

NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 24 MAY 2021

Craft skills under threat with 27 additions to the *HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts*

New research by the **Heritage Crafts Association** has unearthed more traditional craft skills on the verge of extinction in the UK, in the latest major update of its pioneering project, the *HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts*.

The research, which has been funded by **The Pilgrim Trust**, has found that COVID-19 has only exacerbated the issues faced by our most at-risk skills, after a year that has seen many craftspeople pushed to the brink.

20 new crafts have been added to the 'critically endangered' category of the *HCA Red List*, meaning that they are at serious risk of dying out in the next generation, including diamond cutting, mouth-blown sheet glass making, pointe shoe making and glass eye making. They join the list of 130 endangered crafts, including eight that have been reclassified as being at a higher level of risk than when the research was last updated in 2019.

Critically endangered crafts include those with very few practitioners, few (if any) trainees and a lack of viable training routes by which the skills can be passed on. Often they serve very niche markets, and craftspeople cannot afford to step away from production to train their successors for fear those markets will disappear.

It's not all bad news, however, as no new crafts have become extinct in the past two years, and some, such as gilding and pole-lathe bowl turning, have seen an upturn in their fortunes. In many cases this has been as a result of a new-found appreciation of the handmade and the need to support small businesses during the pandemic. In others it has been due to direct support from the Heritage Crafts Association, which since the publication of the last



edition of the **HCA Red List** has distributed 27 grants of up to £2,000 each as part of its Endangered Crafts Fund.

Mary Lewis, who led the research on behalf of the Heritage Crafts Association, said:

“COVID-19 has been tough on everyone, not least the craftspeople who possess our most fundamental craft skills. Society is rapidly changing around us, and it is more important than ever that we are aware of the cultural assets still available to us, so that we can have an informed debate about what we want to safeguard as a resource for the future. If we allow endangered crafts to disappear then we seriously diminish the opportunities for future generations to create their own sustainable and fulfilling livelihoods, based on these skills.”

Whilst the UK has been a world-leader in the preservation of tangible heritage (museum collections, buildings and monuments), it has fallen behind the rest of the world when it comes to the safeguarding of intangible heritage (knowledge, skills and practices). Of 193 UNESCO members, the UK is one of just 13 that have not yet ratified the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage, and government responsibility for heritage crafts falls in the gap between agencies set up to support arts and heritage.

Sue Bowers, Director of the Pilgrim Trust, said:

“We are delighted to support the continuing development of the Red List which is so important in tracking the state of heritage crafts in the UK and creating the platform for discussions about how we can bring about positive change in the future.”

The **HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts** 2021 edition is available to view online at <http://redlist.heritagecrafts.org.uk>.

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About the HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts

The 2021 edition of the **HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts** was led by Mary Lewis, HCA Endangered Crafts Manager, supported by the **Pilgrim Trust**. The project runs alongside Mary’s work in identifying and developing

interventions to improve the prospects of such crafts, funded by The Swire Charitable Trust, The Garfield Weston Foundation and The Dulverton Trust.

For the 2021 edition, 244 crafts have been assessed to identify those which are at greatest risk of disappearing. Of the 134 crafts featured on the *Red List*, four have been classified as extinct, 56 as critically endangered and 74 as endangered. The remaining 110 are classed as currently viable.

Drawing on information such as the current number of craftspeople and trainees, the average age of practitioners, opportunities to learn, and other issues affecting the future of the crafts, including the impact of COVID-19, the research assesses how likely it is that the craft skills will be passed on to the next generation. From armour making and arrowsmithing to wig making and woodturning, each has been assigned to one of four categories: extinct, critically endangered, endangered or currently viable.

Four crafts are known to have become extinct in the UK in the last fifteen years (cricket ball making, gold beating, lacrosse stick making, and paper mould and deckle making) with one more (sieve and riddle making) brought back from extinction. At the other end of the spectrum, viable crafts are defined as those for which there are sufficient craftspeople to pass on the craft skills to the next generation, though crafts in the currently viable category face real challenges and require continued monitoring.

