own claims as to what counts as heritage, a viewpoint which may in fact contradict the ‘official’ stories provided by heritage organisations themselves ([Madgin et al., 2018](#)). It is also important to note how young people engage with heritage in increasingly informal, diverse, and creative ways, such as through memory, ancestry, and community and place attachment ([Davison and Russell, 2017](#); [Benwell et al., 2020](#)), as well as via social media, apps, and virtual reality ([Koutromanos, 2020](#)). These findings further demonstrate the need to interrogate precisely what makes history relevant, and heritage valuable, to young people.

It follows that understanding the value of heritage is critical especially at a time when the heritage sector is seeking to address these challenges and engage with a wider and specifically younger audience. Concurrently, ongoing debates about the need for more holistic approaches to education demand a re-evaluation of the roles that heritage might play in this process. In fact, many young people actively embrace opportunities to develop the ‘soft’ skills associated with those beyond-the-classroom and extracurricular activities typically associated with arts and heritage, such as communication, confidence, and teamwork ([DCMS, 2021](#)). Indeed, when young people do participate in extracurricular activities and/or clubs, the range of social benefits that they may gain include meeting new people and socialising with friends, physical and mental health benefits, improved social skills, creativity gains, and educational and career benefits.

1.4 Heritage and Young People in Public Policy

Contemporary policy contexts compel organisations such as Historic England, and the heritage sector more widely, to accelerate their ongoing transitions from being predominantly interested in heritage to more holistic offers related to health and wellbeing, with potential to also, for example, support social prescribing ([SQW, 2020](#)). However, such organisations face challenges in articulating the relevance of heritage to wider spheres in clear and compelling ways. For instance, stakeholders are “not confident that Historic England currently has the knowledge or the language to effectively articulate the specific tangible benefits of exposure to heritage” ([SQW, 2020: 32](#)). Despite

relatively significant resources being invested across the youth and heritage sectors to support young people's engagements with heritage in recent years – predominantly through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) since the early 2000s as well as Historic England's own *Heritage Schools* (see [Blamire et al., 2022](#) for an overview) – a number of knowledge gaps remain. As detailed below, addressing these questions is essential in order to better understand and state the case for heritage being a positive tool for achieving social, cultural, and political change.

First, while many individual project evaluation reports note positive outcomes associated with regards to the development of interpersonal skills, identity and belonging, social inclusion, social cohesion, and health and wellbeing, there is a considerable lack of evidence to justify these claims, for instance, in determining precisely what it means for individuals to gain a 'better sense of place'. Second, there is a question as to the extent to which these benefits are really heritage-specific or indeed whether they could be similarly accrued through participation in other arts, sports, or alternative cultural activities. Third, the various outcomes of young people's participation for families, teachers, neighbourhoods, communities, and local institutions remain relatively underexplored. Fourth, there is little mention of the more critical outcomes that may be associated with young people's engagements with heritage such as, for instance, whether an individual comes to disidentify with a place or experiences their sense of belonging being disrupted due to their participation (such as, for instance, in learning more about the place-based legacies of colonialism or other forms of inequality which contribute to producing place). Existing evidence arguably romanticises the ways in which young people may engage with heritage. Finally, within academic and policy literature, the proclaimed benefits are rarely scaled-up and brought into conversation with broader public policy concepts concerning mental health and wellbeing, social inclusion, social cohesion, inequality and, more recently, so-called 'left behind' places and the Levelling Up agenda.

Published in February 2022, the UK Government's *Levelling Up* White Paper represents the latest attempt by policymakers to address stark regional inequalities in the UK. As one of twelve key missions, enhancing 'pride in place' entails restoring "a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been

lost” ([HM Government, 2022: xviii](#)). Ongoing questions pertain not only with regards to whether the incumbent Conservative Government will remain committed to this policy framework following recent changes to the party leadership, but also with regard to the extent to which fleeting ‘hanging-basket’ style interventions and other forms of civic boosterism may meaningfully transform the socio-economic fortunes of ‘left behind’ places. Nevertheless, cultivating a sense of civic pride (or ‘pride in place’) that is inspired by community, history, and a renewed sense of belonging that is intergenerational and intercultural, could potentially provide a compelling antidote to relieve the strains that have accompanied profound social and political transformation in Britain over recent years. These changes have been manifested within the politics of Brexit, COVID-19, and most recently the cost-of-living crisis, as well as ongoing cultural debates concerning identity-based rights; each has highlighted deep-seated divisions within British society across competing identities of age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. It is notable that a considerable degree of political and public angst has followed these developments. The question, then, is whether – and, if so, how – heritage may address these concerns and, in so doing, help to reduce long-standing inequalities, and build a more equitable society for the future. There is also a question surrounding what roles young people might play in this process.

In addition, it remains unanswered as to whether – and, if so, to what extent – heritage may contribute to fostering both *social inclusion*; that is, the degree to which individuals or communities feel able to fully participate in society (in contrast, *social exclusion* refers to the practices through which particular people have no recognition, voice, or stake in the society in which they live), and *social* or *community cohesion*. The latter concept forms a focus of the UK Government’s Integrated Communities Strategy which seeks to ensure that people and communities, whatever their background, “live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities” ([HM Government, 2018: 10](#)). While recent policy research has focused upon countering extremism (for instance, in the [Independent Review of Social Cohesion and Resilience](#) launched by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in April 2022), a number of dimensions can be seen to shape strong cohesive societies such as institutional trust and the legitimacy of institutions, civic engagement and interpersonal trust, social support,

and the density of social relations (see [Lalot et al., 2021](#)). Given this, it is essential to uncover what potential contributions heritage might make to these policy agendas.

1.5 *Research Aims*

We set out to explore through fieldwork with diverse groups of young people situated in different areas of the country young people's engagements with a range of distinct heritage projects and programmes. The overall aims of the research were to explore innovative examples of heritage practice with young people, and to critically assess the specific outcomes that emerged as a result of their activities. Through both the literature review undertaken and sustained dialogue with young people, youth practitioners, heritage professionals and representatives of funding bodies, the following lines of research inquiry were established:

- How do young people come to conceive of, and define, what heritage is? How then do they engage with it?
- How do heritage programmes contribute to positive (or negative) outcomes for young people? Specifically, what is the role of *heritage* within this?
- How do some heritage programmes contribute to young people's sense of health and wellbeing, and what does this mean, particularly in the context of COVID-19?
- How does heritage create a (positive/negative) sense of place and place identity amongst young people?
- How might heritage contribute to fostering social cohesion and/or reduce social division and polarisation within communities where programmes take place?
- How do some heritage programmes – and/or the outcomes arising from them – connect with broader policy agendas concerning inequalities?

1.6 *Structure of the Report*

Section 2 details the qualitative methodology utilised in this research. In Section 3, the seven case studies which featured as heritage projects in the fieldwork are illustrated. In Section 4, the main findings resulting from the study's engagement are considered. We conclude, in Section 5, by returning to the opening passages in order to summarise the key points of learning and to state recommendations.

