

# CLAIMING OUR CASTLE

Final report of **CREATIVE CAERLAVEROCK**  
a creative learning collaboration  
between The Stove Network, The Imaginarium  
& Historic Environment Scotland

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Introduction: Claiming Our Castle	4
Executive Summary	6
Creative Caerlaverock Timeline	8
Creative Learning in Practice	12
1   Inviting Communities to Create	12
2   Caring for Places and for People	16
3   Supporting Access through Trust	22
4   Sharing what Counts	28
Conclusion: Our Future Heritage	32
Appendix 1: Project Resources	34
Appendix 2: Photo Credits	35

# Introduction: Claiming Our Castle



This is the final report for Creative Caerlaverock, a multi-year creative learning project co-delivered by The Stove, an arts-led community organisation based in Dumfries and Galloway, and The Imaginarium, in partnership with the Learning and Inclusion Team of Historic Environment Scotland (HES). The project's aim was to develop new ways of engaging local communities with heritage through participatory arts, co-design, and place-based learning opportunities centred around the Caerlaverock Castle as a source of inspiration.

Through successive phases of creative engagement, the project supported innovative collaborations with practitioners from the local creative and heritage sectors, as well as a broad range of community stakeholders. Creative Caerlaverock's methodologies, co-creation pathways, and creative

community engagement approaches brought together the complementary expertise of The Stove and The Imaginarium. The Imaginarium contributed its established professional community development and participatory creative heritage practice with under-represented local communities, while The Stove brought its creative placemaking approach, focused on long-term impact, partnership building, and supporting local people to connect with place, heritage, and identity.

This work contributes to, and aligns with, the principles for future partnerships outlined in the *Making Sense of Scotland | Outreach and Learning Framework*. It also builds on the Creative Learning Framework co-authored by The Stove and Northlight Heritage in 2022, which mapped early opportunities for inclusive community engagement, creative learning, and co-creation through the Creative Caerlaverock project. The creative learning framework embedded documentation, evaluation, and reflection throughout the project activities, and a series of annual reports and creative publications have recorded Creative Caerlaverock's key activities, outcomes, and legacy (see Appendix 1).

*"Creative Caerlaverock is an innovative approach to creative learning, heritage and community arts working to realise and inspire new possibilities in working with the region's historic locations."*  
Caerlaverock Phase 1 Report

**This final report is designed to support reflection and discussion among HES and its partners about how to take forward the creative methods and community co-design principles used throughout Creative Caerlaverock. It is also a resource for other community groups and creative practitioners to think about how to adapt these ideas for heritage work in their own places.**

Given the project's wide range of participants – including artists, culture and heritage workers, diverse community stakeholders, and both national and site-based HES staff – the report reflects multiple and distinct perspectives, interests, and concerns to provide a collective evaluation of Creative Caerlaverock and, most importantly, lessons to support future creative learning partnerships. It draws on semi-structured interviews with participants, community partners, and HES staff; two reflective workshops organised with delivery partners and the 'Heritage ReMixers' youth advisory group; as well as the robust documentation produced over the course of the project.

The remainder of the report puts the diverse experiences of Creative Caerlaverock in dialogue. In the next section, the Executive Summary

outlines key recommendations for future creative learning work. This is followed by a brief summary of the main phases of project activity, and subsequently four thematic sections, which discuss Creative Caerlaverock through the lens of Making Sense of Scotland, the HES Outreach and Learning framework.

Each section builds on participants' reflections to identify key messages for future creative heritage partnerships in Dumfries and Galloway, and in Scotland more broadly. The Conclusion draws these together to invite further discussion about the future of heritage, culture, and collaborative learning.

## Making Sense of Scotland Aims & Outcomes

- ▶ Access & Understand
- ▶ Learn & Reflect
- ▶ Inclusion & Diversity
- ▶ Skills & Experience
- ▶ Ideas & Creativity
- ▶ Wellbeing & Have Fun
- ▶ Share & Collaborate
- ▶ People & Places



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The experiences shared in this report demonstrate the value of embedding community co-creation and creative learning in the stewardship of heritage. It provides a basis for the development of sustainable frameworks for local procurement, partnership development, and long-term engagement strategies. In the future, creative heritage partnerships can build on the successes, learnings, and recommendations from Creative Caerlaverock. The project offers adaptable and material methods for exploring heritage together with communities.

## Key Successes

- ▶ New heritage opportunities were developed with priority communities through locally led co-creation and replicable creative methodologies.
- ▶ Project legacy has produced tangible outcomes that have been shared with the wider public, as well as new relationships and partnerships that have continued independently beyond the project.
- ▶ The open framework of support enabled responsive and timely programming that could respond to emergent needs and foster local skills.

## Key Learnings

- ▶ Consistent communication across the duration of the project will help clarify expectations and reduce uncertainty.
- ▶ Creative heritage outcomes require careful planning and resource to ensure they can be hosted, accessed, and preserved as intended.
- ▶ Greater support and autonomy for site staff can empower project outcomes and feed into joined up working across HES priorities.

## Key Recommendations

- ▶ Create a 'learning hub' model to provide reliable and flexible support for creative heritage led by local practitioners.
- ▶ Invest in long-term relationship building and iterative programming to build on local skills and connect with communities' changing interests.
- ▶ Develop clear pathways for preserving and sharing creative heritage outcomes alongside HES archives and collections.

