



[Hannah David](#)

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The importance of heritage in society

Ahead of her appearance at a panel discussion on funding the future of heritage, PCS Culture Group President Hannah David asserts that heritage is our story, and a dynamic force that shapes our present and future; it belongs to us all and it is our collective responsibility to ensure its preservation for future generations.

5-minute read

As someone deeply rooted in the heritage sector, studying, working, volunteering, and frolicking in it all of my adult life, I witness first-hand how heritage serves as the bedrock of our societal framework. It encapsulates our shared history, culture, and identity, providing us all with a tangible link to our past. Not only does heritage enrich our understanding of where we come from, but it also plays a pivotal role in shaping our future. Active participation and engagement with heritage that is all around us can lead to individual and communal wellbeing outcomes.

Guardians of workers' rights

Trade unions are the guardians of heritage workers' rights, advocating for fair treatment and dignified working conditions across various sectors of heritage. From museum staff to archaeological technicians and policy makers, these workers form the backbone of heritage preservation efforts, yet they often face precarious employment conditions and low wages.

The union movement plays a crucial role in collective bargaining and challenging exploitative employment practices, ensuring that heritage workers are treated

fairly and with respect. Beyond negotiating for better pay and benefits, trade unions also advocate for the preservation of heritage funding and resources, recognising that sustainable heritage management requires adequate investment in workforce development and infrastructure.

Moreover, trade unions serve as platforms for fostering solidarity and mutual support among heritage workers, empowering them to collectively address workplace challenges and advocate for systemic change.

Invaluable opportunities for young people

From an educational perspective, heritage offers invaluable opportunities for experiential learning, particularly for our youth. It allows individuals, especially children, to delve into history, society, and their place within it, fostering a deeper connection to their cultural roots. Moreover, heritage serves as a platform for promoting social equity and inclusivity, amplifying the voices and narratives of marginalised communities often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Numerous studies underscore the positive impact of heritage on public health and wellbeing. Access to cultural heritage spaces has been linked to reduced stress levels and improved mental health outcomes, highlighting the therapeutic value of engaging with our shared heritage. Furthermore, heritage sites serve as focal points for community engagement and solidarity, fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion among diverse populations.

Economically, investing in heritage preservation and promotion is not just a matter of preserving our past; it's an investment in our future. It generates employment opportunities and stimulates local economies through tourism, cultural events, and artisanal trades, contributing to sustainable growth and shared prosperity.

Solutions for heritage funding challenges

Over the past decade, Tory governments and austerity measures, along with budget cuts, have placed immense strain on heritage funding, threatening the preservation of our shared cultural heritage. The current cost-of-living crisis further exacerbates these challenges, as heritage organisations and workers grapple with stagnant wages and increased financial insecurity.

Accessible to all

As we approach a UK General Election, it's imperative that we prioritise discussions on the future funding of heritage, ensuring that it remains accessible to all.

To address these challenges, we could adopt progressive taxation policies that redistribute wealth and resources to support cultural preservation efforts and promote social justice:

- One solution involves introducing progressive wealth taxes targeting the wealthiest individuals and corporations, with revenue earmarked specifically for heritage initiatives. Additionally, closing tax loopholes and offshore tax havens can prevent the wealthy from avoiding their fair share of taxes, further bolstering heritage funding.
- Reforming inheritance tax laws to make them more progressive is another avenue to explore, ensuring that intergenerational wealth transfers contribute to the preservation of our cultural heritage.

Furthermore, we must expand the National Heritage Fund, prioritising projects that preserve and promote cultural heritage in underserved communities. Implementing subsidies and increasing grants for heritage organisations and workers facing financial strain is essential, with a focus on supporting small-scale heritage initiatives and heritage skills.

Union campaigning

Across the culture sector, PCS members are campaigning against cuts in funding and chronically low wages. In Wales, [we continue to call on the Welsh Government to protect Welsh culture jobs and services](#) in the face of large-scale funding cuts which threaten dozens of jobs and risk decimating the underfunded sector.

[And our members at National Museums Liverpool](#) have shown remarkable determination to fight low pay during their long-running strike action which has highlighted stark inequalities in the sector.

Investment in our future

In conclusion, investing in heritage is not just a matter of safeguarding our past; it's an investment in our future. By promoting community-led approaches to heritage preservation communities are empowered to take ownership of their heritage assets, ensuring that decisions about their preservation and

management are made democratically, with specialist guidance, and in the best interests of the community.

We must recognise the benefits it provides to people, communities and society. By prioritising investment in heritage preservation, advocating for workers' rights, and engaging in meaningful discussions on funding priorities, we can ensure that heritage remains a cornerstone of our society, fostering social cohesion, economic prosperity, and cultural enrichment for generations to come. Heritage is not a relic of the past or the reserve of the elite but a dynamic force that shapes our present and future, and it's our collective responsibility to ensure its preservation for future generations.

- **Hannah is speaking at an event organised by the TUC at the Science Museum at 6pm on Tuesday (21). Admission is free and [tickets are available through Eventbrite.](#)**