



Festival of Archaeology 5 Year Impact Study 2020-24

Produced for:

Council for
British Archaeology

By:

Resources
FOR CHANGE







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Executive Summary














1.1 Findings

		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	5 Year Total
Engagement 	Engagements ¹	585,631	51,547	294,039	99,926	96,360	1,127,503
	Reach ²	24,058,116	70,803,603	65,875,676 (July only) 85,400,868 (March – July)	61,294,463 (Festival only) 90,024,366 (June – August)	54,282,647 (Festival only) 88,697,286 (June – August)	358,984,239 (Including build up to Festival)
Events 	Live	141	505 (activities) 1,229 (sessions)	439 (activities) 794 (sessions)	457 (activities) 611(sessions)	435 (activities) 767 (sessions)	1,977 (activities) 3,401 (sessions)
	Non-Live/ Resources	174	213	202	7 ³	21	617
	Total	315	709	641	464	420	2,138
	Organisers	180	219	233	191	233	1,056





¹ Those interacting directly with a Festival activity as a signed up participant or present observer

² Those seeing some form of Festival presence online but not interacting directly

³ Resources were not promoted during the 2023 Festival due to issues with the website

<div>Who takes part?</div> <div></div>	<div>Organisers</div> <div><div></div><div>Each year, at least half are committed Festival supporters from the heritage sphere with up to a third representing a more diverse range of first timers which keep the offer fresh and relevant</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Each year, the Festival is refreshed by a least a quarter of new people with a core bedrock of organisers making up around half who have committed for multiple years.</div></div> <div><div></div><div>East Midlands and London have been hot spots over 5 years. East of England, Southern Scotland and parts of the South West have been consistent cold spots over five years</div></div> <div><div></div><div>The trend has been increasing volunteer numbers and hours over 5 years, though 2024 has seen a significant dip compared to 2023</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Activities have largely reverted to pre-pandemic modes of delivery with guided walks, family friendly and hands on events the most common activities replacing digital alternatives</div></div>
	<div>Participants</div> <div><div><div>Considerable progress in realising more equitable female representation across 5 years.</div><div></div></div><div><div>Those reporting a disability participating at levels higher than national profile consistently over 5 years.</div><div></div></div><div><div>Predominantly from England and Wales, with organiser driven hot and cold spots</div><div></div></div><div><div>Considerable progress in ensuring youth representation in the Festival 2022-23, though seems to have reversed in 2024.</div><div></div></div><div><div>Considerable progress in ethnic participation 2022-23, though seems to have reversed in 2024.</div><div></div></div><div><div>Tend to have higher education qualifications though some representation from those with vocational qualifications</div><div></div></div><div><div>Predominantly employed rather than retired, though sharp increase in proportion of retired in 2024.</div><div></div></div></div>

What do they think?	Organisers	3 out of 4 happy with public response each year, citing good attendance and audience satisfaction.	At least 8 out of 10 happy with CBA materials and support (low scores only if not used).	Almost a third experienced issues, though these tended to be related to external factors and dropped significantly in 2024.	Each year, virtually all organisers say they would deliver a Festival activity again	
						
	Participants	High levels of enjoyment each year – at least 8 in 10 people each year, and even better in 2024.	High levels of learning each year – at least 8 in 10 people each year, and even better in 2024.	Wellbeing outcomes primarily around learning and giving time engaging with archaeology.	Access issues have declined year on year over 5 years, increasing relating to site specific factors.	At least 19 out of 20 people would attend again. At least a third attend two or more events each year.
						
		At least 8 in 10 people feel welcomed and included each year, consistent across 2021-2024.	At least 8 in 10 people feel respected by staff and volunteers each year, consistent across 2021-2024.	Typically, only around 1 in 10 are CBA members, though rose to almost 1 in 5 in 2024.	At least 19 out of 20 people would attend again. At least a third attend two or more events each year.	
						