# Creative Caerlaverock Timeline

The successes of Creative Caerlaverock rest on partnership, community engagement, and iterative reflection over a number of years, building on the networks and experience developed by local practitioners through much longer-term work in their communities. The following outline provides an overview of the five main stages of Creative Caerlaverock's development:



## Initial Engagement and Pilot Work (2021-2022)

Since 2020, The Stove Network has collaborated with HES, The Imaginarium, local creatives, and partner organisations to reimagine Caerlaverock Castle as a centre for creative learning in Dumfries and Galloway. Early work explored connections between communities and heritage, presenting creative engagement approaches to respond to challenges such as Covid-19 lockdowns and site closures.

In October 2021, The Stove and Northlight Heritage were awarded a tender to co-develop a Creative Learning Framework. Published in August 2022, the Learning Framework included engagement and evaluation methodologies designed by The Imaginarium and contributions on creative practice by Dr ts Beall. It mapped opportunities for inclusive community engagement, creative learning, and co-creation with under-represented audiences, setting objectives for widening participation, diversifying use of the castle and its grounds, supporting local creative practitioners, and exploring the potential for a regional Creative Learning Hub.

## Creative Caerlaverock Phase 1: Relationship-building and Early Engagement (2022-2023)

In Phase 1 of the project, The Imaginarium led work to build relationships with priority audiences and community stakeholders. They worked with The Stove on a variety of creative heritage engagement methodologies to inspire local communities, including Ancestral Supper-themed immersive consultation events, taster activities such as the Time-Travelling Forest School, living history and Live-Action Role Play events, and the development of the Caerlaverock Tarot Cards bespoke engagement tool. The activities were co-produced through a series of micro-commissions with local creative practitioners and with input from the Heritage ReMixers youth advisory group. The initial engagement and taster activities fed into the development of an Activity Plan for the following year, building on key interests from the priority groups.



*“Caerlaverock Castle is a little different. It’s pink and it’s triangular, it’s dramatic and it’s full of hidden histories. From acts of rebellious drag, to powerful LGBTQ+ connections, it holds centuries of stories on its walls...”*

*The Quest for Queer Caerlaverock*

## Creative Caerlaverock Phase 2: Expanding Delivery with Priority Groups (2023-2024)

In Phase 2, these initial activities were developed into immersive programmes for the priority audiences. These included a Midsummer at the Castle event – featuring trebuchet building, sound foraging, walking tours, and other activities requested during earlier engagement – and a series of Mostly Ghostly Tours, as requested by local residents. This period saw the development of new engagement opportunities such as The Imaginarium's The Missing Museum, an immersive and participatory exploration of lost LGBTQ+ and BME histories from the areas surrounding Caerlaverock. Longer programmes such as the Siege of Summerhill Medieval Bootcamp and Sonic Caerlaverock, with partners like Sonic Labs, empowered young people to explore local heritage with creative tools and place-based learning activities. These activities strengthened relationships with previously ‘hardly reached’ community groups and built new channels of communication allowing them to contribute to longer-term thinking about engagement opportunities with local heritage.

## Creative Caerlaverock Phase 3: Tangible Outcomes and Legacy Planning (2024-2025)

Phase 3 comprised the project’s final activities and sought to develop deeper and long-lasting engagement with the priority groups through targeted activities and the creation of tangible outcomes. In collaboration with Sonic Labs, the Site & Sound project engaged local young people with the castle grounds through a number of creative activities, producing their own artwork and a Sound Foragers Field Guide for future visitors. A series of oral history events were organised as part of Our Land, Our Stories, which were adapted into four original songs in collaboration with The Bookshop Band. Building on the earlier work through The Missing Museum, a series of co-design workshops invited participants to explore and represent their own LGBTQ+ heritage – commissioning a unique stone carving connecting LGBTQ+ symbolism and carvings from Caerlaverock Castle. This led to the creation of 'The Quest for Queer Caerlaverock' card deck and walking guide by The Imaginarium.

## Delivering Legacy and Strategic Impact (2025-2026)

Following the conclusion of the project's main activities, The Stove, The Imaginarium, HES, and key project partners have worked to carry project outcomes and learnings forward as legacy resources. Resources have been made available online through the project's website, and some are hosted on site at Caerlaverock Castle. Final project evaluation and reflection, as well as the launch of HES's new Outreach and Learning Framework, is guiding plans for follow-on activities, future opportunities for regular annual creative learning programming, and strategies for community co-design of historic spaces.

### Looking Back, Looking Forward

Across all stages of its delivery, Creative Caerlaverock has deepened engagement with Caerlaverock Castle and interest in local heritage among priority groups including young people, local farmers, LGBTQ+ communities, and New Scots. The following sections present four case studies, which look more closely at how this work has developed principles for best practice that can inform future creative learning collaborations.



# Creative Learning in Practice

## 1 | Inviting Communities to Create



- ▶ Learn & Reflect
- ▶ Ideas & Creativity

A defining feature of Creative Caerlaverock's learning model was to approach communities with an invitation rather than instruction. Instead of a fixed programme of activities, the project provided a framework for open conversations and responsive programming that could build on local interests and personal passions. As one of the project's creative practitioners put it, this open model of working allowed them to 'keep an ear out' for ideas, needs, and opportunities coming from the community, and then to connect them to the resources and institutional support on offer. During interviews and focus groups, project organisers, creative practitioners, and community participants alike emphasised the importance of patience, trust, and approachability to the project's successes, all of

which were sustained by creating an open invitation for communities to make heritage their own - making it relevant to them - followed by a commitment to help them bring their ideas to life.

