This year, we celebrated 25 years of looking after the nation's heritage. But that's not all that happened – here are some of our highlights.

2019 was a year of looking back – to all the projects we've funded since the first National Lottery draw in 1994 – and looking forward, with our new name, structure and ways we give out our grants.

This is just a few of the things we were proud to have achieved in 2019...

A revolution in heritage funding

In January, the new-look National Lottery Heritage Fund changed the way we invest in the UK's most-loved heritage. We now have open programmes of funding from £3,000 up to £5million and beyond.

We also launched our new Strategic Funding Framework. Our CEO Ros Kerslake discussed our new priorities and aims in *The Times* and on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row*.

It made a big splash on social media: we particularly enjoyed this *Game of Thrones*-inspired tweet.

Giving back to heritage charities

Two singers in the Forget-me-not Chorus, which supports people living with dementia. The charity hit its fundraising target. Credit: Kirsten McTernan

This autumn, we supported 31 charities in the UK's biggest online match funding campaign The Big Give Christmas Challenge 2019. The campaign smashed records to raise £15.6m in seven days — and 25 of the 31 charities we championed achieved their target.

As part of our dedication to resilience in the heritage sector, with the help of celebs like Alexander Armstrong explaining how the campaign works, we invested £250,000 to help projects like the Forget-me-not Chorus in Wales reach their funding goals – what a great Christmas present!

Reaching a quarter century

Derry Girls star Saoirse-Monica Jackson shows us around Derry

This November saw us celebrating our silver anniversary – and also a golden age of heritage!

Since The National Lottery launched in 1994, we have invested over **£8billion** in the UK's heritage. This year a host of famous faces helped us celebrate The National Lottery's 25th Birthday. Chris Packham built bird boxes to highlight the ways funding is helping the natural world, astronaut Major Tim Peake spoke of the importance of funding for science and Helen Skelton climbed Ben Nevis with a youth group to launch a map of National Lottery-funded outdoor adventures – to name just a few!

We also made these films which celebrated our impact (so far) on:

- Dundee
- Rochdale
- Waltham Forest
- Blaenavon
- Great Yarmouth
- Derry

Our happy birthday film also went down a storm on Twitter as did this amazing piece of 25th Birthday artwork by David Mach - and we were happy to receive birthday wishes from grantees including the British Museum, the Woodland Trust and Barnsley Museums.

Check out some of the fun films about our local impact, this beautiful graphic from our team in Wales and 25 years in 25 seconds.

Saying Thanks to You

Big Narstie in Kenwood House

Rapper Big Narstie was just one of the celebs who helped us take part in Thanks To You, the UK's biggest scheme saying "thank you" to National Lottery players who make what we do possible. Big Narstie joined *Derry Girls*' Jamie-Lee O'Donnell, *Love Island's* Anton Danyluk and comedian Elis James in funny films exploring some of the UK's most-loved heritage – some of which opened for free or gave special offers to National Lottery ticket-wielding visitors in November.

The Eden Project lit up its famous biomes like giant National Lottery balls to mark the occasion - with activist and model Lily Cole hitting the switch.

Celebrating LGBT+ history

In August, we celebrated Pride Month on our website, including a fascinating discussion between archivist experts Jan Pimblett and Veronica McKenzie on diversity, partnerships, and what's happened since Stonewall. On social media, we shared a film about Queer Britain's Joseph Galliano's tour of the V&A.

We also announced the first large-scale LGBT+ project to be funded in Northern Ireland.

Sharing stories for Black History Month

Christine Francis with her granddaughter

The thought-provoking National Lottery-funded Colour of Love photographic project in Nottinghamshire was featured in the *Mirror*. It celebrated the love stories – and shared the struggles – of people in interracial marriages between the 1940s and 1970s. We told the story as part of our Black History Month celebration, which also saw us look at what it's like to work in the heritage world as a black person.

Heritage Horizon Awards

Our big news in the summer was the launch of the new Heritage Horizon Awards, worth £5m and over. Our CEO explained what we were looking for: "Something that will deliver a significant impact for people and communities. It has really got to be something outstanding."

The awards came to the attention of the Museums Journal, Museums + Heritage Advisor, LocalGov, NewStart, Museums Association, and Church Times among others - and the shortlist is set to be revealed early in 2020 (the demand for grants has been "huge").

A helping hand for nature

TV presenter Steve Backshall celebrates with the Back from the Brink team

In a year when good news for nature has been hard to find, we had plenty of great stories to share.

- Our Back from the Brink project - invested in by us to a tune of £4.6m, won the prestigious heritage category at the National Lottery Awards. This incredible project brings together seven conservation charities and thousands of volunteers to try to save 200 endangered species. It was voted for by the public - so thanks to Chris Packham (and his fans!) among others for encouraging people to get involved.

Other bright spots for nature included:

- our top tips for helping nature
- getting up, close and personal with the Marsh Fritillary

- news stories about investment of more than £400,000 in saving the beautiful smooth snake on ITV, the BBC, the *Daily Mail* and lots more
- the chance to restore South Wales' "lost peatlands"
- £4m to help at-risk sand dunes thrive again - not least with a "bunny boost"

and:

- our innovative partnership with the National Trust to explore new ways of looking after our parks and urban green spaces

And finally...

Sir Peter meets Professor Julian A Dowdeswell at the Scot Polar Research Institute

A fond farewell to our wonderful chair, Sir Peter Luff, who wrote in the *Evening Standard* about the transformational power of National Lottery funding:

> "By inspiring their interest in the stories of the past, the National Lottery Heritage Fund also changes the stories of people living today."
>
> *Sir Peter Luff*

25 years of funding for UK heritage: our film