



## **Where Britain's history lives: a new look for Historic Houses**

**The Historic Houses Association today reveals its new Historic Houses brand and revamped membership scheme.**

The UK's castles and historic houses are the backbone of its world-leading tourism industry. Each year, 26 million visits are made to independently owned historic houses across our four nations. Unveiled ahead of English Tourism Week (but equally significant for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland tourism too), there is now a new look for one of the most important parts of the UK heritage sector.

Historic Houses is the new name of the Historic Houses Association, the UK's largest collection of independently owned historic houses and gardens. Few people realise that most historic houses open to the public are looked after by independent owners rather than by charities or government. Historic Houses represents these houses and celebrates the different ways in which they can be supported and enjoyed, including through visits, special tours, overnight stays, weddings and events, or as film locations.

In its first rebrand for 30 years, the new-look Historic Houses will seek to attract more new members than ever before, emphasising that its houses are not static museums but lived-in family homes with thousands of stories from the past, present and future waiting to be discovered by visitors.

Historic Houses members are given free access to more than 320 of the most significant historic houses and gardens across the country. Each of these places has a unique charm and is full of fascinating stories. Our houses range from famous places like Burghley, Woburn and Longleat to smaller but equally compelling destinations such as Stonor in Oxfordshire, Kelburn Castle in Ayrshire, and Seaforde Gardens in County Down.

Annual membership, which costs from just £50, offers visitors the chance to get out and discover some amazing heritage, whether on their doorstep or

further afield. To find out more or to become a member visit Historic Houses' new website [historichouses.org](http://historichouses.org).

**Ben Cowell, Historic Houses Director General, said:** "With so many places waiting to be explored – including many quirky 'hidden gems' – we want to shout about who we are and what we do. We think our membership scheme has tremendous potential to grow support for this important part of our heritage. Remarkably, our membership scheme has almost been a trade secret until now, and usually only discovered through word-of-mouth.

"Our bold new brand aims to change all that, and to communicate what's so special about the places we represent. Our houses are not static museums, but living examples of Britain's past, present and future. Making sure that these houses have a viable future remains our long-term goal, and we think the best way to do this is to make sure their contribution and our mission is better known and supported.

"We'll be doing all we can therefore to highlight the many stories of the places we represent, and to encourage them to be better valued and appreciated, by the public as well as by government."

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## Notes to Editors

- The Historic Houses Association (HHA) was formed in 1973 as a representative organisation for independently owned historic houses. It represents over 1,650 houses and gardens across the UK, many of them open to the public. Nearly 50,000 people are already part of its membership scheme, which gives free access to more than 320 of these properties. (By comparison, the National Trust has 200 mansion houses open to the public.)
- Working with the award-winning design agency Johnson Banks, the HHA has rebranded as Historic Houses. This new brand can be seen on its website, [historichouses.org](http://historichouses.org) (built by Pixl8), in its quarterly magazine Historic House and through its revamped membership scheme material.
- The 1,650 houses represented by Historic Houses welcome an estimated 26 million visits each year. These visits generate over £1 billion for the UK economy. Historic Houses properties generate 33,700 full-time-equivalent jobs spread throughout the country, often in rural areas, and contribute nearly £500 million each year as gross value added. (Figures from Historic Houses member survey, 2017).
- Tourism is the UK's fifth biggest industry in terms of GDP contribution. There were 15 million heritage-related international visits in 2015 (almost

half the total of all inbound international visits to the UK), and 63% of domestic visitors say that being able to visit a historic building is the 'sole reason' or a 'very important reason' for their holiday. Heritage is therefore the product that makes our tourism industry so successful, and historic houses lead the way in attracting millions of visitors to all parts of Britain, including the more remote rural spots. (Figures from Heritage Counts 2017: Heritage and the Economy.)

- English Tourism Week (17-25 March) is an annual celebration of the importance of tourism, organised by VisitEngland. See [www.visitbritain.org/English-tourism-week](http://www.visitbritain.org/English-tourism-week).
- It costs just £50 for a single Historic Houses membership, or £80 for a joint membership. Membership gives free access to more than 320 historic houses across the UK as well as a range of other benefits.
- Houses new into the Historic Houses membership scheme in 2018 include Chatsworth in Derbyshire (where members can now receive one free entry into the garden each year), Harewood House in Yorkshire (one free entry per year), Arundel Castle in West Sussex (all-year free access to the gardens) and Stonor in Oxfordshire.
- Hidden gems in the free-access membership scheme include:

Kelburn Castle, in Ayrshire, covered in a striking modern 'graffiti-style' mural by Brazilian artists;

The Merchant's House, an amazingly preserved 17<sup>th</sup>-century silk merchant's house in picturesque Marlborough;

The Bishop's Palace in the ancient cathedral city of Wells, Somerset, whose swans have learned to ring a bell hanging over its moat when they want food;

DH Lawrence's birthplace, a tiny miner's cottage in Nottingham that saw the beginnings of one of Britain's greatest and most controversial 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers;

Plas Brondanw Gardens in north-west Wales, created by the eccentric mind behind world-famous Port Merion and an insight into his inspirations;

Seaforde Gardens in County Down, whose huge maze is reputedly the oldest in Ireland.

Ben Cowell, Director General, and James Birch, President, are available for interview.

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