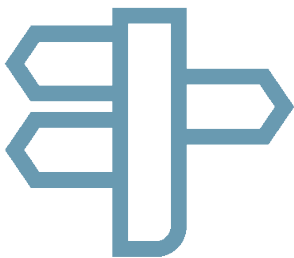
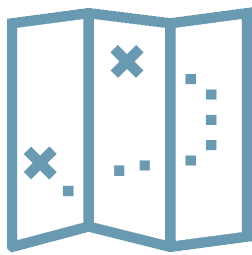
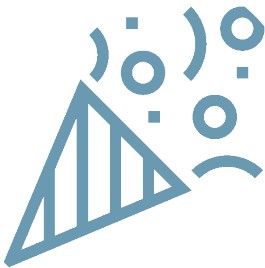
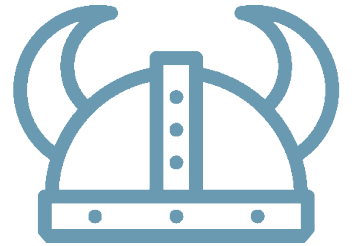
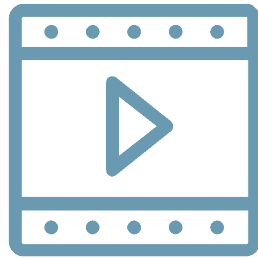
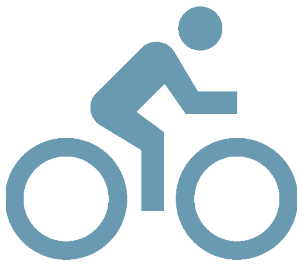


# Get Started!

Your guide to taking part in England's largest festival of history and culture



# Welcome



Firstly, hello! If you're reading this, you're either new to Heritage Open Days or an old hand who's interested to see what's in our core pack. Whichever you are, **welcome!** If you're new, we're delighted that you're considering joining HODs, and hopefully you'll find lots of information and tips in this pack to help make taking part a simple and easy process.

The good news is that if you decide to stage a Heritage Open Days event, you'll be joining the **largest** festival of history and culture in the UK. Every year, 1000s of events take place across the country, encompassing walks, talks, plays and recitals, with cinemas, museums and galleries opening up archives and backstage areas, and hundreds of buildings that are normally closed to the public, unlocking their doors. The festival now includes digital events, providing even more ways for people across England and beyond to engage with your stories and places.

The beauty of Heritage Open Days is that it offers **complete freedom** to stage your event, or tell your story in whichever way you want. We take a very broad view of the word 'heritage', welcoming all places to take part in the festival, including modern buildings, factories, industrial plants and natural spaces.

All we ask is that every event must be completely free of charge. This is **your chance** to put your corner of the world on the map, and tell the stories – of people, places and events – that really matter to you.

Your national Heritage Open Days team



**Sarah**  
Programme  
Manager



**Liam**  
Marketing &  
Projects  
Manager



**Alex**  
HODs  
Officer



**Charlotte**  
Registration  
Assistant



**Jade**  
Marketing &  
Projects  
Assistant

# Why take part?

We understand that opening for free or putting on a special event can be challenging, but there are many benefits that will make taking part in HODs a worthwhile experience.



Become part of a national celebration with millions of visitors eagerly searching for events



Join a community of 1000s of local and national organisations and develop new partnerships through our workshops and networking events



Try out new ideas, concepts and experiences without the pressure of a paying audience



Share what's important to you and get more recognition for local heritage



Get extra publicity for your site or event through our online event directory, strong social media presence and press campaigns



Attract new audiences to your site: one-third of HODs visitors have not been to a heritage site in the past 12 months



Engage and forge stronger local connections: over 80% of visitors say that visiting a HODs event made them feel more proud of their local area.



Meet and inspire potential volunteers and supporters: over 45% of visitors are inspired to volunteer in the future



Have access to our [Organiser area](#), where you can apply for free insurance and marketing materials, as well as download many free guides and resources



Remember - taking part doesn't mean that you necessarily have to open all day, every day - your event can just be a single pre-bookable tour or a one-off online event. Whilst your event must be free, you are welcome to ask for donations.