This responsive community development approach is not an easy accomplishment. It required considerable discussion and planning in the early stages of the work, as well as iterative reflection throughout: communication was key, but also challenging. In their reflections, some participants described uncertainty about 'what HES was wanting to get out of it' and were unclear whether some activities had resulted in tangible outputs or where to find them. Project organisers were likewise candid about the occasional difficulty coordinating between so many different delivery partners and audiences, as well as managing expectations or disappointment when some ideas couldn't be taken forward.

*"The opportunity to be listened to has been part of the whole project."*  
Community Partner

The place-based delivery of the project proved essential for addressing these challenges, however, because it meant the organisers and practitioners were present and approachable. In some cases, simply bumping into one another on the high street created the

*"If you're building co-creation, you have to open with a question. I could have defined a 6-week programme with each week carefully planned out, but you can't do that if you want to co-create with communities. You need the artists to inspire, but not to set the direction. It needs some structure, but you also need to leave room for the unexpected."*

**Project Organiser**

opportunity to get an update on the project. In one participant's words, these local, creative conversations made it easier to engage with large organisations that could otherwise be hard to 'break into' and often required 'waiting and waiting' to get a response. In contrast, Creative Caerlaverock "helped broker discussions and had people on the ground to just go ahead and deliver things."

When asked about how the principles of open listening and responsive programming were put into practice, a frequent and favourite example was Creative Caerlaverock's series of Ancestral Suppers. As an alternative to the conventional power-point presentations and sticky notes of community consultations, the Creative Caerlaverock organisers created immersive storytelling and themed interactive consultation evenings that drew on local heritage while encouraging participants to share ideas for future activities.

The Ancestral Suppers created a fun and informal

environment for project organisers and members of under-engaged communities to converse over a meal, get to know one another, and reflect on their own ideas about heritage. Participants recalled being introduced to members of their community they had never worked with before, opening new conversations and collaborations. Meanwhile, members of the Creative Caerlaverock team – serving as waiters, medieval monks, songsters, and raconteurs – took careful notes, gathering ideas and contact details. As one organiser put it, the Ancestral Suppers were an 'imaginative portal' that encouraged participants to reimagine how communities might engage with heritage and to connect with practitioners who could help realise their vision.

But the Ancestral Suppers played a wider role in the work of Creative Caerlaverock, because the events were also opportunities to invite different creative and heritage practitioners in the area to contribute. The Suppers built on their enthusiasm and passion, as well as their years of experience fostering local creative culture. This was key to the Suppers' success, because it used living culture

*"I'd never seen such an immersive and experiential approach to consultation. ... It brought people together who hadn't met, got us into groups that hadn't engaged before, and since then we've been doing a lot more work with groups that wouldn't have happened without these introductions. ... From that little spark, amazing things have happened, it's integral to our practice now."*

**Community Partner**



to inspire other members of the community to participate in curated conversations and share how they would like to connect with heritage themselves.

The Ancestral Suppers exemplify the creative invitation and intentional listening that defined Creative Caerlaverock's approach. They offer a model for creative community engagement that can be used elsewhere, but one which should be adapted and reimagined by each place's creative practitioners. Provided with a framework for collaboration, an ethos of open invitation, and active local presence, such creative gatherings can bring heritage to life in new ways.

### For Future Heritage

- ▶ Create curated spaces for dialogue and informal conversation. This allows people to share many ideas without it feeling intimidating or like a competition.
- ▶ Look for ways to extend the invitation. There may be a need to adjust or replace a creative approach in order to make a project more accessible to a specific community.





## Project Spotlight: MacLellan's Castle

One unexpected result of Creative Caerlaverock's responsive programming model was the ability to support HES' wider portfolio of projects. The project's pre-existing partnerships proved useful for the HES Exhibitions Manager, when she wanted to commission creative practitioners in Dumfries & Galloway to create new ways to engage with some of HES' other closed sites. They provided an expedient way to navigate procurement processes, to connect with local collaborators through The Imaginarium's existing networks, and to enable local engagement and consultation.

The end result was an evening of projection art displayed on MacLellan's Castle in Kirkcudbright, spotlighting community members as historic characters as well as the historical recipes they had prepared during local workshops. Although the partnership took extra work to coordinate between and understand the different processes of HES, The Stove, The Imaginarium, and the creative practitioners, she considered the project at MacLellan's to be the most successful of her projects during that time 'because of how connected it was to the community' and it gave them the opportunity 'to see themselves and be excited' about local heritage.

**“We wanted site staff to have a sense of ownership in the project, and that required understanding what their priorities and needs are. Go talk to the person. I think site staff really value when you make the effort to visit in person.”**

Reflecting on lessons for future projects, she recommended inviting site staff and local community to help shape the brief and investing in budget and capacity to support project legacy.

## 2 | Caring for Places and for People



- ▶ Access & Understand
- ▶ People & Places

In some ways, Creative Caerlaverock was born from hardship. Following the Covid-19 lockdowns and the closure of many HES sites due to risks of falling masonry, project participants were faced with the challenge to encourage communities to re-engage with places that had become inaccessible. This required creative thinking not just about how to bring people back to these sites, but also how to bring the heritage and stories of HES sites out into their neighbouring communities.

