

People and Historic Places - Summary Report

The first national pilot project addressing access by ethnic communities to opportunities in historic houses

Black Environment Network. Historic Houses Association

1. Executive Summary

The People and Historic Places project is a unique national project linking ethnic communities to historic houses. The pilot was undertaken as a partnership between the Historic Houses Association (HHA) and Black Environment Network (BEN).

1.1 Overall aim

“ To explore opportunities to increase access by ethnic community groups to historic houses”

1.2 The Project

The project was focused on the simplicity of an offer of a visit to a historic house to a range of ethnic community groups. Efforts were made to select ethnic minority participants to give a range of social group characteristics, age, gender, ethnicity and religion. Against this is a framework of preparation, training and evaluation. There is enormous goodwill within the Historic Houses Association. The news of this project prompted so much enthusiasm that many Historic Houses came forward to be involved. Some individual owners expressed their personal enthusiasm and desire to engage directly with the groups. A total of 8 houses were selected to take part, in order that the resources of the project would not be overburdened.

1.3 Key Outcomes and Conclusions

Overall the project was an overwhelming success:

- Every one of the ethnic community groups enjoyed the visits and would like to make further visits. If support can be found for a further programme of visits, it is estimated that we now have between 7 to 10 times the number of interested groups in the various locations we targeted. These would consist of return visitors bringing friends and other family members, plus new visitors stimulated to visit historic houses through word of mouth.
- Every one of the 8 historic houses now knows, through experience, that they can engage successfully with ethnic communities as a significant new audience.
- A visit that simply offers a guided tour of a historic house with the enjoyment of its gardens and grounds has sufficient interest for new visitors from ethnic communities. The sheer beauty of historic houses and their grounds are a revelation and experienced as a new form of social pastime. Many visitors felt that a single visit was not enough and expressed their wish to return simply to wander around and settle down to enjoy these surroundings.
- Many historic houses have activities and attractions which add to the experience. These provide a range of opportunities to engage the interest of the full age range.
- There is a significant potential for commercial returns for historic houses within reasonable distances from urban conurbations with high ethnic presence. There is a rising middle class within ethnic communities. Even with groups on low income, many ethnic community groups raise money for trips out as part of their programmes. Investing in first visits can lead to income as entry fees and the cost of activities would be covered by grants and other fundraising.
- Minor investment in training relevant personnel will address the unevenness of awareness, knowledge and skills in relation to providing a welcome for visitors from ethnic communities.

1.4 The socio-cultural significance of visits to historic houses

- The engagement of the owners of historic houses with ethnic communities has demonstrated how the usually assumed divisions of class and privilege can be overcome, and experiences can be
- exchanged which demonstrate common ground and generate goodwill. These positive experiences of generosity and welcome cannot be underestimated as a basis for the continuing relationship that enables the maximum benefit of access to heritage by ethnic communities.
- Many of the houses have historical links with the countries of origin of members of ethnic communities. Some have significant objects and features of cultural value.
- Members of ethnic communities, are disadvantaged and live in some of the worst environments within the inner cities. These visits to historic houses have been re-awakening their connection to nature and history. This is true both in what they have yet to share in and what they can already share, as their uprooting have often been in the context of historical events.

- Connecting to historic houses and participating in the activities enabled integration through simply being among members of the majority population. It is a setting within which a contribution to social cohesion can be made.
- Although it is early days one can see that volunteering at historic houses will contribute to breaking the mould of stereotyping, bringing into the big picture the reality of the possible vast contribution of ethnic communities to the care and protection of the historic environment.

1.5 Into the future

The expectations of both historic houses and ethnic community groups have been raised in the most positive way. The stage is set for us to build on this first pilot and move towards a more ambitious project. However, the actions set out in the following recommendations, to be effective, require funding, expert advice and guidance. It is as yet unclear how precisely this will be provided. Until resolved, apart from the follow-on action identified for contacts already established, this report will remain inevitably aspirational.