# Develop your event

From tours of historic buildings or landscapes to interactive online workshops on the history of English puddings, it's the diversity of events that makes Heritage Open Days unique. Your event can be held in-person, online or a combination of both, and we've produced a special [beginners' guide to developing digital events](#). If you're struggling to get started here are examples of just some of the types of event that have taken place in previous years...



Re-enactments and costumed guides bringing history to life



Daytime or evening talks from specialists



Object-handling sessions and conservation workshops



Walking, cycling and even kayaking tours



Film screenings, live music and pub quizzes



Behind-the-scenes archive experiences



Treasure hunts and trails for both children and adults



Street parades and village festivals



Access to usually closed or hidden spaces



Food and drink tasting sessions

To help generate different events and new stories, each HODs festival has a different theme (e.g. Edible England, Hidden Nature). Whilst your event doesn't have to have this focus, it may provide a good starting point when developing your ideas. Check our [website](#) for details on this year's theme.

## Case Studies

### Mixing codes and cocktails in Knutsford

Inspired by the work of Alan Turing, The Lost & Found bar in Knutsford, Cheshire was transformed into a WWII era speakeasy. With the help of an expert mixologist, visitors discovered the secrets behind classic cocktails and even had a go at creating their own signature drink!

### Exeter library's 'white gloves' experience

A rare chance for people to get close to some of the library's special collection, which features books dating back as far as 1480. After being given expert object handling tips, visitors donned white gloves and delved into the unique stories contained within their pages.

# Your event entry

The best way to create a really engaging online event entry is to think about it as if you are creating a news story. The most successful entries combine a tightly-written, intriguing introduction, strong images and a clear description of what visitors will see and experience if they come along.



## Using images

- Include an image whenever possible. It gives visitors a better idea of what to expect and will help your entry stand out
- Make sure your image is big enough to not appear pixelated. All smartphones and digital cameras will take pictures of sufficient quality for your event entry
- Use images to highlight interesting or unusual features that people will see
- If your event is family friendly, include pictures of children enjoying themselves
- If you include images of people, ensure they are doing something active. Avoid using images where people are just standing around and looking at things
- To make your place sparkle try taking pictures during the 'Golden Hours' (the hour after sunrise or before sunset)



## Describing your event

- Make your words come alive – use adjectives. Is it unique? Fascinating? Vibrant? Are you revealing something? Are there secrets to be discovered?
- Try and include specifics about what's happening. Rather than talking about 'family-friendly activities', mention what will be involved – face painting? Treasure trails? Art workshops?
- Give some context. If it's a historic building, give one or two interesting facts, if a natural landscape, what birds or unusual trees/flowers might be seen?
- Keep the title short and snappy, but make it creative. Rather than just 'Georgian Gardens Heritage Open Day', use 'A Festival of Flowers' or 'A Walk Through the Woods'
- Make sure you include all the essential information; location, dates, times, whether your event is pre-bookable



If you're not sure where to get started, or need a little inspiration, check out these examples from previous years that had real impact...

[Danbury Delights - cooking at the palace gatehouse](#)

[Stories Under The Stars](#)

[Drawers for Wars - A Century of British Military Underwear](#)

# How to register

Registering an event with us is quick and easy. To keep things simple, we've broken the process down into three steps. You can work through this in your own time on our online Organiser area.

1

## Get started

If you're new to Heritage Open Days, you'll first need to submit a [login request](#). Once approved, this gives you access to our Organiser area. Here you'll find our online registration form, and be able to save, edit and submit your event(s).

If you've taken part before, click 'View my events', use the filters & scroll down to find the past event you want to update. Click on the event title to open the record and click the 'Clone' button. When prompted, select '2025 Festival'. Alternatively, you can create a new event from scratch.

2

## Get ready

Before registering an event, you will need to consider the following factors...

### That your event meets our entry criteria



Entrance must be free



Your event takes place within the festival dates



You provide some form of information



Your event offers something not normally available for free

### Insurance requirements and risk assessments

Every event carries a risk, and all MUST complete and review risk assessments to minimise this. You can either complete your own, or see our 'Handy Hints – Risk Assessments' and template form available from the Organiser resources section in your Organiser area. HODs as part of the National Trust can offer secondary cover insurance for some activities. Check the insurance summary section on the registration form for links to the important documentation and tick the appropriate box.