This model of engagement is both adaptive and highly personal. By encouraging residents, community development workers, creative practitioners, and locally based HES staff to play to their strengths, the project contributed to lasting partnerships, supported

local career development, and fostered new interest in and commitment to heritage. The framework of Creative Caerlaverock became a way to invite communities to respond to these challenges generatively, by looking for ways to engage and celebrate heritage across the wider landscape and within their own places. This was key to connecting Caerlaverock to the communities' lives.

*"Usually with creative work, it's like 'here's the brief'. This was different because we could help make our own brief. It was a personal thing, getting to ask myself what I could contribute."*

*Heritage Remixer Participant*

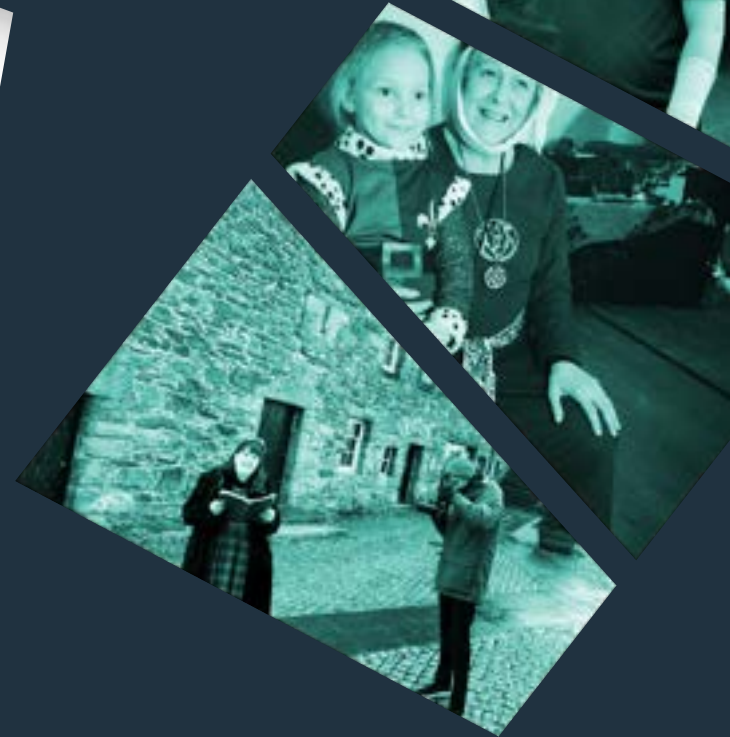
The Heritage Remixers, Creative Caerlaverock's steering group of young professionals, played a unique role in making these impacts possible. Acting as a local 'think tank', the Remixers identified partners, contributed ideas, and drew on their own connections to local culture to shape the design of creative programmes for community groups. Their involvement also contributed to their own professional development: as they worked in their communities, they came to recognise their own skills and found ways to advance their own creative careers locally. For instance, one Remixer brought his passion for Galloway's local sound system culture into the project by designing thematic music for the Ancestral Suppers. Another

led on communication and outreach, an experience that led him to his new work in local social policy.

One of the clearest examples of the Remixers' impact is The Siege of Summerhill – Medieval Bootcamp, developed in collaboration with Summerhill Community Centre. Over fourteen weeks, the Summerhill youth group worked with creative facilitators to explore their area's history and future.

The programme was designed around the group's existing interests – film, drawing, and community events – and worked from there to facilitate conversations about place, social structures, and climate change, using local heritage linked to Caerlaverock as examples. Heritage crafts, herbology walks, drama workshops, VR experiences, and even a siege of Caerlaverock Castle encouraged the young participants to be imaginative, think deeply, and see their place in new ways.

In one organiser's view, this process of 'immersive education' was only possible because of the time spent together, the informal chat, and the everyday interactions with participants. "This helped us realise 'Oh, they want to make a film,' so then we could





see how to make that happen. And that showed them history can be an act of imagination, and fun... You could see the interaction in the group becoming really genuine and active." In turn, the film became something the young people took back to their communities, sharing their own Caerlaverock stories during a film-screening as part of an Ancestral Supper they put on for friends and family. "We found a group of kids who were very patriotic, but a lot of them had never been to Caerlaverock themselves even though they lived nearby," one Remixer recalled, "working with them made me passionate about accessibility, and It helped me find a purpose."

Programmes like the Remixers and the Bootcamp kept Creative Caerlaverock rooted in its place and the interests of communities living there. This way of working raises important questions for future creative learning projects, and how to adapt such embedded experiences and place-based expertise. In particular, it highlights the need to consider who is available to lead delivery on the ground and to prioritise the needs and ideas emerging from the

community when developing learning opportunities. In this sense, Creative Caerlaverock can be understood as a potential blueprint for a 'learning hubs' model of engagement, where local practitioners, learning group leaders, and community organisers are invited to connect with HES through different levels of creative partnership. For such a model to succeed, however, it requires sustained local capacity, clear channels of communication, and opportunities for members of the community to contribute their diverse perspectives - meeting them where they are at through collaborative, inclusive, and non-extractive processes.

*"Everything was just so fun, and do you know, I still talk about this project. I bump into the kids on the street and they want to talk to you. The project allowed them to become part of our lives, and we became part of theirs."*

**Heritage Remixer Participant**

### **For Future Heritage**

- ▶ Give participants opportunities to shape and take ownership of learning activities.
- ▶ Recognise that impact and legacy can take many forms. Dedicate time and budget to document these and share them in ways that are relevant to diverse communities.



