

Dr Simon Thurley CBE appointed as new Chair

25 February 2021

The Prime Minister has appointed Dr Simon Thurley CBE as Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Image



Photograph by Chris Ridley

Simon will take up the three-year post on 1 April 2021, succeeding René Olivieri.

René has held the position of interim Chair since 2019, playing a critical role in steering the two funds in their response to the pandemic. This included the delivery of a £50million Heritage Emergency Fund that helped struggling organisations when they needed it most and distributing significant government funding.

Leadership in the heritage sector

Between 2002 and 2015 Simon was chief executive of English Heritage, responsible for the National Heritage Collection of 420 sites including Stonehenge and Dover Castle, as well as for the National Heritage Protection system, including the listing of buildings.

For five years from 1997 he was director of the Museum of London, the world's largest city museum and its archaeological unit MoLAS. For eight years in the 1990s he was Curator and Surveyor of the Fabric at Historic Royal Palaces, leading various projects including the Restoration of the Privy Garden at Hampton Court.

"It is a great privilege to be appointed as Chair at a critical time for the heritage sector"

Dr Simon Thurley

Personal passions

Simon takes a keen interest in nature and has been patron of the London Parks and Garden Trust since 2004. He played a role in setting up the Canal and River Trust, of which he was a trustee until 2015.

He is a trustee of the British Library and the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, an organisation which awards funding to projects that enhance arts education and participation, improve access and increase diversity across the arts, culture and heritage sector.

Simon is Provost of Gresham College, London's oldest higher education establishment, founded in 1597 to give free public lectures in the City. As a historian he's written 13 books including a history of English Architecture, *Building England* and the story of heritage protection, *Men from the Ministry*.

In 2011 he was made CBE for services to heritage, he is married with two children and lives in Norfolk.

Protecting and celebrating heritage

Simon said: "It is a great privilege to be appointed as Chair at a critical time for the heritage sector. My career has been shaped by a strong belief in the power of the UK's heritage to positively contribute to people's lives and the places where they live, work and visit.

"To have the opportunity to chair the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund which share this vision is an honour."

Contributing to the UK's post-Covid recovery

Ros Kerslake, CEO of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said,

"I am delighted to welcome Simon Thurley as our new chair.

"Simon will join us at a pivotal time as the UK's heritage sector emerges from one of the greatest crises it has ever faced. Heritage has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the UK's post-COVID recovery, making communities better places to live, boosting local economies, creating jobs and supporting personal wellbeing.

"Through his depth of knowledge and leadership experience in our sector, he will make a major contribution to helping us deliver on our ambitious agenda to support the heritage sector through this to a stronger and more resilient future. Investing in our heritage is for the benefit of everyone in the UK.

"I would like to extend grateful thanks to René Olivieri who as interim chair since December 2019 has played a critical role in steering the Fund over the last challenging year."

René Olivieri said: "I am proud to have held the role of interim Chair since December 2019. My time in this position has been defined by the coronavirus pandemic and the incredible response that my colleagues have coordinated to support the heritage sector at this crucial time.

"I offer my congratulations to Simon Thurley and look forward to seeing the Funds lead the heritage sector's recovery under his guidance."