



## PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Dave Proudlove – Founder of development and regeneration advisers URBME

# 'Open days give hope for our city's heritage'



**SUCCESS:** A Heritage Open Days guided walk on the architecture of Absalom Reade Wood at the weekend.

Picture: Pete Stonier

ONE of the year's biggest events came to a close this past Sunday with a choral concert at the Our Lady of the Angels and St Peter in Chains Church in Hartshill.

Heritage Open Days is the biggest grassroots heritage festival in England, and next year celebrates its 30th anniversary.

This year's Heritage Open Days programme has seen some 5,000 events across the country, involving more than 40,000 volunteers.

It is a mammoth undertaking, and the continued success of Heritage Open Days is a huge tribute to those on the ground doing the doing.

One of the places that runs some of the most successful Heritage Open Days is The Potteries. Heritage Open Days have been a mainstay in our city's calendar for many years, and the impact has been huge.

Heritage Open Days in The Potteries typically attract around 8,000 attendees each year, supported by 250-300 volunteer days.

In addition, research has demonstrated that each attendee spends around £8, meaning an injection of £64,000 into the local economy.

Over the past five years, members of the Potteries Heritage Society, the Heritage Network and the Bottle Ovens Owners Club have contributed more than £100,000 worth of their time towards planning and delivering events across the city.

This year's Heritage Open Days have once again been a great success. A total of 34 events were delivered,

with historic sites such as the former Chatterley Whitfield Colliery – a big Heritage Open Days favourite – Winkhill Mill, and St Mark's Church – the biggest church in the city – all opening their doors, alongside walking tours in locations including Burslem and Longport.

Events that were hosted by the Potteries Heritage Society generated 200 visitors alone.

Heritage Open Days across the Potteries are an incredible achievement that deserves much greater recognition.

When you consider what has been achieved by a network of volunteers giving their time freely, you can only imagine the potential impact if these people and organisations were backed with resources.

In recent times, there appears to have been a false narrative developed in some quarters in response to The Potteries Heritage Emergency, and the approach that is taken to the city's heritage assets and historic environment.

There has been suggestions that there has been an acceptance of decline and that perhaps people don't care enough, while some have suggested that in any case, the rot has spread so far that much of what we have is now beyond redemption.

These are arguments that I don't buy. Indeed, the ongoing success of Heritage Open Days in the city counters these arguments in a number of ways.

They demonstrate that our city's heritage has real depth to it, and is about far more than just hand-picked buildings, and is as much about

intangible stuff as well as the tangible.

Heritage Open Days highlight that there are many people and organisations across The Potteries that are doing the doing when it comes down to our heritage, and have been for many years; what they have always lacked is genuine and meaningful support.

Heritage Open Days also prove that these people and organisations have laid the foundations from which we can build a brighter future for the city's heritage.

Our city's heritage is genuinely world-class in nature, yet we are in the midst of a genuine emergency in terms of its condition and accessibility, and an ambitious response is necessary to address it.

This is something that needs to be depoliticised, and cannot be dominated by one single body; we need a mutually supporting solution that allows as many players to play as possible, and is driven by the community it is intended to serve.

And we can learn a lot from the continued success of Heritage Open Days in the city. It tells us that there are people with invaluable knowledge, skills, passion and desire in and around the city to properly shape what that solution should be.



Read more columnists at  
stokeontrentlive