2. Methodology

2.1 *Community Peer Research*

This was a qualitative inquiry rooted in the traditions of participatory community and peer research; an approach that is committed to disrupting traditional barriers between the researcher and the researched, disavowing the role of researcher as expert and instead privileging the voices of those with lived experience of the issues being studied to direct the research. Through this, the methodological approach aims to empower people to affect positive change and to produce spaces for collaboration and the coproduction of knowledge between different stakeholders. As far as practically possible, participants were invited to assist with design of the research, collecting and analysing data, and disseminating the research findings ([Young Foundation, 2023](#)). The ICRD has extensive experience in conducting a wide range of community and peer research (see Rees et al., forthcoming), with recent work having shown how young people bring their own unique skills as coresearchers to the research process ([Arnull and Kanjilal, 2022](#)).

2.2 *Selecting Case Studies*

The study used a case study design to enable an in-depth exploration of the research questions. The seven heritage projects were identified through desk-based scoping research and dialogue with youth and heritage practitioners, as well as submitted expressions of interest from groups themselves. The sampling criteria were broad, and required only that groups consisted of young people involved in heritage activities of some kind (conceived in their broadest sense to encompass any aspect of physical, natural or cultural heritage as defined by groups themselves). While specific age categories were not defined, the majority of participants were aged 13-21. In keeping with the participatory ethos, the precise form of engagement with each case study was determined in consultation with the group and also reflected various practicalities such as time, resources, and participant availability as well as, crucially, the precise stage that each heritage project had reached. Whether projects were still running or were completed, or had been disrupted due to the lingering impact of COVID-19, ultimately helped to shape which forms of engagement were possible. The fieldwork activities developed were, therefore, those that were most meaningful, relevant, and appropriate to the project in question, and designed in a bespoke manner with project coordinators

and young people. What the research methods shared in common, however, was the spirit of co-creation which placed young people’s voices at the heart of the research. The seven case studies are listed in *Table 1*.

Heritage Group	Location
Adventurers History Club	East London
Connecting with Yemeni Elders’ Heritage	Liverpool
Hope Streets	Manchester/North West
Ignite Yorkshire	Leeds
Nacro Education Centre Boston	Lincolnshire
Stand Out	Burnley
Wild Sparks	North Yorkshire

Table 1: Heritage Case Studies

2.3 Research Methods

Fieldwork was conducted between May and November 2022, and consisted of ethnographic participant observation¹ combined with a series of project-specific bespoke workshops and some semi-structured interviews with young people and adult project coordinators (see *Appendix A*). Where feasible, the research entailed participating in project activities alongside sharing informal conversations with young people in order to explore the research themes. Fieldwork activities included, amongst other examples, a museum visit, a boat trip, and a three-day heritage crafts residential course. When there were no heritage activities to engage with, workshops were chosen; this involved bringing young people together within non-hierarchical, inclusive and creative spaces to share and discuss their views and experiences. One case study also involved a group of older participants in their late 20s/early 30s reflecting on their earlier experiences; in this instance, two workshops were conducted with the latter involving the young people’s former school teacher and other adult facilitators. Where face-to-face activities were not possible, some semi-structured interviews with young people and project facilitators were conducted online via MS Teams; these typically lasted 60-90 minutes.

¹ This method involves the researcher either directly participating in activities and/or observing those activities, recording notes, and seeking to interpret people’s behaviour and interactions.

To conclude, research findings were corroborated at two events. The first was held in Birmingham in October 2022, was organised by the research team, and was entitled [Understanding the Value of Heritage: A Young People’s Showcase](#). Young people’s groups were invited to showcase their work, to reflect on the project’s preliminary findings, and to contribute to dialogue with youth practitioners, heritage professionals, academics, and representatives from other public bodies. In an ICRD guest blog post, Kenzie Chadburn, a member of Stand Out, [reflects on their experiences of this event](#). The second occasion was led by young people at Curious Minds. *Hope Evolves: A Guide to Youth-Led Change in Heritage* was hosted in Warrington in November 2022 and brought together a similar network of participants. The research team was invited to [share research findings](#) and to network with key stakeholders; providing a further opportunity to corroborate research findings. *Figure 1* illustrates some of the different fieldwork activities.



Figure 1: Fieldwork Activities I (Source: Authors)

The data was subject to qualitative thematic analysis ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)). One safeguard to ensure rigour is ‘triangulation’ whereby fieldwork data is cross-checked against two or more other data sources to ascertain reliability. In this research, this was achieved via observation, workshop and interview data, informal exchanges with industry volunteers, practitioners, professionals and funders, and analysis of academic and policy literature. The research themes were derived from the overall research aims outlined in Section 1.5.

2.4 *Limitations*

Some caveats remain. First, ICRD and *Arts Connect* worked hard to ensure buy-in from a diverse range of young people's heritage groups, although logistical issues meant that it was not possible to secure the participation of some groups. The relatively short timescale also prevented deeper engagement with those groups who did engage over a longer period of time. It would have instead been preferable to have built closer relations with the participants over a more protracted period in order to have better engaged with the groups and to have better fulfilled the participatory premise of the fieldwork. Nonetheless, these challenges accurately reflect some of the day-to-day realities of working within the youth and heritage sectors; paradoxically, therefore, rendering the researcher's experiences somewhat authentic. Notwithstanding these limitations it is advanced that the research findings are valid and indeed profound.

2.5 *Ethics*

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Arts, Business & Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Wolverhampton. No data was collected prior to all participants' providing fully informed consent, and to ensure confidentiality, participants' responses are anonymised within this report. Project researchers possessed up-to-date Enhanced DBS Certificates and worked closely with adult project coordinators during the fieldwork to guarantee adherence to safeguarding procedures.

3. Young People's Engagements with Heritage: Case Studies

This section outlines the seven case studies selected for the fieldwork. For the sake of brevity, further contextual details can be accessed via the hyperlinks provided.

3.1 *Adventurers History Club*

The Adventurers History Club was the brainchild of three Year Ten students from George Mitchell School in Leyton, East London, who had previously taken part in a school-based National Lottery Heritage Fund project called *Up the Manor* (UTM). UTM involved an academically mixed-ability cohort of about a dozen George Mitchell students from mainly British Asian and Somali backgrounds. These students had bonded closely as a group and had had their imagination 'fired' by trips to museums and archives across London as part of the project. Keen to build on the success of UTM, this all-male group developed the idea of a monthly history club that they called the Adventurers History Club (AHC); it began meeting in 2009. The students helped plan and cost a programme of activities and secured funding from the Gareth Butler History Trust (£2,000), and the Bishopsgate Foundation (£1,000). During the academic year 2009-2010, the Adventurers visited Tower Bridge, the Bank of England Museum, the Tower of London, the Imperial War Museum, Windsor Castle, Globe Theatre, and the Museum of London Docklands. The Adventurers also took part in an overnight trip to Arundel in West Sussex. Throughout the academic year, they undertook research into aspects of history relating to each planned trip, and recorded their findings in research notebooks. In addition to taking part in visits to heritage and cultural sites, the boys also gained experience of club administration (The Adventurers History Club Annual Report, 2010).

The AHC continued for three years with further visits to the Hajj Exhibition at the British Museum and the Freemasons' Hall, London, as well as fieldtrips to Cambridgeshire, Kent, and Bath. Members also participated in *Taken for Granted*, a National Lottery Community Fund project which explored the experiences of MPs from Global Majority backgrounds. As of 2012, the AHC's stated mission was to "broaden the horizons and raise the aspirations of Londoners aged 16-25 from diverse communities by facilitating and funding their spare-time participation in cultural and heritage activities" (The Adventurers History Club Annual Report, 2012: 3). Of sixteen members, fourteen were

from families where neither parent had attended university, and ten were in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)². Within this ethnically diverse group, members variously identified as African-Somalian, British Bengali, Pakistani, British Pakistani, African, Bangladeshi, Indian and Somalian.



