

Skills at the IHBC's Annual School June 2013

Skills was a word very much at the centre of the Annual School of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) hosted by the institute's North Branch in the historic city of Carlisle in June 2013.

Setting out to examine the critical challenges for built and historic environment conservation specialists and placemakers in the 21st century, the school focussed on the breadth of the skills training needs of conservation professionals required to ensure that our heritage is viable, sustainable and in good condition.

Nearly 150 delegates from all relevant specialist backgrounds and disciplines were presented with a large range of opportunities to scrutinise the latest thinking on skills resources, priorities and opportunities, ranging across practice, policy, funding, community education, low-carbon priorities and traditional skills as well as the tools of the mainstream construction sector such as contracts and design review.



There is a need for building conservation specialists to understand what others in the sector are doing and how they fit together to conserve the historic environment. Being 'up' on your own field is one thing – and that's hard enough – but there must be a need for specialists to get to grips with the skills of others that they work with, strengthening the sector and broadening its base. Several of the School's sessions highlighted this. Are people sufficiently up on digital recording to know when it should be specified? Does the sector have the community engagement skills needed to persuade others of our cause?

The loss of skilled craftspeople equipped to work with heritage buildings, engineering and crafts is a significant issue. The equivalent loss of knowledge in the public sector, as conservation officer numbers continue to drop, is equally worrying. The loss of private sector jobs, notably amongst small practice archaeologists, is a third concern. Bolstering the sector with cross-fertilisation of knowledge and skills will be important as fewer people are left to deliver more.



On the Saturday of the School, a mini Skills Fair in the Market Place was held. Delivered through North of England Civic Trust's Heritage Skills Initiative (HSI), over 50 School delegates got taught blacksmithing, wood turning, lime mortar pointing, lead work and more. Looked on by the Carlisle public, gripped by how that spindle would turn out or what the gizmo under the hammer would look like when it was done. For the contractors who led the training, spreading this kind of word amongst professionals and potential new clients is vital for the sector.

But it was the need for connections between different skills which the School highlighted best demonstrating the importance of developing an approach which integrates training of all types into live projects, writing training into tender documentation across the board, and making it an integral part of all commissioned and contracted work on heritage-at-risk projects. There is a clear need for building conservation specialists to know what others in the heritage sector are doing and, for that, we need to share our skills beyond our immediate colleagues. Whether it's an hour's talk by the architect or a 12 month bursary by the joiner, it's got to be all joined up.



Jules Brown & Kathryn Banfield, North of England Civic Trust – Heritage Skills Initiative
Stewart Ramsdale, Tees Heritage Trust.

All images of mini Skills Fair at the Annual Summer School of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation © Institute of Historic Building Conservation

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer

Services Department:

Telephone: 0870 333 1181

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: customers@english-heritage.org.uk