

## **How the Historic Environment Grounds Me in Uncertain Times**

In a world that often feels like it's shifting beneath our feet, nature has long been my refuge. The rustle of a foraging bird, the rhythm of waves, the quiet majesty of ancient trees, these are the things I turn to when I need to regroup and breathe again. But in times of profound uncertainty, it is the historic environment that speaks to something deeper in me: a reminder that I have been here before, and I have endured.

We care for places that have stood through centuries of change, castles that have weathered wars, cottages that have seen generations pass, gardens that have bloomed through every season of history. These places are not just beautiful; they are anchors. They remind us that while the world may change, the essence of who we are, our stories, our resilience, our creativity, remains.

During the pandemic, when the world paused and uncertainty reigned, it was these historic places that quietly held us. People returned to familiar footpaths, gazed at the same stone walls their ancestors once touched, and found comfort in the stability of place. For me, my touchstone is the school campus I have lived on for 18 years that has educated young people since 1843. Every day, I experience buildings and landscapes that have stood and witnessed world wars, social revolutions, my daughter's first bike ride and the antics of generations of school boys. I'm proud that we've played a small part in that long story but I also feel deeply grounded and comforted by the sense of continuity.

Martin Luther King Jr. also found strength and clarity in the presence of historic places. When he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech, he wasn't just invoking the memory of Abraham Lincoln, he was grounding his vision for the future in the enduring symbols of the past. In that moment, King reminded the world that the struggle for justice was not new, but part of a long, unfinished journey. Like many of us, he drew power from a place that had seen generations come and go and used it to speak truth to the present and hope into the future.

Our beloved historic places are the stewards of our resilience, identity, and hope. They remind us that while the world may be unpredictable, there are constants we can hold onto, places that have seen it all and still stand strong. In the weeks and months ahead, I'll be immersing myself in these spaces not just for comfort, but for perspective. Because when we experience history, we're not just reflecting on our past, we're gathering strength for what lies ahead.

Jo Barnes

*Strategic Lead (Land and Covenants), The National Trust*

*Trustee of the Gardens Trust*