Figure 2: The Adventurers History Club visit Arundel, West Sussex (Source: The Adventurers History Club Annual Report, 2010)

The focus on the AHC was exceptional in the sense that the fieldwork activities involved a group of participants in their late 20s/early 30s reflecting on their *earlier* experiences of doing heritage; this provided unique insights into how these experiences might persist through lifelong learning, and also what legacies and impact of youth engagement might continue into the longer-term. Two research workshops were conducted in London; the first, co-facilitated with the former project leader based at the Bishopsgate Institute, involved only Adventurers; while the second workshop also included a former school teacher as well as other adults previously involved in the project. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were also carried out online.

3.2 Nacro Education Centre, Boston

Nacro is a social justice charity based in England and Wales. With a background based in criminal justice, it is now predominantly focused upon assisting disadvantaged young

² EMA was a scheme which provided weekly financial support to students from low-income households. EMA was abolished in England in 2011.

people and vulnerable adults through housing, education, and justice services. Nacro is England's largest independent training provider of education and skills to 16–18-year-olds and, in Boston, Lincolnshire, adult learning courses include Animal Care, Gym Instructing, Childcare, and Sports Massage Therapy, alongside compulsory GCSE Maths and English. In addition, students partake in Enrichment activities for which a cultural heritage component was notably introduced in recent years. This arose following some students' difficulties completing a GCSE English Language exam question; when asked to write a story about travelling on a train, some commented that they had, in fact, never been on a train before. Indeed, many students attending Nacro in Boston experience not only a lack of social mobility but also a lack of geographical mobility too. To date, heritage activities at Nacro have included making lanterns to celebrate 400 years since the Mayflower set sail to the US, remembering the First World War Centenary, visits to heritage sites such as Lincoln Castle, classroom learning about the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights, heritage crafts and cooking to celebrate and embrace other students' national diversity (see 4.3), and helping to design a heritage mosaic to be installed in the town's historic marketplace. The various themes addressed in Enrichment include social inclusion, overcoming difference, tolerance and respect, identity and belonging, and place-making. We led a one-day workshop at Nacro Boston in July 2022 with eight participants; all identified as White British, were aged 16-19, and the learning of each had been shaped by factors relating to neurodiversity.

3.3 Hope Streets

Hope Streets was a five-year project beginning in 2018 funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund grants programme entitled *Kick the Dust* (see [Blamire et al., 2022](#)). Led by the cultural education charity Curious Minds, Hope Streets was a strategic partnership that sought to deliver and embed long-lasting transformational change across the youth and heritage sectors through testing and refining new models of youth engagement and leadership which place the heritage sector at the heart of young people's services. Hope Streets was predominantly museum-led and worked in partnership with The Atkinson, Cheshire West and Chester Museum Service, Lancashire Museum Service, Bolton Museum and Tullie House Museum and Arts Gallery. It engaged 11-25-year-olds from diverse backgrounds and worked in collaboration with artists, other experts and heritage professionals to “interrogate, agitate and re-present their local heritage”

([Curious Minds, 2018: np](#)). Young people were empowered to take up paid roles, to act as advisors, and to contribute to heritage organisations' strategic plans as a means of ensuring permanent change within heritage spaces. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with young participants and programme staff, with informal conversations also being held at *Hope Evolves* in November 2022.



Figure 3: Hope Evolves, November 2022 (Source: [Curious Minds, 2022](#))

3.4 Ignite Yorkshire

Ignite Yorkshire was also funded through *Kick the Dust*, and was a four-year project (2018-22) and worked with the youth and heritage sectors to engage diverse communities of young people aged 14-19 (and up to age 25 for SEND), out of school, with the industrial heritage of Yorkshire. *Kick the Dust* programmes emphasise partnership approaches and, as such, social enterprise *We are IVE* was the lead organisation working with the Canal & River Trust, Canal Connections CIC, the National Coal Mining Museum for England, North Yorkshire Youth, Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust, and Swinton Lock Activity Centre. Over 3,000 young people were involved across a range of diverse creative projects including a textiles heritage-based drama, a mining heritage festival, creative writing, and blacksmithing and woodworking (see [Ignite Yorkshire, 2022](#)). This

study's research included a workshop in Leeds with ten young participants, whilst observation activities during a visit to the Royal Armouries Museum focused on exploring queer histories, and a boat trip led by Canal Connections.

3.5 Stand Out

Stand Out is an LGBTQ+ based heritage project run by a team of young producers aged 13–25, which works with the youth-led arts organisation Blaze Arts. [Inspired by the first public meeting held by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality in 1971 at Burnley Library](#) – which recently commemorated its 50th anniversary – Stand Out was formed in 2022 to explore local history and queer heritage in Burnley, particularly by way of gathering oral histories. The group's aims are to revisit and reclaim the struggles of LGBTQ+ people and to combat discrimination within the town. In July 2022, Stand Out exhibited the first volume of their [Zine](#) which examines local and general queer-related history and, in 2023, alongside pop-up exhibitions, Stand Out are set to host their own local Pride event. Despite being a fledgling group, members of Stand Out participated in this study's *Young People's Showcase* (Figure 4) and shared informal dialogue with project researchers.



Figure 4: Stand Out Young Producers at the Young People's Showcase (Source: Authors)

3.6 *Wild Sparks*

Formed through Ignite Yorkshire, a young people's group – Bright Sparks – was first founded at North Yorkshire Youth, a youth charity based at Carlton Lodge Activity Centre, Thirsk. Bright Sparks members were 14-19-year-old individuals (up to the age of 25 for those with SEND) who, over a three-year period, worked together on heritage crafts projects supported by a permanent youth facilitator and drop-in artists and heritage crafts experts. Following the culmination of Bright Sparks, a new group was established – *Wild Sparks* – which catered for 11-19-year-olds (up to the age of 25 for SEND) through a monthly club which offered outdoor activities and heritage crafts between May and December 2022. In addition, Wild Sparks enjoyed two residential visits to Carlton Lodge; the first of which saw the opening of a bespoke on-site Learning and Heritage Centre. The majority of participants were White British and, amongst them, many had special educational needs and disabilities which had prompted a shift to their being home schooled. The themes for Wild Sparks are supporting personal development and resilience, enabling people to acquire transferrable skills, and enabling young people to have opportunities to reach places that would normally be inaccessible. The sheer extent of the outdoors and heritage offerings provided is worth quoting in full:

“Medieval Woodworking Skills, Blacksmithing, Dry Stone Walling, Yorkshire Stone Flag Flooring, Stained Glass Making, Whittling, Hand and Axe Carving, Hazel Weaving, Map Reading, Seal Making, Painting, Lime-Washing, Rope Making, Pyrography, Image Harvesting, Film Making, GIF Making, Drawing, Creative Writing, Model Making, Fabric Printing, Poetry, Archaeology, Archiving, Wattle And Daub Making, Design, Hedge Laying, Environmental and Conservation Skills, Bat Boxes [combined with] Archery, Axe Throwing, Bush-Craft, Den Building, High Ropes, Zip Wire, Problem Solving, Kayaking, Rope Bridges, Canoeing, Raft Building, Outdoor Cooking, Foraging, Nightlines, Climbing” ([North Yorkshire Youth, 2022: np](#))

In addition to hosting Wild Sparks at the *Young People's Showcase*, one project researcher (Blamire) attended the three-day residential course in August 2022. Blamire participated in the full range of outdoor/heritage activities proffered, and conducted observations and informal conversations with the young people attending, as well as youth workers, project facilitators and site staff.