2. Introduction

2.1 Project aim and objectives

2.1.1 Overall aim

“ To explore opportunities to increase access by ethnic community groups to historic houses”

2.1.2 Objectives:

- To test and develop initial methodology to involve ethnic minorities in accessing historic houses
- To lay down the basis for a programme of work to stimulate ethnic minorities to access what historic houses have to offer
- To engage ethnic minority groups in the development of methodology

2.2 Project participants

8 historic houses across England, Scotland and Wales

England : Arley House, Tissington Hall, Syon Park

Scotland : Drumlanrig Castle, Kelburn Castle, Traquair House

Wales: Margam Park, Tredegar House

8 ethnic community groups involving 250 participants

England: Wai Yin Chinese Women’s Society (Manchester), Manchester Black Health Forum, Bangladesh Multipurpose Centre (Birmingham), Junction Community Church (London)

Scotland: Scottish Filipino Association (Edinburgh), Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association (Edinburgh), Muslim Women’s Resource Centre (Glasgow)

Wales: MEWN Cymru - Minority Ethnic Women’s Network (Cardiff)

3. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

3.1 Maximising the outcomes of the pilot project and enabling more visits

100% of the ethnic community groups involved enjoyed the visits and would like to return.

There is a commercial aspect to opening up access by ethnic groups to historic houses. There is a rising middle class within these communities. Additionally, disadvantaged groups can raise money for programmes of visits and activities which they become interested in. So historic houses can benefit from grant monies raised by groups.

Action:

- Maximise the new opportunities created
- Individual historic houses can encourage more visits and consider implementing taster programmes for the particular ethnic communities they are now in touch with

3.2 The creation of an initial positive image of historic houses

3.2.1 The engagement of the owners of historic houses with ethnic groups

Much goodwill has been created through the special efforts of the owners of particular historic houses to personally engage with ethnic community groups.

Action:

- Other owners of historic houses may be encouraged and stimulated to personally engage with ethnic community groups

3.2.2 Promotion and information

There is a strong tradition within the heritage sector of portraying historic properties through the use of beautifully composed but people-free photos. The response of ethnic community groups which have not been to such places is that they project an image that is people-unfriendly and remote, although the places are obviously beautiful.

Action:

- There is a case for a general poster or leaflet to promote visits to historic houses depicting ethnic minority people enjoying aspects of historic houses
- Small amounts of money to buy space in community newsletters enabling the reproduction of photos alongside articles would be a very direct way of promoting awareness of what historic houses have to offer. It is both drip feed education and building up awareness and motivation to go on such visits

3.2.3 Engaging with the media

With a pioneering project such as this, it is important to pay attention to the possible role of the media. When engaging ethnic minorities in a new area, it is important that care and sensitivity is taken into consideration when involving the media.

Action:

- Any interest from the media should be nurtured
- BEN has produced guidelines for facilitating the engagement of ethnic community groups with the media in a socially and culturally sensitive way

3.3 A framework of development and support

3.3.1 Availability and cost of transport

Some historic houses were not only a long distance away from where most ethnic groups are in the inner cities but they have poor public transport links. The cost of hiring coaches or minibuses can be substantial.

Action:

- Historic houses should negotiate for the establishment of good public transport links
- Fundraising support should be given to groups to access resources

3.3.2 Building the capacity of the staff of historic houses

The unevenness of the staff of historic houses, in their commitment and their capacity to work effectively with ethnic minority groups, needs to be addressed.

Action:

- Invest in further training, developmental support and experiential learning of the staff of historic houses
- Share good practice and experience among historic houses

3.3.3 Maintaining a dialogue

Although the project has been very successful, the links between historic houses and the communities are not sufficiently established and may be lost without further action being taken.

Action:

- Maintain dialogue with the ethnic community groups which have been involved and engage them with the design of a follow-up project

3.3.4 Ethnic monitoring

None of the individual historic houses undertakes ethnic monitoring. The overall picture of access to the countryside is being researched at present by the Countryside Agency through its Diversity Research Programme.