<p>Response to theme?</p> 	Organisers	<p>A significant minority, if not majority, respond positively to the annual theme each year</p> 	<p>Every year more than half of organisers feel the theme helps their event planning.</p> 
	Participants	<p>A trend towards increased participant awareness of the theme each year 2020-23, though a significant drop back to 2020 levels in 2024.</p> 	

1.2 Conclusions

The Impact Study offers the following conclusions in relation to annual Festival delivery since 2020:

1. **National relevance:** The Festival has directly engaged with over 1.1 million people over the 5 years (2020-2024) and reached an additional 358 million more through social media. This affords the Festival a national relevance in the heritage engagement landscape within the UK and will be of interest to heritage organisations and funders.
2. **Resilience of the model:** The considerable success around engagement and reach was achieved against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic – the biggest upheaval in society in living memory, demonstrating the adaptability and resilience of the Festival delivery model.
3. **Diverse activities targeted where potential for lasting impact exists:** The diverse range of activities offered with an ample range of family friendly and youth engagement events during formative stages of life are creating opportunities for personal, albeit lasting impact.
4. **Geographic variation in offer a by-product of the bottom up Festival model:** The voluntary participation of organisers is reliant on their capacity and capability which are beyond the CBA's control and therefore geographic variation in Festival coverage is to be expected.
5. **Inclusivity and relevance:** The Festival has made considerable progress over five years in catering for more diverse audiences, with the major successes around female and disabled representation. However, other areas of success around youth and ethnic engagement have seen positive trends reverse in 2024 highlighting how persistent annual effort is needed to sustain the gains.
6. **Considerable level of organiser support:** The Festival has been enabled by 1,056 organisers who have delivered 1,941 activities and 617 online resources since 2020 – a considerable achievement that demonstrates the buy-in that exists from organisers.
7. **Bedrock of committed organisers:** The Festival is enabled by a committed core group of organisers in the traditional heritage sphere, representing at least half of organisers each year, with many having been enablers for more than 5 years. These organisers are the bedrock of the Festival and should be celebrated as such.
8. **Healthy annual turnover of organisers:** The Festival is refreshed by at least a quarter of new organisers each year, which come from a diverse range of organisations, groups, projects and individuals. These organisers are vital fresh blood for the Festival, keeping it relevant.

9. **Local organisers = local impact:** Locally based organisers are often prisms for local impact, enabling more authentic and relevant engagement that helps ensure that the Festival as a whole can reach a more diverse range of people.
10. **Organisers respond well to the themes:** The use of an annual theme to support advocacy goals has been consistently effective in marshalling organisers over five years, with a majority embracing as a helpful framework rather than an imposition.
11. **Increasing public awareness of theme over time:** There has been a trend towards greater participant awareness of the annual theme over 5 years, even with reverses such as 2024 when awareness fell. Overall, there have been improvements in marketing and comms in that time and representing a solid foundation to deepen engagement in line with advocacy goals.
12. **Link between Festival and CBA less obvious and an area for future improvement:** Whilst the Festival raises awareness of archaeology broadly, it is less clear that the national profile of the CBA is being raised annually, though the high proportion of non-members participating represent a significant opportunity to achieve this.
13. **CBA staff have made a considerable contribution towards Festival delivery beyond grant resource each year:** Staff resource needed to service the Festival has been focussed on key individuals who go above and beyond. Whilst the effort required

was closer to a sustainable level in 2024, it remains clear that the CBA staff contribution remains critical to Festival success.

14. **Enjoyment and learning main participant outcomes, with early indications that wellbeing outcomes come from learning and giving time:** Participants typically report enjoyment as the main positive outcome, followed by learning. Initial data on wellbeing point towards learning and giving of time as the primary contributors towards increased wellbeing.
15. **A warm welcome:** The overwhelming majority of participants feel that Festival activities make them feel welcomed and included – this has been consistently high since data was first collected in 2021.
16. **Consistent focus on young people paying off, though gains are fragile and need continued annual effort:** The consistent effort engaging young people through the Festival has seen positive results with annual improvements in perceptions and agency evident in the data, though 2024 highlights these as fragile gains that require continued investment of time and effort to sustain.
17. **Festival appeals to advocates and first timers alike:** Participants include a core group of committed Festival supporters representing around a third who are likely to be archaeology advocates, with the majority attending just one event each year. Interviews point towards the accessibility with experts at the Festival as a source of its interest and vibrancy.