3.7 *Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage*

Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage was an intergenerational project that was delivered by National Museums Liverpool working with a range of partners: the Liverpool Arabic Centre, the Al-Taiseer Mosque, the Al-Ghazali Centre, the Liverpool Arabic Arts Festival, and the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre. The project was inspired by a 14-year-old of Yemeni heritage, Abdul Wase, whose grandmother lives with dementia. Having discovered the museum's app *My House of Memories* – designed for people living with dementia – Abdul noted that the app failed to portray pictures and stories of relevance to Liverpool's Yemeni community. Having then contacted National Museums Liverpool, an initiative to collect and record objects pertaining to Yemeni heritage was born. The aim of the project was to help young people of Yemeni heritage to support their parents and grandparents to connect with their cultural heritage “by enabling young participants to capture, preserve and digitise familiar and untold community stories, traditions and culture linked to museum collections” ([National Museums Liverpool, 2022a: np](#)). The material collected formed the content of the “Memories of Yemen” app and was launched in June 2022. The project's themes included bringing heritage institutions closer to their local diverse communities, strengthening partnership-working between local communities and place-based heritage organisations, and cultivating intergenerational community dialogue. In all, over 40 young people were engaged in collating and designing the heritage app content. This study's researchers conducted a one-day research workshop with young people at the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, Liverpool, in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool, in September 2022 (*Figure 5*). Eight young participants also attended the *Young People's Showcase*.



Figure 5: Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage Research Workshop (Source: Authors)



Figure 6: Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage Project Team (Source: [National Museums Liverpool, 2022b](#))

These seven case studies represent a considerable degree of diversity across different identities of age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Consequently, they provided good opportunities for undertaking detailed contextual analysis, with the projects also reflecting varying stages of delivery. Some programmes were/are significantly resourced – such as *Kick the Dust* – while others were/are more piecemeal or reflect more *ad-hoc* approaches to heritage engagement. These differences enabled the researchers to capture a diverse range of ways through which novel heritage activities with young people were (and are) approached. Moreover, what these projects shared in common is their desire to mobilise heritage in order to address aspects of social inclusion, social cohesion, and health and wellbeing, whilst also improving the lives of young people. They are/were also all predominantly youth conceived and/or youth led.

4. Outcomes of Heritage Engagement for Public Policy

This section reflects on the fieldwork across the seven case studies and considers the various outcomes of young people's engagements with heritage. It thereafter states the consequences, and renewed potential for, public policy afresh. Section 4.1 reviews the evidence for personal development; 4.2 covers identity and belonging; 4.3 notes the potential for social inclusion and social cohesion; and 4.4 draws together the evidence for heritage as a driver for tackling place-based and regional inequalities. Finally, 4.5 brings attention to some of the limitations of these heritage activities as well as the challenges faced with regard to the implementation of new public policies. Throughout, comment is made as to how these various outcomes may combine to produce profound possibilities for transforming people and places.

4.1 *Personal Development*

First, as well-established within academic and policy literature on arts-based activities – and in line with the typically less robust project-specific evaluation literature upon heritage – young people's participation in heritage activities is constitutive of a range of personal development outcomes. That is, young people gain knowledge – e.g. an increased understanding of an area or concept – as well as wide-ranging interpersonal skills such as increased confidence, communication skills, critical thinking, empathy, resilience, teamwork, and leadership. These skills were not just observed by researchers and heritage project coordinators, but are actively recognised and embraced by young people themselves.

In workshops, former *Bright Sparks* noted that they had learnt about a range of heritage-specific knowledges and craft skills – such as stained glass making, wattle and daub, woodworking and blacksmithing – whilst building a traditional bodger's lodge (*Figure 7*). In fact, one participant reflected that “my favourite part of the activities is the opportunity to learn new skills”. Alongside heritage, at Carlton Lodge Activity Centre, young participants engaged in outdoor activities led by qualified instructors who fully recognised the roles that outdoor education has in developing key skills such as confidence, independence, resilience, and the ability to overcome challenges. With many of the *Wild Sparks* living with special educational needs and disabilities and/or having withdrawn from mainstream education, even simply participating in a three-day

residential visit may seem challenging, yet the programme had offered unique opportunities and insights into how heritage can deliver in such a context.



Figure 7: Building the Bodger's Lodge at Bright Sparks (Source: [Ignite Yorkshire, 2021](#))

Similarly, young learners at Nacro Boston enjoyed learning about cultural heritage through exploring different national cuisines; they reflected that this had helped them to develop their senses of understanding and empathy with others. The Adventurers History Club provided young Londoners from minority ethnic backgrounds with opportunities to visit places beyond the capital and, in so doing, learn more about the diverse geographies of the country. The fascinating workshop discussion detailed in *Figure 8* is illuminating.

Naseem	I think especially at an age where you're coming out of your teenage years and getting into adulthood, it's good to have experiences outside your normal surroundings to give you some breadth of understanding of people's different backgrounds, their upbringings, and it sort of humbles you [learning about] their different ways of living...
Rasheed	Yeah, when you go on these trips outside you realise it's not all ethnic minorities, that was eye-opening!
Zaid	You know, there's a lot of emphasis on diversity and interacting with others from a different background but a lot of that is focused on the white middle-class environment, whereas it's not done the other way around [...] the reality is that a lot of ethnic minority communities will be quite concentrated in terms of who they interact with so that was definitely a big impact of going on those trips...
Naseem	100%. It's eye-opening to everyone and, you know, it can remove ignorance...
Rasheed	Yeah, going on those trips does force you to critically think a bit more.
Zaid	Though do you remember going to Peterborough? We were on a bus and – obviously here you've got double-decker buses and they're very regular – but there was about 10 or 14 of us, all Asian, Somalian and whatever, and we all got on the bus and we were talking, and this lady sitting us beside us was like “you've got a really good English accent, where did you learn it?” and, I mean, we found it humorous but it's interesting, isn't it? 'Cos it's like part of me was even thinking back then, you know, you can't necessarily blame them, but it's also interesting to see where it's not so multicultural around the country.
Rasheed	Bath kind of scared me a bit [...] We're so used to being in London and everyone's generally miserable and siloed into themselves, whereas in Bath random people on the street would be like “Hi, how are you?” and I was like: this is a bit weird for me! So you go to different areas and people are much more talkative and friendly, but for us it was very foreign...

Figure 8: Adventurers History Club: Workshop Excerpt (Source: Authors)

In addition, young people at *Ignite Yorkshire* reflected on the following positive outcomes that had occurred as a result of their participation: “feeling more confident talking with strangers”, “using public transport”; “gaining confidence [and] meeting friends”; “helping me to explore my identity” and “develop public speaking skills”. In terms of health and wellbeing, the same young participants felt that participation had helped them to overcome their anxieties and taught them how to manage stress.

