UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Bulletin

Cambridge Heritage Research Centre

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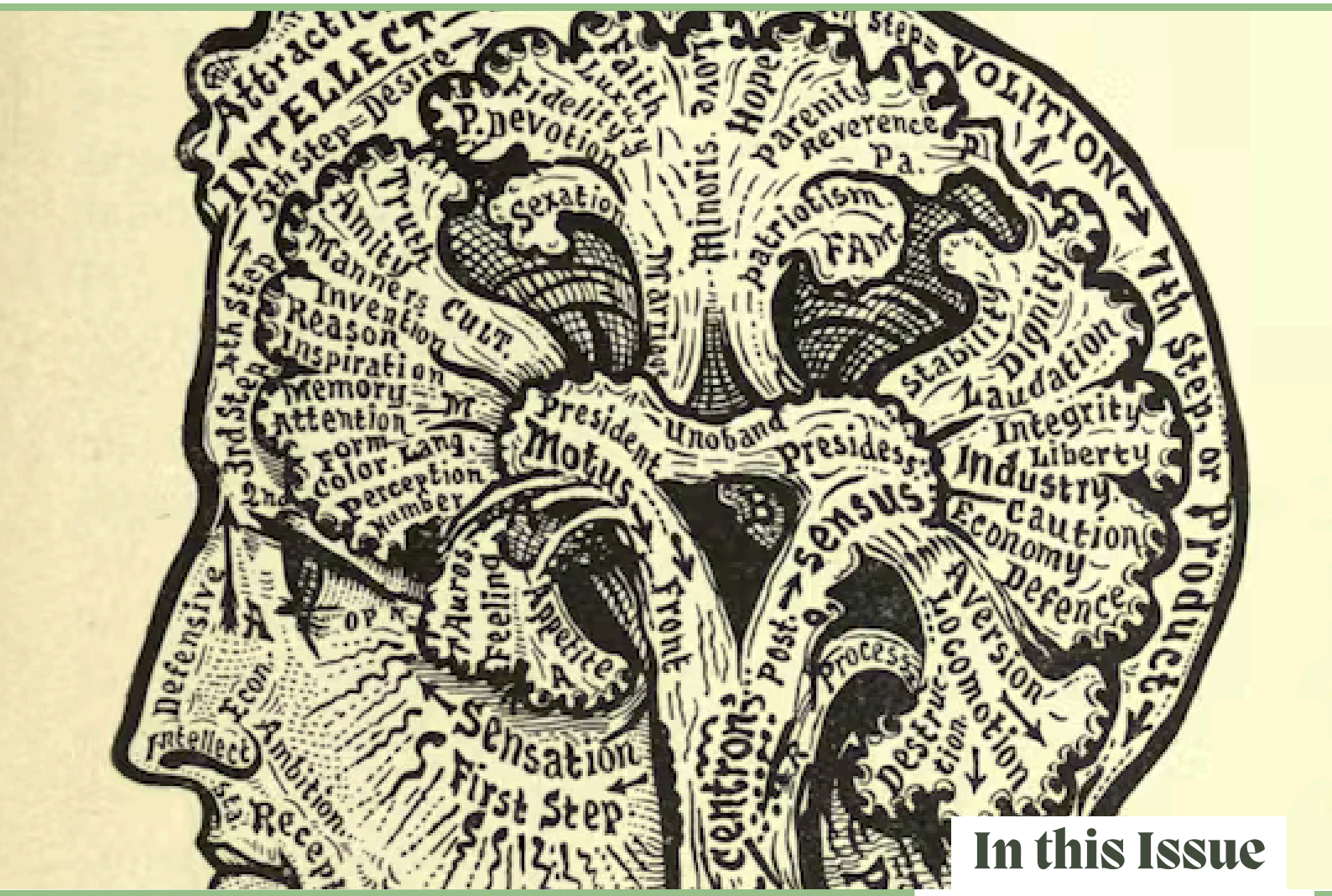

In this Issue

12 June 2025

Cover photo: Public Domain

From The Book of Life: The Spiritual and Physical Constitution of Man
Dr Alesha Sivartha, 1898

In the News

Promote National Lottery Heritage Fund Projects and Celebrating National Volunteers' Week

Advertise your heritage projects with The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Page 2

UK Museums and Heritage Organisations celebrate their volunteers

National Volunteer Week was 2-8 June, 2025.

