Crime, AI and innovation: what our heritage sector



Preventing acts of criminal damage to heritage sites is a critical concern. Photo: Gordon Leggett, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Our new UK Heritage Pulse research investigates the impact of crime on heritage settings. It's the latest insight from our conversations to understand the views and experiences of our sector.

39% of respondents to our recent Heritage Pulse survey reported that their site had experienced intentional damage, with 31% also identifying examples of anti-social behaviour.

In a tough economic environment, the financial cost of repairs and replacements was identified as the biggest impact of heritage crime experienced by our panel. Video surveillance was the countermeasure of choice, if budget was available.

What we've learned in 2025

UK Heritage Pulse is a collaborative research project for the UK's heritage sector, informing strategy, recovery and reinvention. It's one of the ways that we keep in touch with the changing needs and ambitions of the sector, so we can deliver on the vision of our Heritage 2033 strategy.

This year, our community has taken part in surveys exploring the future of the heritage sector, sharing insights that demonstrate the pace of change and how organisations are adapting to challenges and thriving. Let's look at the headlines.

AI can be a force for good in the heritage sector

In October, our survey revealed that **more than 60% of heritage sector workers now believe AI offers more opportunities than risks** for their organisations – a jump of 20% since 2023. Explore more findings in the full survey analysis.

To explore this change, digital strategist Ash Mann took us beyond the hype to explore the operational use of AI in the sector across two webinars, focusing first on principles, opportunities and risks and then the practical application of AI tools.

Both webinars are now available to watch on YouTube.

The heritage sector is responding to strategic challenges

Over the summer, our series of Big Think surveys asked sector colleagues about three hot topics – financial resilience, maintaining relevance and making bold choices to build a sustainable future. The results highlighted a clear appetite for collaboration, entrepreneurialism and reinterpretation.

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We're supporting the SS Great Britain Trust to co-design how the vessel's stories are shared in collaboration with communities in Bristol.

William Carruthers, Lecturer in Heritage and Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Essex, reflected on the responses: “What struck me the most is that they are thoughtful and pragmatic in the face of what has become an increasingly difficult and precarious operating environment. I find them encouraging in terms of a future heritage that is less fixed in its attributes and more engaged in the places where it’s embedded. People and practitioners want different heritage futures.”

The focus of UK Heritage Pulse changes month-to-month but our surveys always feature our Pulse Monitor questions – a monthly health check on the sector, measuring resilience, confidence and ambition. Over 2025, we’ve seen respondents **express confidence in the relevance of their work and their ability to deliver it**, balanced against **growing stress and challenges with recruitment and retention**.

Add your voice to UK Heritage Pulse in 2026

Join a panel of hundreds at the heart of the heritage sector to regularly offer your views, shape strategy, share knowledge and influence funding priorities.

We want to hear from people who work in both historic buildings, museums and archives, and organisations that work in the natural environment to improve habitats, conserve species and connect people to their landscape.

Join our community and you’ll receive regular, timely research updates and access to events and resources, designed to inspire innovation in your organisation and beyond. The first 2026 survey will be shared in January, exploring place-based approaches and projects.

Register to take part or to discover more about the findings of our heritage crime survey, read the full report.



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The Big City Butterfly project worked with partners to improve the quality and connectivity of London's green spaces, boosting habitats and connecting the community with nature. Photo: Chris O'Donovan.



innovate



The Mary Rose was built in 1510-11 at the start of Henry VIII’s reign and was one of his favourite ships until it sank in 1545. Credit: Hufton and Crow.



Museum’s resilience

Welcoming people aboard the Hastings fishing fleet. Credit: Euan Baker.

Community collaboration is helping keep Hastings’ fishing heritage alive