Furthermore, these knowledges and skills are being actively and positively embraced by young people as a means by which to support further education or entry into the job market. Not only had increased confidence encouraged and supported participants to make applications to college or university, but these experiences were seen as being “useful for [their] CVs”; as one Ignite Yorkshire member explained, “I went to the JobCentre and they were surprised at how much I did at all these events!”. It was also found that participation in Bright Sparks had enabled some young participants to pursue further study in heritage-related disciplines such as Archaeology, while others had been able to obtain direct employment in heritage-related industries. Thus, participation enabled young people to network within the heritage sector and to learn about opportunities for paid and unpaid work in the sector. However, as the Adventurers reflected, some simply acknowledged that the acquiring of these skills was essential for the functioning of a good and just society. Finally, in Hope Streets, the opportunity to work *alongside* adults through volunteering – bearing responsibility for projects as well as informing the strategic oversight of organisations – had contributed to both the social and emotional maturation of the young adults who had participated.

While existent literature on heritage and skills development does highlight progress in these areas, robust evidence is slim. Yet, clearly, these projects are/were brimming with possibilities for developing young people and, crucially, fostering cultural capital (that is, the skills, knowledge and assets that may promote an individual’s social mobility) even if there also remains untapped potential. In particular, more should be done to emphasise and promote these outcomes in order to strengthen engagement across the youth, heritage, and education sectors (see Section 5). There also needs to be more committed work undertaken with regard to both reinforcing these outcomes to those young people who do participate and benefit in order that they are better able to ‘sell’ these experiences in the future, and in terms of marketing the value of these opportunities to those who do not currently engage. Finally, while individual project evaluation reports typically end here – that is, by proclaiming the wealth of positive individual benefits attributed to young people as a result of the project-specific activities undertaken – this report argues that this is simply the *tip of the iceberg* in terms of the full value of heritage. In the following sections, it is demonstrated how these skills are simply the foundations upon which more radical transformations might be achieved.

4.2 Identity & Belonging: 'Pride in Place'

It was found that a key driver which encouraged young people to engage with these place-based heritage activities was having the opportunity to learn more about the place they live and/or events relating to it, as well as the chance to challenge, re-interpret and re-present the ways in which that place is popularly understood. For instance, Stand Out is (youth-)driven by a collective desire to disrupt popular depictions of Burnley. To many social and political commentators, strong support for Brexit within so-called 'left behind' towns such as Burnley reflects the views of an older, white, working-class population that is essentially conservative and nostalgic in its outlook and resentful of recent cultural shifts within society (see [Tyler et al., 2022](#) for a critique of this viewpoint). In response, Stand Out explores and reaffirms the hidden histories which reflect social diversity within Burnley and, through doing so, stakes a claim for all minority people living in the town, and inspires queer culture to be celebrated within the town. The project has also created a safe, inclusive social group for LGBTQ+ individuals in Burnley. Ignite Yorkshire has also included work exploring queer histories and other forms of inclusive heritage that are "not normally taught in schools [such as] women's history, non-white history and international history" (young participant). This work, with a lesser emphasis on place, has helped to attract and welcome diverse groups of young people from across the region who have since enjoyed opportunities to form new friendship groups and establish senses of belonging based on shared identities.

Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage has invited young people in Liverpool to explore their Yemeni heritage. Some young participants were UK citizens born in Liverpool sharing differing levels of engagement with Yemen, while others were much newer arrivals to the city. In this study's workshop, young participants reflected on becoming involved with the project because it was a way to: "connect with Yemen" and to "share my Yemeni culture with others"; to "connect with new people"; to "learn things from one another"; and to "feel closer to the community". The project enabled young Muslim boys and girls to share their migration experiences, to explore their own diverse identities, and to consider the contribution of Yemeni cultural heritage in shaping modern-day Liverpool. With the aim at the outset to collate material for a dementia-based app, Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage has also helped to forge new conceptions

of identity and belonging for young Yemenis in the city; as one participant explained “we have a large Yemeni presence [so] as a Muslim girl I can wear what I want, and feel safe”.

This study’s research also demonstrates that young people are attracted by opportunities to explore aspects of their own heritage and/or that which they themselves consider to be important, rather than simply learning about heritage for the sake of it. Some participants at Ignite Yorkshire, for instance, remarked that it sometimes felt that heritage was being “shoehorned into everything”. This is clearly unsurprising, but it does further emphasise the need to engage young people in the coproduction of heritage activities and, from the beginning, enable them to define their own visions for heritage. This follows research by [Madgin et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Habib \(2021\)](#) and acknowledges the gap between public political discourse, the dynamic nature of social change (e.g. ongoing debates concerning identity-based rights), and the existing offers provided by heritage institutions. While an entirely youth-led approach would not be unproblematic, there is nonetheless clear scope to encourage more place-based heritage activities that are youth-led with the potential to contribute to fostering that “sense of community, local pride and belonging”; as proposed in Levelling Up policy discourse ([HM Government, 2022: xviii](#)).

Finally, another key driver for participation is friendship. Simply put, young people often participate because they observe their peers being involved and do not want to miss out! Notably, it was found that some young people demonstrated leadership in defining their own heritage activities; for instance, in Connecting with Yemeni Elders’ Heritage, 14-year-old Abdul Wase, who was described by his peers as a “cultural icon”, was integral to ensuring buy-in across the group. In turn, the project acted as a landing point for those who had recently sought asylum from Yemen or arrived from other European countries. In Stand Out, the shared LGBTQ+ identity brought young people together, while Bright Sparks and Wild Sparks enabled home-schooled pupils to ‘find their group’; as one young participant explained:

“[I get] a feeling of belonging, acceptance and inclusion. When I was younger, you were isolated if you were interested in something ‘different’. It has been a joy to find out I am not the only one who likes doing archery or making baskets out of unusual materials”

It is also noteworthy that during the COVID-19 pandemic – which proved to be a traumatic time for many young people and was disruptive to both their educational and personal development – the social components of these heritage programmes was crucial and made positive contributions to supporting their health and wellbeing. Many projects within Ignite Yorkshire, for instance, made strong use of online delivery.

From this it can be seen that heritage allows young people to not only learn more about a place but to view that place in new ways, to collectively construct new visions, and to establish new groups of friends and collaborators. In so doing, young people develop their own forms of identity and belonging and make claims to a given place – the question next, however, is what does this mean for wider communities and society?

4.3 Social Inclusion & Social Cohesion

The fallout associated with Brexit, and magnified by COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis (and ongoing strike action), and the existence of highly charged social debates which are often described as being reflective of a ‘culture war’, have highlighted apparent deep-seated divisions across British society with respect to identities based upon age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In this study’s fieldwork, it was questioned as to what roles heritage might play in addressing these tensions and building a more equitable society for the future – that is, through promoting social inclusion and social cohesion. The results are enlightening.

When focused on/in place, young people’s heritage activities can be highly effective. While Section 4.2 has already made the case for working towards social inclusion in terms of providing activities which challenge discrimination and/or confront the barriers that prevent young people from fully participating in society, heritage projects also allow young people to feel ‘accepted’; this has significant implications for their health and wellbeing. Moreover, potentially vulnerable people may be introduced to a range of youth-specific support services as well as, in the case of Wild Sparks, other youth and heritage activities which positively contribute to their social inclusion.