For the purposes of this research, a heritage craft is defined as “a practice which employs manual dexterity and skill and an understanding of traditional materials, design and techniques, and which has been practised for two or more successive generations.” The research focuses on craft practices which are taking place in the UK today, including crafts which have originated elsewhere.

The 2017 *HCA Red List*, funded by the **Radcliffe Trust** and led by Greta Bertram, was the first to rank traditional crafts by the likelihood they would survive the next generation. It brought the plight of these skills to national attention, with coverage across national newspapers and broadcast media including Countryfile, The One Show and Radio 4 Woman’s Hour.

The 2019 edition, supported by the **South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership** and led by Daniel Carpenter, added 37 new crafts to the list, including 16 to the critically endangered category, and featured in six national newspapers on the day of publication and was mentioned on the Radio 4 Today programme.

<http://redlist.heritagecrafts.org.uk>

New crafts for 2021 (embargoed until Monday 24 May)

New critically endangered crafts (*crafts classified as ‘critically endangered’ are those at serious risk of no longer being practised in the UK. They may*

include crafts with a shrinking base of craftspeople, crafts with limited training opportunities, crafts with low financial viability, or crafts where there is no mechanism to pass on the skills and knowledge.)

- Barometer making
- Bowed-felt hat making
- Brilliant cutting
- Coiled straw basket making
- Compass making
- Copper wheel engraving
- Currach making
- Diamond cutting
- Fabric pleating
- Frame knitting
- Glass eye making
- Hazel basket making
- Highlands and Islands thatching
- Horsehair weaving
- Mouth-blown sheet glass making
- Pointe shoe making
- Shetland lace knitting
- Silver spinning
- Sporrans making
- Wooden fishing net making

New endangered crafts (*Crafts classified as 'endangered' are those which currently have sufficient craftspeople to transmit the craft skills to the next generation, but for which there are serious concerns about their ongoing viability. This may include crafts with a shrinking market share, an ageing demographic or crafts with a declining number of practitioners.*)

- Hat making
- Kilt making
- Lithography
- Skeined willow working
- Sofrut calligraphy
- Spectacle making
- Type founding and manufacture

About the Endangered Crafts Fund

The Heritage Crafts Association's Endangered Crafts Fund was set up in 2019 to ensure that the most at-risk heritage crafts within the UK are given the support they need to thrive. The Fund is used to support makers and trainees who wish to develop or share their skills in the crafts that have been identified as being most at risk.

To date, 27 projects have been funded with support from the **Garfield Weston Foundation**, the **Dulverton Trust**, the **Sussex Heritage Trust**, **Allchurches Trust**, the **Radcliffe Trust** and the **Swire Charitable Trust**.

Anyone wishing to donate to the fund may do so securely online via the web link below. Alternatively, please send a cheque made payable to 'Heritage Crafts Association' with an accompanying note specifying 'Endangered Crafts Fund' to: Heritage Crafts Association, 27 South Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4BU.

www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/ecf

About the Heritage Crafts Association

Founded in 2009 by a small group of makers and those interested in craft, the Heritage Crafts Association (HCA) is an independent charity advocating on behalf of traditional heritage crafts. Working in partnership with government and key agencies, it provides a focus for craftspeople, groups, societies and guilds, as well as individuals who care about the loss of traditional crafts skills, and works towards a healthy and sustainable framework for the future. It aims to support and promote heritage crafts as a fundamental part of our living heritage.

The Heritage Crafts Association is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales as Charitable Incorporated Organisation no. 1159208 (registered address: 81 North Street, Wellington, Somerset TA21 8NA).

www.heritagecrafts.org.uk

About the Pilgrim Trust

The Pilgrim Trust is an independent grantmaking trust that supports the urgent and future needs of the UK. It gives approximately £3 million in grants per year to charities and other public bodies that either focus on preserving the UK's heritage or catalysing social change. Its preservation and scholarship fund aims to preserve the fabric of historically important buildings and to conserve significant collections and artefacts. It wants present and future generations to enjoy the rich and diverse heritage found throughout the UK.

www.thepilgrimtrust.org.uk