Page 2

Cover Story

Cultural memory should not keep us stuck in the past: On the urge for public memorialization

By Marie Louise Stig Sørensen

In this piece, Cambridge archaeologist and heritage researcher Marie Louise Stig Sørensen questions our approach to memorialization over the centuries, revealing how the ways we remember the past are never neutral, but actually reflective of the present's priorities, structures, and power systems. She argues in favor of moving towards a structure of memorializing that privileges reflection on past events rather than the taking of strong positions.

Read more on ***Page 3***

Do You Have a National Lottery Heritage Fund Project?

Take part in our next social media moment by sharing a post with the #HeritageIsOpen hashtag on 23 June 2025.
Celebrate your heritage project and let people know about upcoming events, what they can visit, or when your project is opening.

Our social media moments reach thousands of users and regularly trend in the top five so getting involved is a great way to acknowledge your grant and reach new audiences.

How to take part

- Share a social media post at 9am on Monday 23 June 2025.
- Feature information on your heritage project, summer events, openings and a great image.
- Include #HeritageIsOpen and tag @HeritageFundUK.
- Use the social media platforms you like to use best.
- Carry on using the hashtag throughout the summer to share highlights from your events and projects.

Learn more

UK Museums and Heritage Organisations Celebrated National Volunteers' Week

Groups such as the Birmingham Museums Trust North East Museums celebrated their vital volunteer force from 2 - 8 June, 2025. Recognitions included private tours and social media callouts for all those dedicating their time to the heritage sector.

Learn more

Cultural memory should not keep us stuck in the past: On the urge for public memorialization

Professor Emerita of Prehistoric Europe and Heritage Studies at the University of Cambridge and co-author of the books Memorials in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict. From History to Heritage (2019) and War and Cultural Heritage. Biographies of Place (2015).

The past is alive and well among us. It lives in the different forms of remembering we give it – from public monuments to anniversary celebrations. In this piece, Cambridge archaeologist and heritage researcher Marie Louise Stig Sørensen questions our approach to memorialization over the centuries, revealing how the ways we remember the past are never neutral, but actually reflective of the present's priorities, structures, and power systems. She argues in favor of moving towards a structure of memorializing that privileges reflection on past events rather than the taking of strong positions.

Various forms of public memorialization have become ubiquitous, a taken-for-granted, unreflected part of our cultural toolkit and habitus. They have become overwhelmingly naturalized. They inhabit our spaces and dot our calendars. They create expectations, lead to comparisons, ignite competition, and at times can even prolong conflict. They can be banal, subsumed into the everydayness of cityscapes, but they can also be persuasive, insistent reminders of past deeds, conflicts, and grievances. Memorials to war and conflict are particularly common and also particularly challenging. Should they come with a health warning (Memorials can seriously damage your health)? Although memorization is neither a "natural" phenomenon (why should remembering be more natural than forgetting?) nor a necessary practice, we seem to have difficulties weaning ourselves from the apparent urge to memorialize. This piece reflects on that urge and argues that over the course of our history our practices of remembering have fed larger and shifting political narratives. Thus there is no single or natural way of memorializing. In turn, this awareness should lead us to fruitfully situate and interrogate current practices, which I describe below.

Not being in praise of public (and thus official) memorials – the calendar of recurrent memorialization events, the calls for new memorials to forgotten or neglected voices, the laying claims on memorials for conflicts still ongoing, and so on – feels almost un-civilized. Through memorials and memorialization, we feel not merely the weight of the past but are also cast into certain roles. We are expected to accept the – depending on one's perspective, affirmative or stultifying – effects of these cultural practices. They represent civic duty and a performance of humanism (as we act out feelings and display our connections). Participating is a tactile performance of societal membership. But, aside from these ennobling feelings, memorials and memorializations enable the past to cast long shadows over the present (and future).