In terms of social cohesion, young people’s heritage activities work powerfully when they combine both intergenerational and intercultural components. During Up the Manor, the

precursor to the Adventurers History Club, pupils were required to conduct interviews with (predominantly white) older residents to learn about their experiences of growing up in the borough. Through the project, perceptions and prejudices were challenged, place-based commonalities emerged, and shared understandings were formed. While beyond the scope of this report, [Reminiscence Arts](#) led by the charity Age Exchange has been a trailblazer in the field of intergenerational arts and heritage and warrants mention. Stand Out's initial work also included a strong intergenerational component, with the collection of oral histories creating space for young people to learn about "the trials and tribulations that the LGBTQ+ community faced on the path to equality" and through which shared understandings emerged ([Stand Out, 2022: np](#)). Through uncovering these hidden histories, Stand Out is re-staking claims to place (and also to space, should a wish to establish a physical premises be realised), and promoting tolerance, respect, and diversity. However, this is not straightforward. Although still in its infancy, should this work be not universally received within the town then the potential negative impacts could include a sense of belonging being disrupted, in addition to marginalisation, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as potential threats to individuals' physical and mental wellbeing.

Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage showcased intergenerational and intercultural elements. In September 2021, the project hosted a Yemeni culture day which brought together residents to celebrate Yemeni culture through food, music, dance and the collation of cultural artefacts. The event was attended by an ethnically diverse audience who enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about Yemeni culture and its contribution to Liverpool. In this study's workshop, young people variously reflected upon their pride in showcasing aspects of their culture, making their family proud, and "representing [their] country in the best possible way". Equally, working with older people in order to learn about Yemeni culture helped to bring young people closer to their elders. Interestingly, at the *Young People's Showcase*, young Muslim girls representing the project shared a fleeting moment of connection with a white British-born young person who told of their recent heritage placement which had been spent at an open-air museum dressed as a thirteenth-century medieval peasant. Here the shared experience of wearing a head covering operated as a brief moment of bridging between diverse cultures, highlighting

the power of heritage to disrupt taken-for-granted ways of thinking. *Figure 9* illustrates some of these fieldwork experiences.



Figure 9: Fieldwork Activities II (Source: Authors)

Finally, an example of how untapped potential for heritage abounds. The town of Boston, Lincolnshire, has witnessed substantial population growth in recent years owing to in-

migration from Central and Eastern Europe; in part a consequence of the presence of a low-wage food production sector. Since 2001, the town has doubled in population to around 70,000 people. These transformations have been accompanied by a narrative of tension and division across nationalities, and led a centre-right think tank labelling Boston the least integrated town in the country ([Policy Exchange, 2016](#)). Boston also recorded the highest vote for Brexit in the country. Yet, while Boston is often depicted and perceived as a once 'sleepy rural English market town' previously undisturbed by immigration (see Blamire et al., forthcoming), the town has a rich cosmopolitan heritage – much of which remains hidden. This includes not only its role in founding its US namesake, but also the fact that Boston was once a member of the Hanseatic League and formed a booming trading outpost during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. During this time, Boston was one of England's richest provincial towns and was known as a lively cosmopolitan place which held internationally renowned fairs (Austin and Radford, 2019). Later, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dutch engineers drained the fens and in doing so left their mark on the architectural landscape, and thereafter the arrival of Irish labourers – many of whom came to settle in the area – resulted in the formation of an 'Irishtown'. Meanwhile, few know that the town's famous Guildhall was built using timber imported through trade with the Baltics.

While some local organisations are working hard to promote activities through which the town's rich heritage might be better realised – such as the [Boston Hanse Group](#) – such efforts are being led largely by groups within the community and voluntary sector rather than formal heritage organisations. This means that the quite extraordinary potential – *for heritage only* – to challenge the noted everyday forms of anti-migrant prejudice and discrimination, and to promote alternative forms of belonging in this town, are not being fully realised. A more sustained and better resourced programme of activities might enable the enormous potential for heritage to be fully seized. Such an approach would require a much more joined-up response from partners across the borough that was not limited to heritage organisations but would also involve the wider community and voluntary sector, schools, charities, religious institutions, and the local authority. There are also clear opportunities to bring education, arts and the creative industries, and sports into such an offering as well. Through so doing, more local people would be

empowered to stake a claim in this place and embrace it as their own, whilst more tools to combat division may appear.

This report has so far shown how heritage provides unique opportunities for the development of young people's knowledges and skills, and how this is constitutive of building both social and cultural capital. The study has also demonstrated what contributions heritage might make towards fostering renewed senses of identity and belonging and, with them, a 'pride in place'. It then turned to consider how these factors may contribute towards fostering social cohesion within and across diverse people and places. Finally, the report examines what all this might mean for tackling socioeconomic inequalities.

4.4 Tackling Regional Inequalities (or what it really means to 'Level Up')

As previously mentioned, the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper seeks to restore "a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost" ([HM Government, 2022: xviii](#)) with policy attention focused on regeneration, communities and civic society, culture, heritage and sport, housing, planning, and crime. While critical scrutiny is beyond the remit of this report (for that, see [Dobson, 2022](#)), this research nevertheless shows how heritage may have considerable roles to play in the building of the social capital, as well as trust and participation; all of which are integral to healthy civic life. It has also shown how heritage can be a powerful force for bridging communities as well as instilling renewed senses of civic pride. Moreover, although there is a temptation to interpret 'pride in place' through the lens of 'hanging basket' solutions, *Historic England's* own [High Street Heritage Action Zones](#) and the [Future High Streets Fund](#) have both seen considerable investments in local high streets that have brought with them significant impacts that have fuelled economic, social, and cultural recovery across England.

There is also clear potential for heritage to address first the 'emotional geography' of places which enables diverse residents to claim meaningful ownership of the place in which they live and to feel as though they belong and, secondly, to more indirectly fertilise the ground for economic revival by promoting the acquisition of skills, social capital and trust, and encouraging civic participation and collaboration between partners. Clearly, in

order to radically transform regional inequalities in the UK, other policy realms must deliver; including addressing ongoing challenges within the housing, education, transport and healthcare sectors. Heritage has an important role to play in such transformations, and young people are actively leading the way in transforming place, tackling inequalities and making their places fair, good and equitable places in which to live.

To give some examples, Ignite Yorkshire has embarked upon numerous projects which each aim to explore and reinterpret the industrial heritage of Yorkshire. As feedback from young people who participated in a textiles heritage-based drama showed, they felt that “in order to understand the context of current social and political movements, pandemics and the textiles industry, it was fundamental to understand the industrial history of not just Huddersfield and the UK, but also the world” ([Ignite Yorkshire, 2021: np](#)). Crucially, heritage was not seen as being backwards looking or solely about remembering past endeavours in a sentimental light. Instead it was seen to be connected to understanding legacies of colonialism and economic exploitation as well as to contemporary forms of globalisation, which enabled and empowered the young participants to connect the rich textile heritage of the region with other peoples and places. Meanwhile, working with Heritage Lincolnshire, young people are leading the way in revitalising and regenerating urban spaces through the repair and reinstatement of historic shopfronts and the reuse of vacant buildings. This work is itself supported through the UK Government’s *Towns Fund*. In Burnley, Stand Out have not only begun to work to reconfigure the landscapes of sexuality politics within the town – in turn making it arguably a more open, tolerant, and diverse place in which to live – but the group is also actively seeking partnership networks through which to obtain funding towards creating a safe space and premises for LGBTQ+ people. Consequently, the young people are building social capital and capacity within Burnley, and contributing positively to civic life.

