

## Address to BANES Councillors

Thursday 10th May

Andy Thearle, Secretary to the National Heritage Ironwork Group.

Dear Councillors

My name is Andy Thearle, I am Secretary for the [National Heritage Ironwork Group](#). A charity dedicated to raising awareness about the plight of our nation's wealth of Historic Ironwork, a largely overlooked and undervalued aspect of our built heritage.

I am also owner of Ironart, a local firm that is the only specialist traditional blacksmith company within the city of Bath, a firm that still supports apprentices and journeymen as well as doing our utmost to ensure that the master craftsmen and women we employ are afforded a decent wage and the respect they deserve.

I am constantly being confronted with inadequate and poor repair work that is carried out to the historic Ironwork that bejewels our wonderful city. Wrought Iron, the traditional material rather than the description of an activity that it is today, has not been available since the 1970's and as such it is a finite resource that we must look after, not to mention the artistry of all those master smiths that made what we so often take for granted.

Objective 10 of the current [World Heritage Management Plan](#) for Bath states 'Ensure that craft skills necessary to conserve the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value are in place and are of sufficient quality'

To quote 'The council recognises that the availability of craft skills and building materials to maintain the Site are essential. Skills include ornamental plastering, stonemasonry, metal working and joinery, but this is specialist work offered by a small number of companies. An action encouraging and supporting such skills has been included in both previous plans but in practice it has been difficult for the Steering Group to influence this'.

Action 30 of the plan states: Support initiatives which deliver the retention of craft skills and building materials which are necessary to maintain the fabric of the WHS.

I draw your attention to [Bath IRON](#), a festival of Ironwork being curated by the National Heritage Ironwork Group, an event centred around heritage skills that is to take place in Parade Gardens on the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> June. The focus of the event will be the live creation in the fire of a beautiful new balustrade for the Parade Garden's bandstand. Produced using entirely traditional techniques, this masterpiece will be donated to the city for generations to admire for centuries to come. It will be a unique opportunity for the public to witness Master blacksmiths at work and demonstrate that such skills are as valid as they ever were. At a cost of £65,000 this has been no small feat of fundraising, we have £7000 raised as part of our final £20,000 [Local Giving crowdfunding appeal](#) so we are not there yet!

Despite concerted efforts to recind the public entry fee to the gardens for the duration of the event, the council are insistent that this cannot be done. With the axing of the Cultural and Creative skills fund, the £5000 given towards the event was taken back following postponement of the original planned event dates, I am exasperated at how futile it appears to be to get a council that trades on heritage to invest in a ground up initiative, especially when it itself recognises that they are not

doing enough. Please can I ask you to consider recinding the park fee and seeing if some form of financial support can be granted for this most important event.

Lastly I wish to ask the council to support an initiative to create a Heritage Skills centre for the city. As a body that sub-contracts lots of maintenance work, money is already being directly spent on the fabric of the city. I propose that the council look at help funding a feasibility study based on the initial concept drafted here. Money might be more effectively spent by helping to offer the opportunity for meaningful 10,000 hr apprenticeships under the guidance of specialist masters. Current training opportunities are limited and heritage skills are being lost at an alarming rate. A paradigm shift in thinking might just allow heritage skills to thrive here in the city. What a great legacy that would be.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this issue.

**Andy Thearle**

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