That is why we need to be wary of them. The longer I have studied memorials, the more I have become troubled about what they do to/for us. To understand the hold they have and how they influence us, it is useful to be aware of their history and the expectations and values that saturate them.

So let us backtrack a bit and outline how memorials (and memorialization) as a cultural practice have their own specific history and allocated roles and reasons. This could be a starting point for reflecting on whether we really want to continue the current trajectory for memorialization, and whether these roles are ones we still want to embrace, and what the alternatives might be.

The emergence of memorialization

It is well known that memorials, as we now know them, developed with the rise of the nation-state and the modern empires of the 18-20th centuries, and the resulting changes to the relations between the nation and its people (its citizens). Several shifts can be traced during the earlier part of this history, with central tropes being established and the raison d'être for memorials sedimented within public consciousness.

This can be sketched as a change from the public celebration of victory (expressed through victory parades and monuments glorifying leaders) to a focus on sacrifice and the common soldiers. This shift became especially marked after the First World War, and the new format, both the physical forms and the change in mood, was widely shared and imitated. Memorials gained a new international language. Near-identical memorials were erected throughout the Commonwealth, seen, for example, in the widespread imitations of the London Cenotaph War Memorial. As an aside, whereas this monument has become so widely imitated that it is now easily recognized as a war memorial, in its first appearance it was a temporary structure made by Sir Edwin Lutyens for the 1919 event celebrating the end of the First World War, and it was only due to public pressure calling for a proper memorial that it was remade the following year in a permanent form. Reflecting on this widely distributed memorial culture, one may postulate that a side effect of the late colonial period was shared generic ideas of not just the need to memorialize but also its format. The latter, moreover, was often rooted in references to Roman and Greek classical architecture, not just the cenotaph but also the many plinths, columns, and triumphal arches. The Western reverence for the Classics made these forms suitable for the solemn atmosphere that was desired of these new forms of monuments. A parallel account can be made for the memorial culture that developed in regions under Soviet influence, and its particular iconography.

We can also trace the development of a distinct phraseology and tropes, which became shared and aided the uniformity of memorial practices worldwide; again, I point to these because they have become part of the cultural baggage we carry with us. In my research, I have referred to the two most widely used memes as “The nameless body” and “The bodyless names.” The former we are familiar with through the widely used meme of the unknown soldier, and the latter we recognize in the

widespread use of memorial walls listing names of the dead. These two phrases are still core devices used to acknowledge sacrifice. But they have also introduced a subtle subtext of our indebtedness as the mass of death was for us, not just the nation, but for the everyone, thus the common phrase “They died for us.”

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Such memorization, however, takes sides; it needs to do so in order to identify both victims and perpetrators. Here we encounter one of the most important existential challenges of current memorialization practices – the projection into the future of a conflicted and divisive past.

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From the First World War on, sacrifice became the core semantic focus of memorialization, but we have also seen an opening into ever wider concerns, especially as regards whose sacrifices are recognized and what the purpose of the memorialization is. The Second World War had a substantial impact on this shift. Its aftermath introduced new socio-psychological and political reasons, and the notion of victims became central, at times even replacing the previous focus on sacrifice. This had substantial repercussions. When the focus is on the victim, the idea of a willing sacrifice (“They gave their life”) cannot be upheld. In addition, victims are innocent. This shift was profoundly affected by the horrors of the Holocaust, and it was carried by a strong message of “Never again.” Sadly, subsequent history has shown this was a vain hope, and the notion of victims has been hijacked by a range of interests, including contradictory ones. This was clearly expressed during the Balkan War when different groups engaged in what may be described as competitive claims on victimhood. For example, in response to the state sponsored "Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide" created to honor the more than 800 Muslim men and boys killed in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, monuments making claims about Bosnian Serbs as victims of wars were erected in villages close to the site.