In Liverpool, the social value of these outcomes, from supporting new arrivals to bridging communities and combating social exclusion, is profound. The initial idea by a 14-year-old boy, then supported by National Museums Liverpool and five partner organisations, should have long-lasting legacies and outcomes for individuals’ social and educational development, as well as their health and wellbeing, and has also delivered numerous intergenerational and intercultural benefits to the wider community. Meanwhile, as many

of the *Adventurers* later reflected, their own experiences were crucial in cultivating the requisite social capital to support their bids for employment, and other activities, even years later. In Boston, Nacro's work continues to be focused on supporting young people's social mobility and draws on heritage as a vital resource to deliver Enrichment activities. Meanwhile, Hope Streets remains committed to achieving long-lasting transformations within the heritage sector through embedded change, with young people gaining paid roles to help address issues of underrepresentation within museums and other heritage spaces. This offers potential to rethink existing heritage offers through capitalising upon the potential of social media technologies as well as committing to new innovative place-based partnership approaches that may bring diverse stakeholders onboard.

Central to Levelling Up is the *Towns Fund*, a £3.6 billion investment which seeks to address barriers to economic growth and drive economic regeneration and productivity across the UK. Successful proposals were those which addressed long-term economic and productivity growth through investment in connectivity, land use, economic assets including cultural assets, skills and enterprise infrastructure ([Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019](#)). Perhaps the most pressing issues facing many of the 101 towns which have received funding are those of a 'hollowing out' and the 'brain drain' that has accompanied the outward migration of young people away from rural areas and towns towards cities in pursuit of education and work opportunities ([Social Mobility Commission, 2020](#)). Against this backdrop, this study's findings show that heritage can play a key role in ensuring that towns and smaller cities are attractive places for young people to continue to live and work; perhaps Stand Out's work in Burnley is the most powerful example of this. Equally, persuading young people that they *do* have a stake within such places is essential if those same communities are to enjoy diverse economies and boast access to sporting facilities, retail, libraries, and other amenities and services. This report notes that such concerns are an oft-overlooked component of tackling regional inequality in the UK, and that heritage really can provide a powerful antidote to support the reversal of these trends; the 'pride in place' strand of Levelling Up is a welcome signal in this respect.

Finally, it is important to note that attachments to place may not always be positive. With respect to this, the *Young People's Showcase* delivered some truly authentic appraisals of

young people's local communities, towns and cities through recorded comments such as: 'this place is a bit rubbish, and there's nothing much to do here, but it's *our* place and we're still proud of it!'. This authenticity is perhaps best articulated within those unique extracurricular spaces which demand that young people do find their own voice, and provide the onus to acknowledge that: 'yes, this place isn't great, but let's change that!'. Moving forward, policymakers ignore heritage at their peril when it comes to addressing regional inequalities.

4.5 Opportunities and Challenges for Public Policy

This report has highlighted some of the best examples of communities of practice that work, yet there is still enormous potential for heritage to do more with regards to supporting young people's futures, combating social polarisation and fostering social cohesion and, through so doing, contribute positively to improvements in health and wellbeing for all. In turn, those long-standing place-based inequalities which dominate British society may be addressed. However, a number of challenges remain. While the report authors have previously explored the many opportunities and challenges to the practice of engaging young people with heritage (see [Blamire et al., 2022](#)), we here focus on some of the most pressing aspects as identified within the fieldwork.

First, this study's research has shown how young people value heritage when it enables them to explore diverse aspects of their identity and belonging and, through the lens of cultural heritage, to promote alternative perspectives which may not always align with dominant public discourses. Consequently, the heritage sector needs to be proactive and stay attuned to these possibilities moving forward; yet, while projects such as Hope Streets and Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage exemplify strong and effective examples of heritage settings (such as museums) responding positively to this challenge, the research team's previous research suggests that such openness is not necessarily widespread across the sector ([Blamire et al., 2022](#)). It follows, that heritage must be conceived as being alive with multiple diverse possibilities, rather than something that is closed, nostalgic, and backwards looking.

At the same time, coproduction must be approached with care. For instance, there is a need to recognise, retain, and better capitalise upon the existing skills, experience and

expertise of volunteers and professionals currently employed in heritage spaces such as museums. Some of the most valuable and effective heritage activity has involved a careful blend of youth inquiry combined with guidance, facilitation, and leadership from such experts. This report recommends the latter should not be discarded at the expense of a sometimes uncritical and impractical pursuit of youth leadership in the name of coproduction. That said, it is nevertheless imperative that heritage settings continue to work to democratise their spaces and to share power and ownership not only with young people but also diverse communities in general. Indeed, one key point of learning is that *co-curating* community archives and exhibitions really works and that, in the case of Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage, has stimulated intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and understanding between diverse groups of people. As well as helping to develop key skills amongst participants, community co-curation has also contributed to building social cohesion through the sharing of stories and material objects.

Notably, a young person at the *Hope Evolves* event mentioned that there is currently very little within museums which celebrates their Romanian heritage and the contribution of Romanian people to the UK. Acknowledging this gap, this study proposes the solution that the undertaking of more committed co-creative activities, combined with democratising heritage spaces, would enable residents to work with heritage professionals – in turn exchanging skills, knowledge and experience – to, for instance, co-curate a pop-up museum exhibition which might explore Romanian (and Central and Eastern European) heritage in the UK. As trailblazed in Liverpool, residents could contribute personal stories and lend material objects to such an exhibition, with the latter being promoted through a series of local events. In turn, participants would have stronger stakes in themselves with regards to defining what counts as heritage, and would be truly empowered to resurrect 'new' forms of heritage. This process of learning from other heritage spaces could also contribute to establishing new communities of practice through which change might be properly embedded. Crucially, such practices might ensure that future place-based heritage activities respond to local needs in a way that resonates with community priorities and therefore remains central to generating 'pride of place'.

While this study's fieldwork reached diverse groups of young people residing in various different places and heritage settings, it remains the case that some young people do end up being overrepresented within heritage research as a result of participating in multiple projects and that they are, as a result, then effectively counted twice. This suggests that some projects focus on *depth* of engagement rather than breadth with the result that many young people are simply not touched by these activities at all. Although the case studies do reflect possibilities to create diverse experiences across identities of class and race, the author's earlier work demonstrated the need to draw together more socioeconomically marginalised residents within place-based projects; the successes of the Adventurers History Club and of Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage in reaching these groups are valuable here. In particular, while heritage plays an important role in supporting young people to explore aspects of their own identity, these projects have also encouraged those young people to discover the heritage of others and, therefore, have worked to promote the *intercultural* component of such work.

Finally, there is also scope for further partnership-working. Given the enormous potential offered by heritage, local, regional, and national partners each stand to gain from investments in these activities, and it is also the case that this work is too pressing to be left to the heritage sector alone. Instead, anchor institutions such as local authorities and local housing partners, as well as regional education and healthcare bodies, along with the private and third sectors have responsibilities and roles to play in delivering these outcomes through their potential commitments to heritage programmes. The profound ongoing challenges that face these organisations – from the continued impacts of funding cuts, the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and climate change amongst others – demand a more joined-up and holistic response to deliver skills' development and social inclusion, whilst also reducing inequalities and tackling poor physical and mental health. To give one example, widening fledgling place-based social prescribing models to incorporate a heritage component that acknowledges the health and social benefits of heritage participation could be achieved through a more joined-up and better resourced approach. This would entail showing how heritage can effectively tackle *multiple* policy challenges; for instance, in Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage, benefits are simultaneously gained by young people in addition to those living with dementia, and ultimately proved to offer effective *value for money*. What is then needed is more

experimental and innovative work to establish best practice, as well as to further consolidate the evidence base.