Action:

- Some houses have received ethnic minority group visitors after the pilot. It would have been good to include a question on visitor monitoring forms or periodic surveys to identify how a group heard about the house

3.3.5 Language barriers and educational opportunities

Visiting groups purposefully brought their own interpreters - simply bilingual community members.

However, the vocabulary of history and historic objects sometimes eludes them.

Visits can be purely for pleasure, but they also have the potential to be a stimulus to learning.

Action:

- There is a case for the training of community interpreter volunteers, exposing them to a range of houses and grounds and the associated vocabulary
- Particular houses have indicated that they will consider producing materials in different languages if there is a sufficient demand for it
- Consider developing resource materials which support the learning of English through the use of a visit to a historic house, in partnership with colleges

3.4 Building the relationship between ethnic groups and historic houses

3.4.1 Enabling peer group experience

Within peer groups, there is simply no one to ask about such experiences. Besides the members of ethnic communities, key personnel such as the community leaders or the project workers of ethnic community groups do not themselves have the experience of visiting historic houses. So how can we expect these key decision makers to feel able to enthuse and encourage their community to try a new experience ?

Action:

- Taster programmes can be designed to systematically introduce ethnic community groups to what historic houses have to offer
- Investment in the organisation of visits which are specifically for Community Leaders and Community Workers

3.4.2 Enabling active engagement with historic houses

There are opportunities for ethnic minority groups to be actively involved in historic houses, moving them away from just being passive visitors.

Action:

- Bring interested historic houses and ethnic community groups together to brainstorm and identify specific themes of enduring interest
- The identification of some specific activities will only emerge through building on and deepening the relationship with community groups which have visited over time

3.4.3 Multicultural features

The projection of the fact of an inclusive multicultural history draws strong emotional responses.

Making these aspects visible is an area of development. Some multicultural features are not linked to the specific history of the house, but to the overall connections of Britain to the world, e.g. the range of plants from all over the world in the extensive gardens, herb gardens and kitchen gardens, which are evident in many historic houses.

Action:

- Identify and maximise the use of links to multicultural features when working with ethnic groups, including developing interpretative information and activities around such features, e.g. plant trails for plants originating from different countries

4. Next Steps - Where do we go from here ?

4.1 Strategic development for access to historic houses by ethnic communities

The outcomes of the pilot project points to a follow-up project which implements the recommendations listed above. Such a project should:

- Support historic houses and ethnic community groups new to this work
- Support historic houses and ethnic community groups which are engaged with this work to expand the work

- Support historic houses and ethnic community groups to explore and develop different project forms
- Track issues and concerns, seeking solutions for these in partnership with historic houses and ethnic community groups
- Track good practice and produces resources which share good practice and stimulate further development
- Track the benefits of the project thereby strengthening the basis for the funding of such projects

4.2 Maximising the links made through the People and Historic Places Project

4.2.1 Initiatives by individual historic houses

Individual historic houses may wish to develop their own initiatives. BEN has a training and consultancy service and is able to work as advisor, facilitator or trainer as needed to address the needs of different organisations. We can also advise on funding possibilities.

4.2.2 Building on the links made

Historic houses which have participated in the pilot project can choose to take steps to build on the contacts made and the knowledge and experience which have been gained. BEN has made specific recommendations to the 8 pilot houses.

4.2.3 A follow-up project

The outcomes of the pilot project points to a follow-up project with a national co-ordinator focused on supporting historic houses and ethnic community groups to work together to enable access by ethnic communities to what historic houses have to offer. BEN and HHA will explore this option with external funders.

4.3 A seminar to share and review experience

A seminar is being organised to bring participants and other interested parties together to review the lessons learnt and explore opportunities for the future.

The summary and full reports can be downloaded free from the websites of the Historic Houses Association and Black Environment Network www.ben-network.org.uk www.hha.org.uk