In turn, the notion of victims has proliferated, including not just people but also animals and places, at times even intangible qualities, such as trust. Returning to the case of the Srebrenica Memorial, which after the war came to be in a majority Bosnian Serb area: many local people dispute the truthfulness of the memorial's account, and when interviewed claimed that many graves were actually empty and that named victims had been seen alive in other towns. This despite the extensive forensic work that has been done to make sure that every person included in the cemetery had been properly identified.

In the growth of victim memorialization, especially over recent decades, perpetrators, guilt, taking sides, and calling for retribution have, more or less explicitly, become part of the rhetoric. In turn, memorializations have increasingly become an act of claiming, a call for recognition, restitution, and repairs. The wide-ranging memorials and memorialization activities following the Balkan wars of the 1990s do, for example, provide vivid examples of this development, including counter-memorials and the persistent reminders of particular events. Such memoriz-

ation, however, takes sides; it needs to do so in order to identify both victims and perpetrators. Here we encounter one of the most important existential challenges of current memorialization practices – the projection into the future of a conflicted and divisive past. How can we avoid that memorialization adds to the protraction of conflicts rather than resolving or ending them?

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The most important [contemporary memorials] are framed around attempts to liberate the future from the past, not by ignoring past atrocities or sacrifices but by exploring how these may be turned into points of reflection rather than becoming negative burdens that restrict our visions.

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Towards the future of memorialization

Many insist that memorials are important as evidence of our history, and that they serve didactic, social, and emotional roles. One can embrace this position but not by disregarding that memorials are not merely evidence of history – they are also part of a history of how we construct and use public spaces for public memory making. Memorials are neither neutral nor static, and they never were. We need to acknowledge that as part of a historical development, the roles memorializations allocate to the public, to us, have shifted. From a relatively simple notion of celebration and honor, to one of acknowledging and showing gratefulness for others' sacrifices, to the recognition of victimhood, we are now arguably at a state of some complexity and confusion about our allocated roles vis-à-vis the significance of the memorialized and the intention of the act of memorialization.

We see a range of responses. For me, the most important ones are framed around attempts to liberate the future from the past, not by ignoring past atrocities or sacrifices but by exploring how these may be turned into points of reflection rather than becoming negative burdens that restrict our visions. Most inspirational are the attempts at using memorialization as a means of reconciliation, but such attempts are also the most complex as they work against the meaning and purposes that have accumulated around memorials over their long history, including the particular emotive twist they have undergone over recent decades. To be successful, such enterprises probably need to explore entirely new reasons, forms, and practices. Less ambitious but also inspirational are emerging trends towards formats that aim at reflection. Amongst such new forms, I point to memorials with open-ended meanings and, in particular, to those that are “only” temporary. The latter is exemplified by the Blood Swept Land and Seas of Red installation in London in 2014 to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Created by artists Paul Cummins and Tom Piper, it was composed of 888,246 red ceramic poppies (each representing a British military fatality during the war) which progressively filled the moat of the Tower of London between July and November 2014. They were thereafter removed, and no permanent mark was left.

Finally, it is worth pointing out how this mental (and political) “battle” with what we need public memorials for and how we can change the trajectory of memorialization

practices takes place against the background of the ever more evasive and pervasive constructions of personal and public memories. For example, using the power of. For example, using the power of social media and the richness of digital archives, a new genre of “memory reminder” has emerged. We are flooded with accounts and pointers to “what happened on this day” in the past, but such reminders are not limited to the shared public sphere. Social media, such as Facebook, provides pop-up reminders of our personal memories x years ago. How do we individually own and hold memories within such immersive forms of communication? In their provision, do our personal “memories” become just another consumer product, an algorithm, or a service? Are we at risk of recall becoming a computational task rather than a reflexive one? In terms of our wider understanding, including our performance and use of memory, this is an intriguing development – how will it affect us?

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Memorializations ranging from personal reminders we receive on our phones to towering monuments in public space give a specific shape and humanity (or lack thereof) to our past and our relation with it.