## Project Spotlight: The Time-Travelling Forest School

An important feature of Creative Caerlaverock was its ability to bring together practitioners for new collaborations, allowing them to explore different ways of working with their communities and strengthening links with other cultural practitioners. The Time-Travelling Forest School, for instance, was designed by The Imaginarium to facilitate a new co-created programme to encourage school pupils to spend time outside and explore how people have lived with the land in different time periods, while feeding into cross-curricular activities at the nearby primary school. The variety of local heritage and environmental practitioners who got involved meant that a wide range of activities – from clay making and natural dying, to willow weaving and catapult building – could speak to different pupils' interests.

Working together on the Forest School also helped the practitioners and their community partners appreciate the wide range of skills on offer in their community. The activities used within the Forest School became malleable methods of engagement, adapted throughout Creative Caerlaverock: some activities fed into the Siege of Summerhill, while others were adapted into standalone workshops to be plugged into local events like the Nithraid Festival. The collaboration even inspired a member of HES site staff to complete Forest Training herself.

**“It takes time. It’s looking at a project like this in a 10-year timeline. I can say from my own experience, it takes 10 years for a new person to come in, get involved in this and that, and really connect. Then these relationships become pathways for learning and working together: we can build on those connections because we’re here.”**

Reflecting on their work together, the Time-Travelling Forest School's partners, Wordsmithcrafts and the Freelance Ranger, emphasised the importance of building on local skills and connecting with what's already happening in a community's cultural life to strengthen partnerships and increase impact.





### 3 | Supporting Access through Trust



- ▶ Wellbeing & Have Fun
- ▶ Share & Collaborate

Inclusion was a priority within Creative Caerlaverock. A key project aim was to make history feel more accessible to members of local communities who had previously been left out or found it difficult to engage. Much of the project organisers' work went into strengthening relationships with groups like the young people at Summerhill, who had never visited Caerlaverock, or LGBTQ+ community members, who felt unrepresented in dominant historical narratives. Early planning sessions and pilot events helped identify potential partners and develop creative methods that would enable participants to take ownership of their own histories.

Time spent together, casual interactions at local events, and creative conversations about how to work together

all helped cultivate a space of trust. This created the conditions for groups to engage with place in new ways, together. Outreach began well in advance of any formal heritage activity, laying the grounds for successful engagement and helping to ensure the relationships and connections could continue beyond individual events.

Creative Caerlaverock's open framework was designed to support this environment by giving practitioners on the ground the flexibility to adapt. It also allowed them to gather together a growing network of collaborators, partners, and critical friends who could collectively think through how to make access for each community meaningful in practice.

*"Creative Caerlaverock helped them find their feet in Scotland. It was great. It was different from any work I've done in my life."*

*Community Partner*

This flexibility proved especially important in 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine forced many families to seek refuge in the UK. For those arriving to Dumfries and Galloway, settling in the area involved the challenge of navigating a new culture, overcoming language barriers, and adjusting from urban to rural life. One community organiser described how many Ukrainians were still getting their bearings when she was approached about inviting them to be involved in

Creative Caerlaverock. She had become a key contact for the Ukrainian community due to her language skills, and this meant she could also help the project organisers understand the new arrivals' needs. Acting as a bridge, she helped connect the project team with Ukrainian community leaders, facilitating early consultation activities and planning their first activities.

Over the following year, the Ukrainian community attended a jousting event, heritage workshops, and a bespoke Ancestral Supper. Even without a common language, these events allowed the New Scots to share a meal with other members of the local community; music and dance gave them plenty of opportunity to interact and share in one another's heritage even without a shared language. As one organiser recalled, outdoor activities also helped them to connect with their new place and even discover common roots and connections: she gave the example of a foraging walk, where Ukrainian participants found a plant they had foraged in Ukraine. They were able to teach the participants originally from Dumfries and Galloway about how it could be used.

*"The experience at the feast was amazing. It shows you don't always need language. We were communicating. That night needed a lot of effort, but after that the bus was always full!"*

*Project Organiser*

These successes rested on careful groundwork: relationship- and trust-building, interpretation, coordination with community leaders, and a readiness to adapt to participants' needs were essential. Another organiser emphasised that the ability to 'just grab a coffee' with project organisers was also key. This allowed her to engage and keep in touch with the project alongside her busy job supporting refugees across the region.

The events also allowed the Ukrainian community to make wider connections. Conversations at the Ancestral Supper led to new collaborations with the local museums service. According to one member of staff, those interactions led to "20-30 events that would not have happened without that introduction." In this way, initial moments of engagement grew into sustained participation, with New Scots becoming some of the most frequent visitors to local heritage sites.

Reflecting on their experience throughout the project, one community leader saw this success as a sign of the potential to extend the creative learning approach to include other New Scott communities in the region.

*"Working with New Scots and the Ukrainian Community took quite a bit of time to build trust and links to get them to engage. But when they engaged, oh my word! ... It's just beautiful. And you see them... they'll run up to you in the street now, and are able to actually talk a little bit in English, and they're still talking about the foraging!"*

*Project Organiser*





She expected it would bring challenges: other groups might be less organised, geographically dispersed, or have different attitudes toward heritage. Nonetheless, she saw potential in carrying the project's approach forward by working together with partners like local schools and collaborating with trusted intermediaries who could 'accompany them through the door' to get to know local heritage and culture.