18. **Festival a gateway to archaeology for some with considerable personal impact:** The evaluation process has unearthed powerful testimony showing where deep and personal impact is being made, highlighting how the Festival can help ‘unlock’ a latent interest in archaeology. It is an accessible gateway.
19. **Organisers value CBA support highly:** Those organisers looking to the CBA for support and guidance are very happy with the CBA’s response, with the responsiveness of the staff team often singled out as an appreciated aspect of that support.
20. **Organiser delivery issues tend to be outside of CBA control:** When organisers experience issues or lower levels of satisfaction, these tend to relate to external factors beyond the CBA’s control such as poor weather or no shows.
21. **National marketing footprint valued by organisers:** Site-based organisers value the national Festival marketing and promotion which supports local engagement efforts.
22. **Volunteer input increasingly crucial:** Organisers have been leveraging considerable volunteer effort annually since 2020, though there are hints that a worsening economic climate may have impacted on volunteering in 2024. Even so, volunteering plays a critical role in making the Festival a success each year.
23. **There are existential risks to the CBA membership model:** There are existential risks to the CBA membership model: The health and vitality of the Festival relies heavily on the energy and

knowledge of the member organisations, some of whom are vibrant and outward looking, others of which are more inward looking. Both rely on the ‘traditional’ membership model and governance structures of voluntary organisations, but in general the membership is ageing and younger people have less time, and perhaps less desire, to engage with their interests in this way. In common with other voluntary groups and charities, the challenge the CBA faces is to find a way of extending its reach whilst also sustaining the depth and quality of the work which people contribute to the archaeology sector. The risk is that, at least in some areas, local organisations will shrink and miss opportunities to involve a wider range of people from different backgrounds who can bring fresh ideas and energy.

24. **CBA staff have a good awareness of what requires improvement:** CBA staff have a good awareness of what requires improvement: The website continues to evolve and staff are on hand to support directly. Engagement and reach over the five years has been considerable, though organisers and CBA staff recognise there remains scope for further improvement.

1.3 Recommendations

The Impact Study offers the following recommendations based on the annual Festival delivery experience since 2020:

1. **Geographic targeting of the East of England through CBA from 2025?** The CBA may wish to target the next flagship CBA-led events such as the launch and/or close in areas less represented

in previous Festivals to help shine a spotlight on archaeology there. The East of England region is a prime candidate, given relatively higher population than other 'cold spots'.

2. **Target audiences:** The CBA should continue to develop and deliver targeted activities for typically underrepresented groups in its own delivery, and advocate for the same through Festival organisers.
3. **Relationship building with gateway organisations in the East of England:** The CBA should identify key gateway organisations in the East of England through which younger and more diverse audiences can be reached for future Festivals.
4. **Leverage evaluation processes to support CBA membership efforts:** Introduce a 'call to action' as part of Festival data collection methods, offering people information on how they can become CBA members should they wish to.
5. **Time tracking:** Complete the transition to more accurate time tracking into 2025 so that the CBA staff time contribution towards the Festival can be accurately quantified.
6. **Mitigation of fundraising risk:** Develop a fundraising strategy as risk mitigation should Historic England financial support reduce in future.
7. **Case for growing the delivery team:** The Festival staff structure should be reviewed by the CBA with recruitment of an additional

Festival staff member focussed on targeted events in the East of England to increase impact and reduce strain on the current team. This would concentrate more of the available resource on front end delivery, easing pressure on key individuals.

8. **Website and marketing:** Continue efforts to refine the website and marketing: a move to a stronger and more effective set of communications and marketing tools should be planned for implementation in 2025.
9. **'Restless Development':** The CBA should engage its members in a conversation about future structures and models, building on the strengths of the approach which the Festival relies upon heavily, but keeping an eye on current trends for how people engage with their heritage and content in general. We want all parts of the country to be archaeology 'hot spots', not just those lucky enough to have excellent local organisations.