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Remembering, individually and as a community, has been part of human behavior for a very long time, but the performance of remembering in the format of public memorials and memorialization changed with the nation state and has shifted in form and reasons since then. We now perform public memorialization within expectations of how and why we should remember, and for many this is influenced by a concern to challenge some of these formats. It does, however, seem as if the public and the personal may be both merging and diverging in new ways as social media is affecting both the experience/memories of being part of communities and providing reminders (maybe even constructions) of personal memory. Such emphasis on the personal can easily appear as a banal concern, but as with all received/selected memories, they come with the challenge of what we use them for, and a warning about the past becoming more essential to us, and much safer and secure, than the future. If retrospection becomes an overpowering aim in itself, then how do we move forward?

In conclusion, memorializations ranging from personal reminders we receive on our phones to towering monuments in public space give a specific shape and humanity (or lack thereof) to our past and our relation with it. We should remember, however, that the forms and reasons for memorialization, and therefore also our relationship with its various expressions, have always been changing - but maybe the changes used to be at a slower pace? Now we should ask whether in this age of the individualized and the mechanized we can find ways of adjusting memorization to the needs of the now with a view towards the future. I strongly advocate that we should explore them as a means of reflection rather than for positionality.

Marie Louise Stig Sørensen
2nd June 2025

https://iai.tv/articles/cultural-memory-should-not-keep-us-stuck-in-the-past-auid-3181

Register Here

Heritage for Peace - What future for this relationship? A conversation between Dr Isber Sabrine and Dr Dacia Viejo Rose.

16 June, 10:00 - South Lecture Room

The CHRC will be welcoming the President and co-Founder of the NGO Heritage for Peace Dr Isber Sabrine. He will present on the NGOs recent and on-going projects followed by a conversation with CHRC Director, Dr Dacia Viejo Rose, on the future of the relationship between heritage and peacebuilding in Syria and beyond.

Starting Your Research at The London Archives

Session - July, August, September

In this general introductory session to using The London Archives, you'll tour the Information Area to find out about the on-site research facilities and a range of digital resources too.

Discover the types of records that we hold in our vast collections (over 100km of shelving and spanning from 1067 to the present day) and how to access them efficiently yourself.

Whether you are new to exporing archival materials or looking for a refresher on using our collections for your own research, this session is for you!

Register Here

Summer Solstice at Stonehenge

20 June - 19:00, 21 June - 04:51

Watch the sun rise or set as it aligns with Stonehenge this summer solstice. Comfortable footwear and torches are reccomended. Please see link for details on opening and closing times, arrivals, and parking.

Learn More

ICCROM Virtual Conference in AI and Heritage

Submit by 1 July
Conference 20-21 November

Learn More

Association of Critical Heritage Studies conference - Calls to Come

29 November - 2 December 2026

Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

The AHRC's 8th Conference will be hosted at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. At ACHS 2026, guided by our theme of RELATIONALITY, we will explore how heritage connects us with each other, with the past and with the land; and how, as a field, we can interweave theory and practice to create a more relational critical heritage studies.

Concepts and practices of relationality, time, space, and land from Aotearoa and the wider Moana Oceania region will provide a lens through which we'll reimagine heritage and its relationship to wider social, political, and environmental issues.

Register for updates below.

Learn More

The Garden Trust: Invitation for Proposals – New Research Symposium

29 June, Midnight

This year's symposium will take place online on Saturday 15th November 2025. Tickets are free and booking via Eventbrite will open nearer the time.

We welcome submissions from researchers approaching garden history and conservation from various academic disciplines and vocational backgrounds. Papers could, for example, include topics such as: explorations of little-known gardens, aspects of botany, ecology, horticulture, archaeology, social history, architecture, design, art history or sculpture.

Please send a 200-word abstract for a 15-minute paper along with a brief biography to newresearchsymposium@thegardenstrust.org by midnight on Sunday 29th June 2025.