By welcoming the Ukrainian community into Creative Caerlaverock, the project organisers inverted one of the castle's most well-known historical events—the siege—and asked what it would mean to make heritage about sanctuary instead. The work to include diverse communities from across Dumfries and Galloway underscores the care and resources required to do this kind of responsive and sensitive programming well, but also the real results it makes possible.

***"The model [of the Ancestral Suppers] is replicable in similar circumstances. It totally is. Because the methodologies are rooted in community and people ... as long as it's responsive to the site and space and that community."***

**Project Organiser**

### **For Future Heritage**

- ▶ Work with partners and intermediaries to learn what challenges a community is facing and what heritage means to them.
- ▶ Be conscious of demands on partners' time and capacity: devote time and resource to practical support like transportation and project management.

## Project Spotlight: The Caerlaverock Estate Oral Histories

Another idea to emerge from conversations at the Ancestral Suppers was an oral history project with the tenant farmers living on Caerlaverock Estate. The Imaginarium and Dumfries & Galloway Heritage Service worked with Anna Austin, Caerlaverock's Estate Manager, to organise two gatherings for the local farmers and their wives to share a drink and talk about their lives, their place, and how it had changed over the years. For Anna, the events were a special opportunity to get to know the farmers better. She described the experience as an 'eye-opener': it helped her see how much the farmers enjoyed socialising, and their stories revealed how local depopulation had made farming more isolating than it once was.

The events prompted Anna to look for ways the Estate could help bring the farmers together more often, 'it made me think we should try and build these kinds of social events into our annual schedule'. She thought this kind of creative collaboration had great potential for the hyper-local community living around the estate. Later, the stories shared by the Caerlaverock farming families served as inspiration for a series of new songs by the Dumfries & Galloway-based Bookshop Band.

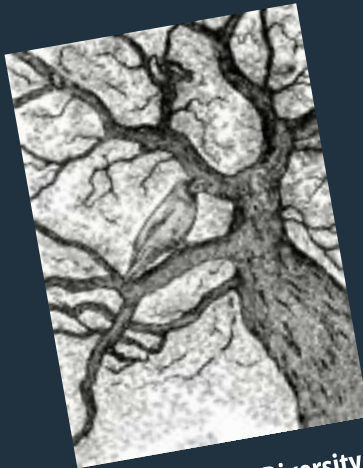
**"Conversations are so much easier with people you have good relations with."**

Anna's advice for future creative heritage partnerships was to invest time in creating plans together and to ensure regular follow-up. This is especially important for organisations like the Estate, which are frequently approached by many different groups interested in potential collaboration: 'rather than an email, I much prefer an ongoing dialogue – a catch-up coffee every few months, just to keep up to speed. This is what let's people offer to help one another.'





## 4 | Sharing what Counts



- ▶ Inclusion & Diversity
- ▶ Skills & Experience

Across all of Creative Caerlaverock's programmes, the project organisers, creative practitioners, and their partners worked to widen access to local heritage through creativity and culture. Rather than relying on a single mode of interpretation, the project evolved a variety of resources to respond to different groups' interests and needs. The process of making together, while talking about heritage and their sense of place, encouraged the participants to put heritage in their own words and explore new ways to understand Caerlaverock.

These approaches are rooted in the belief that heritage is not fixed, but something that should be reinterpreted, expanded, and shared. This perspective also shaped Creative Caerlaverock's approach to outcomes and

legacy. Learning opportunities empowered specific groups to express their lived experiences of place and to ask what heritage meant for them. Then, the participants' ideas and creations fed into a variety of creative outputs that could be shared more widely in the community and with other visitors. In addition to facilitating new interest in heritage, they put different experiences and communities in conversation.

One strand of this work focused on the senses to uncover different ways of understanding a place, growing into a series of 'Site and Sound' workshops focused on sound, improvisation, and creative writing for local young people with complex support needs. Together, they undertook sound-foraging expeditions at Caerlaverock to document and re-mix the natural and social soundscapes of the castle's surround.

*"What makes it work is when people give you notice and tell you we want to do X, Y, Z, 'is this going to be alright'? DJ says with me it's always 'Aye, but...', but that's a change, because it used to be 'no'. ... Sometimes we might have to tweak it here or there, but then we can say 'yes'."*

**HES Partner**

Another group took part in the 'Quest for Queer Caerlaverock', which explored hidden LGBTQ+ histories from the area, searching for traces and legends that could hint at the stories that hadn't been told. As a group, they drew inspiration from

the symbolism in Caerlaverock's many stone carvings to design an artifact of their own.

Both groups produced creative outcomes to share with wider audiences. A guided Sound Walk featuring the participants' compositions can be accessed using the Echoes App. A Sound Foragers Field Guide and The Quest for Queer Caerlaverock were created and given to the HES Visitor Centre at Caerlaverock Castle. And a new stone carving has been commissioned to be installed on site.

These meaningful outputs have the ability to carry the project's legacy forward. However, they also show the importance of carefully considering how to sustain, host, and communicate creative heritage legacies in practice. In particular, the HES site staff responsible for Caerlaverock have played a key role in making these legacies available to the public, but this comes on top of their many other responsibilities and demands on their time.