Heritage partners must recognise the immense value of heritage for within, and outside, classroom settings. As shown in this report, and elsewhere by [Age Exchange](#) and [Ofsted \(2019\)](#), extracurricular activities help to bring subjects alive and develop key skills that are essential for young people's development. Schools and colleges should, therefore, be further encouraged and incentivised to deliver local place-based heritage projects through partnerships; Historic England's [Heritage Schools](#) programme and work by Nacro Boston is instructive here. Meanwhile, the learning is that heritage funders such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) have toyed between previously encouraging more short-term, small-scale projects that embrace a plurality of different approaches led predominantly by the youth sector, under the banner of *Young Roots*, towards, more recently, encouraging larger-scale projects led by heritage organisations working to embed change through a partnership approach (*Kick the Dust*). However, this study's research demonstrates that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach that works and that, instead, small-scale activities can, through the adoption of a social prescribing model, co-exist within broader heritage offerings.

Drawing together the wealth of learning through a place-based social prescribing model may also go some way to resolving the ongoing problem of a lack of institutional memory across the youth and heritage sectors, and might also ensure a longer legacy for heritage activities becoming embedded across wider local/regional partnerships. There are also models here to further invest in the ideas of young people and to recognise their agency in the ways illustrated in this report's case studies. Finally, while heritage funding for young people has previously remained the domain of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, this proposed policy approach promotes unique opportunities for a range of organisations to utilise heritage in order to achieve their target outcomes. We now turn to summarise the key findings and to draw some broader recommendations from the study.

5. Conclusions

The **key findings** of this report are as follows:

First, engagement with heritage *is* effective in supporting multiple personal, social, health and learning benefits. In particular, young people's participation is productive of a range of personal development outcomes such as; knowledge, interpersonal, and transferrable skills. Indeed, the projects reviewed are brimming with possibilities for young people's development, although this is simply *the tip of the iceberg* for heritage potential.

Second, heritage engagement offers unique opportunities for fostering *identity and belonging* and, in turn, chances for young people to reinterpret and re-present the places in which they live. The resulting outcomes of this are manifold, but to emphasise just two; one, these place-based activities directly align with policy ambitions to cultivate senses of community, local pride, and belonging in so-called 'left behind' places. Heritage allows young people to not only learn more about a place but to view that place in new ways, to explore new forms of identity and belonging in relation to that place, and to construct collectively new visions. It also enables them to establish new networks of friends and collaborators. Two, such programmes also make vital contributions to the mental health and wellbeing of the young people who engage with them, and have done so particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, participating in heritage programmes can not only help to confront and even remove the barriers that prevent some young people from fully participating in society, but they also make telling contributions towards building *strong cohesive communities*. In particular, developing the intergenerational and intercultural components of heritage activities has proved effective in bringing together diverse groups of people and enabling them to learn from one another.

Fourth, heritage has a quite considerable role to play in developing social mobility within deprived places. Too often heritage (and other arts-based work) has tended to equip privileged individuals with personal skills which, in later life, are then practiced in other, often more prosperous, places as a result of outward migration and brain drain. The

projects studied here alternatively demonstrate how heritage can provide a mechanism through which young people could be enticed to remain resident in those places, stake claims to them, and make key contributions towards their revival. In this sense, *only heritage* provides these unique opportunities to deliver upon the combined social, cultural, and economic aspects of Levelling Up policy.

6. Recommendations

The report proposes a number of recommendations for youth and heritage-based practitioners, policymakers and funders looking to advance heritage work with young people. In particular, funding bodies seeking to design a bespoke young people's grants package for developing place-based heritage activities should take note.

- **(A)** Young people are most attracted by opportunities to explore aspects of their own heritage and/or that which they themselves consider to be important. Young people should consequently be engaged in the coproduction of activities from the outset, and empowered to define their own visions for heritage. There should also be flexibility built into projects which recognises how youth interests may shift over time. That said, some of the most valuable and effective heritage activity has involved a careful blend of youth inquiry combined with guidance, facilitation, and leadership from heritage experts, and grants packages should bear this in mind.
- **(B)** The most effective and transformative work has focused not only upon outcomes for young people but also diverse groups of people as well as families, neighbourhoods, communities, schools, and other stakeholders. In particular, approaches which embrace both the intercultural and intergenerational aspects of heritage activities are particularly powerful and should be favoured. Such work also demonstrates the most effective value for money.
- **(C)** Grant proposals should commit to better capturing the outcomes of such work. It ought to be a prerequisite of funding to evaluate activities in accordance with consistent patterns of measuring and reporting in order that this learning is not lost. This should be combined with the establishment of a publicly and remotely accessible central archive which collates details of programmes' activities and outcomes. It is indeed surprising that, despite the relatively significant resources that have been invested in young people over the years, no central point for holding heritage data exists. This policy would improve decision-making and accountability, better grow the evidence base, and support further research into new areas. For instance, it is still

unclear as to how long any outcomes might persist, and what impacts and legacies of youth engagement continue into the longer-term.

- **(D)** Proposed heritage activities should demonstrate meaningful commitments to, and credible ideas for, partnership-working. This might entail, for example, evidencing how any prospective programme would engage and work with non-heritage organisations, such as local, regional, and national stakeholders within the education, housing, transport, and healthcare sectors. This is vital in order to share learning, build community capacity, and to ensure that the broader societal benefits of programmes are not only delivered, but maximised.

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Appendix A: Sample Workshop Discussion Guide

Adventurers History Club
Bishopsgate Institute, London
24th May 2022, 6.30pm-8.30pm

Schedule

6.30pm-6.45pm: Welcome and Introduction to the Project

6.45pm-7.30pm: PART 1

7.30pm-7.45pm: BREAK

7.45pm-8.30pm: PART 2

PART 1

Facilitated by looking at a slideshow of photographs of past trips, with informal chat.

- Write down as many trips as you can recall; create an Adventurers timeline
 - When did you get involved?
 - What do you remember?
- What was the best trip and why?
- What were your best moments? Worst moments?
- What worked well for you?
- What was less positive?
- Have you been back to any of the places we visited?

PART 2

- What motivated you to get involved in AHC? What were your ideas about heritage prior to AHC?
- How did being involved in the group influence your attitude to heritage? What do you understand by heritage?
- Was there ever a time when you were made to feel especially welcome in a museum or heritage setting? What about a time when you felt excluded or less welcome?
- How did being involved in the group make you feel about your identity as a Londoner? Did involvement change the way you feel about the place you live at all, whether that be London, the UK etc.
- Did being part of the group make you ask questions about your own family history or your community's heritage? If yes, have you carried out any more research since?
- Did you ever feel inspired to search for more information on anything you saw or found during a trip? If yes, can you say more about what it was?
- Have you done anything differently because of being involved with the group (at the time or in the years since)?
- Did any of the trips have more or less of an impact because of your religious identity?
- Obviously, you were an all-male group. Was this a plus or a minus in your decision to be involved?
- Did you have the opportunity to mix with people of different backgrounds on the programme (across age, class, gender, ethnicity). How would you reflect on the opportunities there – was it a positive or negative experience in that regard?
- On reflection, what sort of outcomes would you say arose as a result of your participation in AHC?
- Looking back, how might you have gotten more out of the programme?