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National Heritage Science Forum celebrates a year of achievement

11 November 2014 saw the first gathering of members and friends of the National Heritage Science Forum (NHSF) in the prestigious surroundings of the new World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre of the British Museum.

Over 40 attendees were welcomed by Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Honorary President of NHSF, who praised the encouraging progress made in response to the 2006 report on heritage science by the Select Committee chaired by her. She noted that in a period of economic austerity it was vital to remind decision-makers of the importance of heritage to the tourism industry, which accounted for 8-10% of GDP. Most visitors to the UK were attracted by our museums, galleries and historic buildings, but these would not survive without the research carried out by heritage scientists and put into practice through conservation and preservation. The challenges ahead could best be met through concerted action.

Nancy Bell, NHSF Deputy Chair, reviewing the first year of the Forum's work, said a great deal had been achieved since gaining registration as a charity. She highlighted the increase in membership to include 17 organisations, including universities, professional bodies and heritage institutions. Other noteworthy achievements included: speaking for heritage science with one voice in responding to national consultations; taking the lead in developing a network of public, independent and charitable organisations; launching the NHSF Kit-Catalogue initiative to provide a register of equipment for members, and actively communicating with the membership and the wider world through the new website and newsletter, as well as social media.

Sarah Staniforth, outgoing Chair of the NHSF and former Museums and Collections Director, The National Trust, gave the keynote speech *Glancing back and looking forward: heritage science in 2020*. She highlighted the role played by Parliament since the 1830s in placing science at the heart of reports on conservation and management of cultural heritage. Following in this notable tradition, the Select Committee report had laid the groundwork for the current focus on heritage science, including the adoption of the Science and Heritage Strategy and the establishment of the Forum.

Looking to the future, her hopes for 2020 included development of the advances already made in funding research projects bridging the humanities and sciences. One far-reaching effect will be to expand the number of PhD level heritage scientists. Increasing the capacity to employ them within the museum and heritage sector will be crucial, as will opening up new channels for publication of their research. Continuing support for heritage science will only be given if public awareness is constantly raised through imaginative publicity for the use of science in for example, conserving damaged paintings or identifying archaeological finds. "There is much to celebrate today", she concluded, "with progress made in the past ten years, but much to do in the next five years and beyond."



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Notes for Editors

Issued 13 November 2014 - for immediate release

The National Heritage Science Forum was set up in 2013 to share knowledge and ideas between researchers and practitioners, maximize the impact and public benefit of heritage science, lead the delivery of the National Heritage Science Strategy and give a more powerful voice nationally to heritage science. The Forum is a registered charity (number 1154160).

The Forum has its roots in the recommendations of a report by the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee on Science and Heritage (2006), chaired by Baroness Sharp of Guildford. This also led to the setting up of Science and Heritage Programme and publication of the Science and Heritage Strategy in 2010.

The Forum's membership represents 17 major UK institutions which make a significant contribution to heritage science: Birmingham Museums Trust, British Library, British Museum, Cardiff University, English Heritage, Historic Royal Palaces, Historic Scotland, Icon, National Galleries Scotland, National Museum Wales, National Trust, Natural History Museum, Oxford University (Bodleian Libraries), Royal Armouries, Tate, The National Archives, University College London.

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