In their reflections on the project, the Caerlaverock site staff emphasised a strong desire to create new opportunities for the local community to access the site and to support creative work that would bring heritage to other sites around the region. Given their knowledge of local heritage sites, everyday visitors'

experiences, and practical considerations and accessibility challenges, site staff are an indispensable partner for creative heritage. Their perspective can also highlight key logistical realities: for example, limited signal and internet access at Caerlaverock can make digital resources, such as app-based experiences, difficult to use in practice.

*"I think the key is knowing that we trust the person we're working with and that we've had success working with them before, they understand our constraints, and what we need to make it work. ... So I would say my highlight, rather than a specific event, would be the connection that I've made through this project."*

HES Partner

At the same time, staff are well placed to identify opportunities for responsive programming: when feedback from the Ancestral Suppers suggested a desire for free access to the grounds, site staff were able to facilitate this, navigating internal HES processes and helping to create a more active and inclusive community presence.

The site staff's experiences can serve as a reminder that physical outcomes alone will



**"Going forward, we need to think about how to spread the word more within the local community. We don't want site staff to be stretched thin. We need to ask communities and group leaders how can this model be useful for you?"**

**HES Partner**

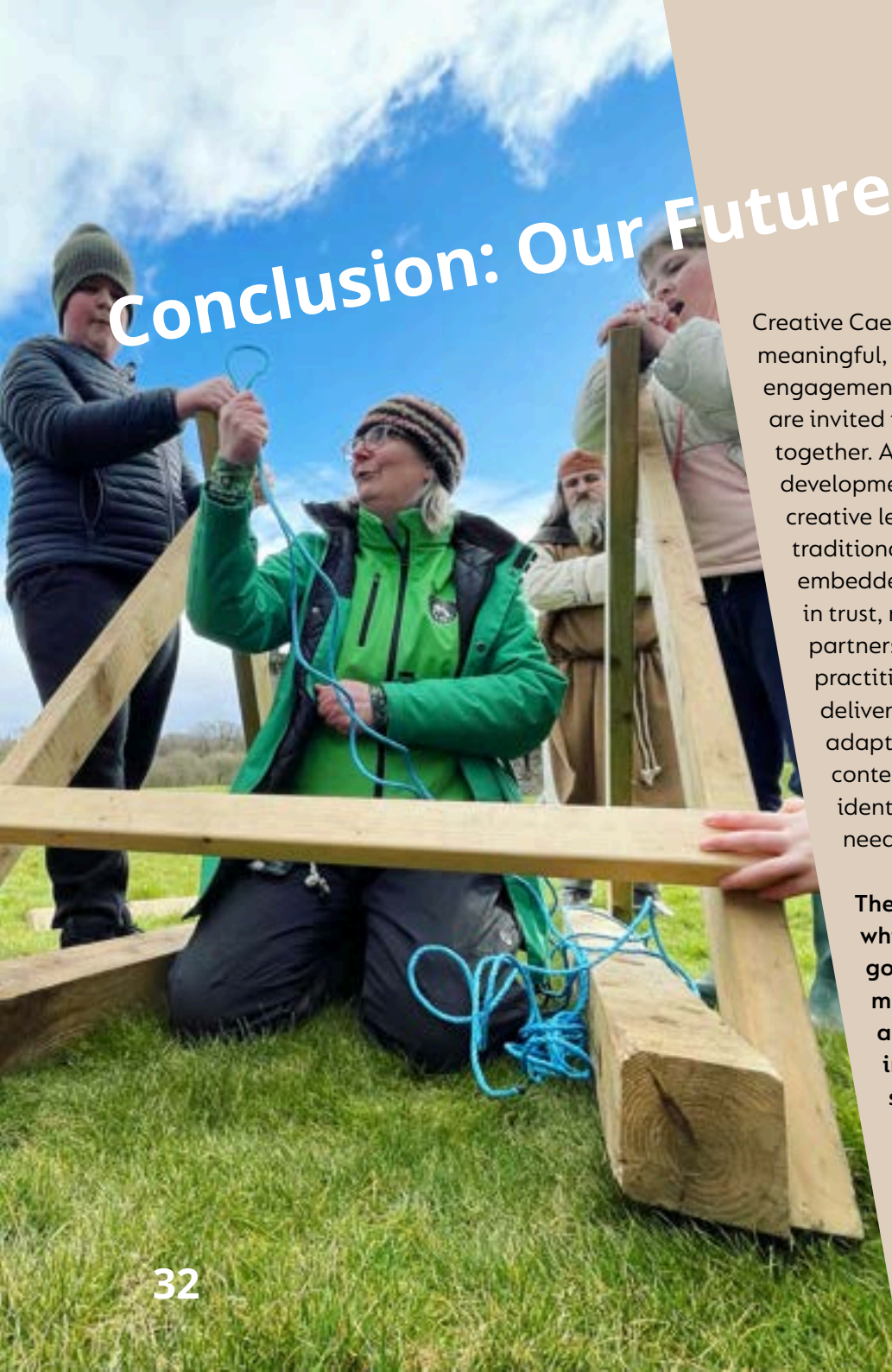
be most effective when they are designed and owned by local experts, who already have trusted relationships and know their community. Recognising the value of including local partners and practitioners in planning, and giving them the support and autonomy they need to take part, is essential for the success of creative heritage partnerships. Material outcomes require maintenance

and coordination, but co-creating and sharing these can also feed into new relationships and opportunities for new collaboration. Caerlaverock's legacy outcomes are tested and replicable formats for creative learning, which other local partnerships can adapt to suit their own communities' needs.