### Your opening times and booking conditions

Whilst you can update these at a later date, many people don't re-check the online event directory before attending an event. To avoid disappointing potential visitors it is always best, where possible, to have your location, opening times and any pre-bookable parts of your event finalised prior to registering.

# 3

## Get going

You're all set to complete our short registration form. This shouldn't take long but you can always save your entry and come back to it later. You'll need to input the following information into the form:



Description - tell visitors what they can see and do at your event. Give as much detail as you can!



Image upload – including an image is optional, but it will ensure your event listing stands out and attracts more visitors



Location - where will your event be taking place? Be as specific as possible to ensure that it can be found on the searchable event map



Timing & tours - enter specific times for opening, closing and special tours. If you are not participating on a certain day, leave the box blank. Add booking details if applicable. You can amend your event if a particular day or session is fully booked or cancelled



Tick boxes – make sure to select all that apply to your event. These help visitors search for events by theme, type, category and special features, as well as access requirements



Links – If your event is online make sure to include a link to where visitors will be able to access your content. For both online and in-person events you can also include links to your website and social media channels

Filled the form out? Preview your entry to see what the public page will look like. Once you're happy, click the submit button and your event will appear on our online event directory as soon as it is open to the public! If you have requested our insurance, your event will go into the queue to be processed by one of the team, which may take a few weeks. You'll then receive an email confirming your entry is live.



Top tip: Register your event as early as possible – you are far more likely to be featured in our press releases and social media channels. You can also apply for free marketing materials, through the Marketing section of our Organiser area. Orders open in early summer, and materials are allocated on a first come, first serve basis.

# Staging your event

So you've registered your event. Now it's time to start thinking about advertising what you're doing and preparing for visitors to arrive. Here are just some of the ways you can help ensure that your event is well attended and goes off with a bang!

## Publicising your event

There are multiple ways to do this, and we encourage you to explore as many different marketing channels as possible. Here are some places where you can promote your event...

- Your local newspaper or radio station – You'll find a handy template press release in the [Organiser resources](#) section of the Organiser area, which you can adapt to suit your own purposes
- Social media – post about your event on your own networks and/or reach out to any local Facebook groups who can post on your behalf
- Share stand out stories and high-quality images with us for use on our national social media channels and press campaigns
- Notice boards – is there somewhere locally where you can pin up a poster about your event?
- Local leaflets and newsletters

## Providing a great experience

Welcoming large numbers of people to an event can be daunting, particularly if this is not something you do on a regular basis. However, thinking about the following things in advance will ensure that every visitor leaves with a smile on their face...



Having space for people to park. If you don't have your own car park, where is the nearest public parking?



Providing refreshments and snacks - you can ask for a small fee for these, which can be a great way to fundraise



Making it easy for people to find the entrance/meeting point to your event. Our downloadable and durable marketing materials can help with this



Knowing where the nearest toilets (including accessible facilities) are. If you are doing a tour you may want to factor in a comfort break



Having a friendly face to welcome visitors to your event and answer any questions. First impressions really shape a person's overall experience



Giving a personal goodbye. A last impression is as important as the first - it's also a great opportunity to tell people about any future events

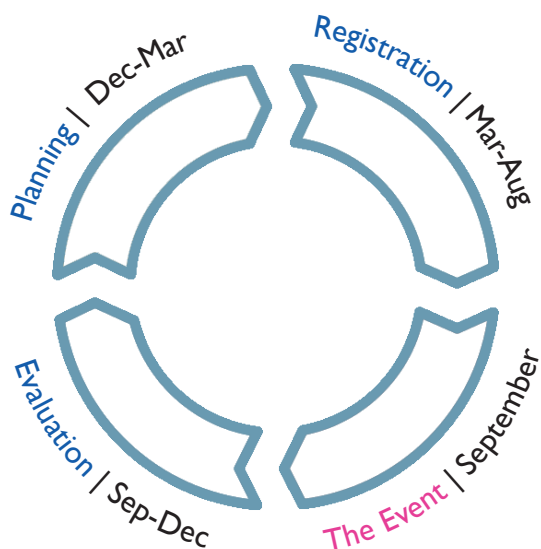


Remember to complete our online evaluation form in the Organiser area after your event, which enables us to continue receiving support for the festival. This provides us with the funds to be able to offer our free insurance and marketing materials.