Learn More

Opportunites

Heritage Officer

9 July 2025

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park (FoTHCP) is an award-winning charity working to protect, preserve and care for the Cemetery Park. The site includes one of the historic 'Magnificent Seven' Victorian-era London cemeteries and adjoining areas including Scrapyard Meadow and Ackroyd Drive Greenlink. The 31-acre Local Nature Reserve is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and London's most central urban woodland.

The Heritage Officer champions our work in relation to the site's unique history, our historic landscape and the wider heritage of the East End. This work spans both tangible aspects of our heritage (including the landscape, monuments, artefacts, records) and also the rich intangible heritage (including the stories/memories of the site, crafts, practices).

Learn More

Strategic Lead IWM North

23 June 2025

Imperial War Museum - Manchester

IWM North is seeking a Strategic Lead to play a pivotal role in defining its next chapter—ensuring it remains a vital and relevant space for exploring the impact of conflict on people's lives. This is an exciting opportunity for a visionary leader to shape the future of one of the North of England's most prestigious cultural institutions

In this senior role, you will:

- Identify and develop opportunities for IWM North to engage audiences and communities across Trafford, Greater Manchester, the North of England, and beyond.
- Lead the strategic development of a comprehensive masterplan for IWM North, ensuring alignment with the wider Trafford Wharfside masterplan.
- Champion IWM North's role as a major cultural attraction, enhancing its visibility, relevance, and impact.

The ideal candidate will be a strategic thinker and inspiring leader, with a proven ability to drive impact, foster collaboration, and translate vision into meaningful outcomes.

They will be instrumental in shaping and driving IWM's success, bringing together strong leadership with a results-oriented approach to advance the organisation's mission and deliver on its purpose.

Learn more

Graduate Archaeology & Heritage Consultant

Brindle & Green Environmental Consultants

Brindle & Green Environmental Consultants are seeking a Graduate Archaeology & Heritage Consultant to join our growing team, based at our offices in Radbourne near Derby.

The role will primarily involve supporting the archaeology and heritage department within the production of archaeological desk based assessments and heritage statements, with scope to undertake archaeological evaluations in the near future.

A full driving licence, including own transport, is essential as the role will involve site visits and limited fieldwork.

Essential Criteria

- Excellent report writing skills;
- Technically competent and willing to learn and use GIS;
- Highly motivated and able to work by themselves and within a team;
- Strong attention to detail;
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal;
- Full driving licence and own transport.

Desirable Criteria

- Degree in archaeology or related subject;
- Familiarity with GIS;
- Experience with producing formal reports and/or input to planning applications.

Learn more

Impact Development Manager (Heritage and Creativity)

2 July 2025

University of Reading, Fixed term - March 2026

Our Heritage & Creativity (H&C) research shines a spotlight on the past and reflects on the value of arts and humanities research to the people of today. Focusing on contemporary global challenges, we promote public debate on issues such as migration and diaspora, health and (dis)ability, and the role of heritage and the creative industries in promoting inclusion and diversity. Our work is informed by engagement with archives and material culture and the exchange between creativity and digital platforms. The University has a wealth of world-class museums, collections and archives and works through them to foster innovative collaborations and partnerships with the public, industry, government, NGOs and other researchers to contribute to social diversity and wellbeing, economic growth and creative enterprise.

You will have:

- Knowledge of impact and routes to achieving it
- Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing with a diverse range of stakeholders
- Experience of managing a project, including maintaining financial records and spreadsheets
- Experience of working within the arts, heritage, creative industries or university sector
- Excellent analytical and problem-solving skills
- Demonstrable knowledge of the Heritage and Creativity Theme portfolio

Learn More

Contribute

We would be especially interested in hearing from you about events and opportunities. Contributions in the form of short reviews of conferences, exhibitions, publications or other events/material that you have attended/read are also welcome. Please note that advertisements for any non-CHRC events, jobs, or programs do not imply endorsement of them.

Subscribe

If you would like to be added to our mailing list to receive our bulletin, or if you have a notice to post, please contact the editor (heritage-bulletin@arch.cam.ac.uk).

For more information about the Heritage Research Group, visit the CHRC website: www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk

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