### **For Future Heritage**

- ▶ Dedicate time and attention for feedback, follow-ups, and relevant modes of project updates. This is essential for communities to feel listened to.
- ▶ Be clear about purpose, timeline, and demands on time from the start. Partners value understanding the broader context of a project and being kept up-to-date when things change or are added.





# Conclusion: Our Future Heritage

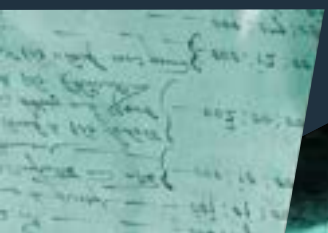
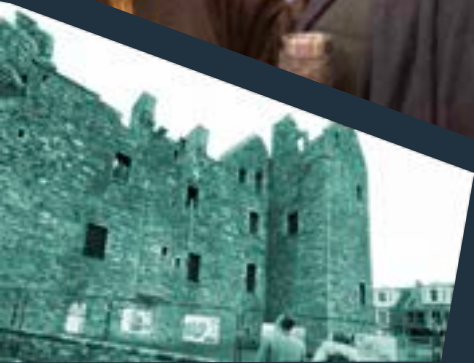
Creative Caerlaverock demonstrates how meaningful, sustainable heritage engagement emerges when communities are invited to explore, imagine, and share together. Across its multi-year development, the project shows how creative learning can move beyond traditional consultation toward an embedded, relational model grounded in trust, responsiveness, and long-term partnership. The project's organisers, practitioners, and participants delivered heritage as a living, adaptable process—one shaped by contemporary voices, diverse identities, and evolving community needs.

**The Creative Learning approach which underpins this project goes beyond outreach: it is a model for community co-design and meaningful participation in the development, use, and stewardship of our historic sites.**

Looking forward, Creative Caerlaverock offers a compelling blueprint for creative heritage practice: invest in people, prioritise local knowledge, and design flexible frameworks that can adapt to people and place. Crucially, the work highlights that impact is cumulative and often intangible: confidence, skills development, and strengthened relationships are as significant as physical artefacts. Future work should build on this by strengthening infrastructure for legacy, enhancing communication across partners, and supporting locally led delivery models. In doing so, heritage can remain relevant, inclusive, and deeply connected to the lives of the communities it serves.

*"When we look at all the projects we're involved in, a frequent grumble is that when a project finishes, what's the legacy? It raises expectations, but then does it go back to where it was before? I can honestly say about this project that hasn't happened. This has got things moving, and it has continued. ... It changed people's sense of what's possible, and the ways people see that castle has changed."*

*Community Partner*



# Appendix 1: Project Resources

Many of the creative resources and outputs from Creative Caerlaverock are available online via The Stove's legacy webpage, which can be accessed using the link or QR code to the right.

[Access Resources](#)



Further information about the project, including annual reports and details about project partners, can also be found on the legacy webpage.

[Access Further Information](#)



# Appendix 2: Photo Credits

| **Front Cover** | The Imaginarium | **2** | The Imaginarium | **4** | The Imaginarium, Outpost Arts | **5** | Historic Environment Scotland | **6** | The Imaginarium | **8** | Outpost Arts | **9** | The Imaginarium | **11** | Outpost Arts, The Imaginarium | **14** | The Stove, Historic Environment Scotland, The Imaginarium | **15** | Historic Environment Scotland | **17** | The Imaginarium, The Stove | **18** | The Imaginarium | **19** | Historic Environment Scotland, The Imaginarium | **20** | The Imaginarium | **21** | The Imaginarium, Historic Environment Scotland, Outpost Arts | **24** | The Imaginarium | **26** | The Stove | **29** | The Imaginarium | **31** | Paragon Music | **32** | The Imaginarium | **33** | The Imaginarium, Paragon Music, Outpost Arts | **Back Cover** | The Imaginarium

**With thanks to all of the community members, partners, and supporters that have made Creative Caerlaverock possible.**

#### **PROJECT ORGANISERS**

##### **The Stove**

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Katharine Wheeler, Development Director  
Sal Cuddihy, Production Manager

##### **The Imaginarium**

DJ McDowall, Creative Director

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Katie Bartlett  
Liam Russell  
Morgan Love  
Ruaridh Thin Smith

##### **Historic Environment Scotland**

Valerie Bennett, Monument Manager  
Rosie Thorp, District Visitor and Community Manager  
Craig Fletcher, Head of Learning and Inclusion  
Claire Whitbread, Exhibitions Manager

#### **COMMUNITY PARTNERS & PARTICIPANTS**

Barbour Memorial Hall Committee  
Better Lives Partnership  
Caerlaverock Community Association  
Caerlaverock Estate  
Caerlaverock Primary School  
Climate Kitchen  
Cycling Dumfries  
Creative Toolbox, DG Creative Wellbeing  
Outpost Arts  
DGC Employability  
DG Heritage Services  
Doughlicious  
Dumfries Pride  
Dumfries Museum  
LIFT D&G (Dungeons and Dragons Group)  
Medieval Bruce Heritage Trust  
Mostly Ghostly  
Northlight Heritage  
PAMIS  
Paragon Music  
Sonic Labs  
Station House Cookery School  
Summerhill Community Centre  
The Bookshop Band  
The Depot  
The Freelance Ranger  
Wordsmithcrafts

*Report text and design by Shawn Bodden*