# The HODs year

## The yearly cycle



## Key dates

**Early March** - registration launches

**Early May** - 'Early Bird' deadline\*

**Early June** - event directory goes live

**Early August** - registration closes

**Early September** - the festival!

**Early October** - evaluation closes

\*Submit your event before this date for a chance to be featured in our 'long-lead' press releases sent to magazines who require content three months in advance.

## Checklist

### Registration

- Organiser login requested/contact details updated
- Opening times and booking conditions agreed
- Insurance needs determined
- Initial event idea decided
- Event entry written
- Image uploaded
- Risk assessment completed
- Event submitted

### Event Preparation

- Volunteers recruited
- Volunteers briefed and trained
- Feedback forms prepared and printed
- Risk assessment reviewed
- Signage put up
- Refreshments prepared
- Visitor welcome ready

### PR and Publicity

- Marketing order placed
- Event entry double-checked
- Local news outlets contacted
- Event promoted on website/social media
- Event promoted on local notice boards

### Post Event

- Evaluation forms submitted
- Volunteer feedback gathered



Did you know, over a quarter of events are submitted in the two weeks before registration closes. It can take up to 6 weeks to process them all. To avoid being caught up in this backlog, register as early as you can!

# FAQs

## **Does my event have to take place during every day of HODs?**

No - events can take part on any number of days, from just one afternoon to several different days. It is entirely up to you, the event organiser, how many hours you wish to participate.

## **Can I still take part if my event doesn't fit with this year's HODs theme?**

Yes - although we hope that you might consider featuring this year's theme in your event, it's not a requirement! If you are struggling to find a connection, then do not worry. As long as it meets our general criteria, you can register with us.

## **I organised the same event last year. Do I need to complete the whole form again?**

NO – the online registration system enables you to copy an old event, update and submit for the new cycle.

## **How do I know if my event has been registered?**

- Everyone – From June anyone can search for events on the directory.
- Organisers – At all times can check the status of your entries in the Organiser area by filtering the My events table to show events for the current festival year.
- Promoters/ Coordinators – At all times can check for events using the HODs Community searches in the Organiser area.
- If still in doubt – ask the team!

## **I'm struggling to register my event online.**

If you cannot submit and register your event online, drop us an email. We'll talk you through the process and help you get your event registered.

## **Can I still edit my event once I have submitted it?**

YES – things change, and it's really important that you keep the publicly advertised entry up to date. See our Registration Roadmap and tips for guidance on how to do this.

## **Someone else from my organisation also needs to register events. How can they access all of the events I have registered?**

They will need to request a login for our Organiser area. We'll then link them to your organisation. They will then be able to access, amend and submit events, but you won't see each others personal details.

## **What is the best way to set up pre-bookable tickets for my event?**

If you are happy to take enquiries regarding tickets, then you can provide a dedicated email address or telephone number. Alternatively, there are several websites (e.g. Eventbrite, TicketSource) which provide free ticket management systems for events that do not charge admission.

## **How can I find other organisers who have registered events near me?**

Within the HODs Community section, you can search for events by area or keyword – enabling you to connect with organisers to discuss common issues or cross-promote your events.

# Fancy a chat?

We pride ourselves on always having a person on the end of the phone or email - you won't find any automated responses from us!

## Get in touch

[info@heritageopendays.org.uk](mailto:info@heritageopendays.org.uk)

## Get the latest news

Twitter: [@heritageopenday](https://twitter.com/heritageopenday)

Facebook: [@heritageopendays](https://www.facebook.com/heritageopendays)

Instagram: [@heritageopendays](https://www.instagram.com/heritageopendays)

LinkedIn: [Heritage Open Days](https://www.linkedin.com/company/heritage-open-days)

TikTok: [@heritageopendays](https://www.tiktok.com/@heritageopendays)

Sign up to our monthly newsletter: <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/about/contact/hods-newsletter>

[www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk)