



THE HOUSE OF WORDS

PRESERVING HISTORY, ENRICHING FUTURES

DR. JOHNSON'S HOUSE TRUST

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Vision

Words ignite imaginations, mend divisions, and build bridges. In a world increasingly fractured by misunderstanding, the ability to communicate with clarity and empathy is more important than ever.

Dr Johnson's House at 17 Gough Square is a House of Words authentically illustrating the power of language, friendship, inter-generational exchange and lifelong curiosity. Having preserved this treasure for over a century, sharing it with the public through exhibitions, events, and learning programmes, we are now poised to empower new audiences both in person and online within a context which is both authentic and inclusive.

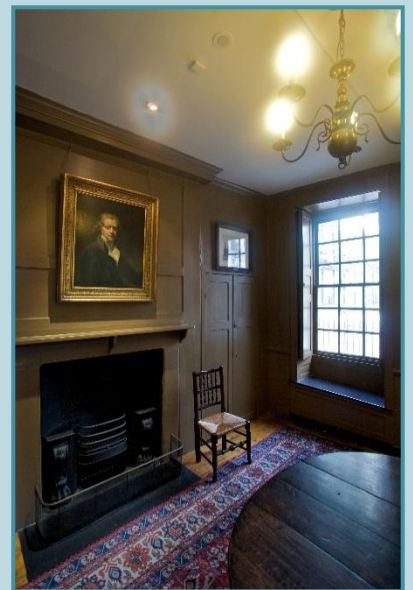
Background

Samuel Johnson was a literary and cultural colossus whose words influenced the Age of Enlightenment and created a legacy that reverberates around the world today. This is the house where he wrote the ground-breaking *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) and lived with a fascinating array of characters, including Francis Barber who was born into slavery and later freed. Barber lived in the House as a child, where he became Johnson's protégé, heir and, ultimately, the first known person of colour to start a school.

Johnson's progressive views on race and gender, his advocacy for women's education, and empathy towards disability were informed by his own experiences and those of his inner circle. In addition to Barber, Johnson provided a home for impoverished poet and translator, Anna Williams, who became destitute after losing her sight, and counted amongst his close friends leading male and female writers and artists from the Age of the Enlightenment.

An evocative site of immense literary importance as well as the only surviving City building where someone born into slavery lived as a free, respected individual, the House brings to life a broad spectrum of issues that resonate today: literacy, oracy, and history; friendship and grief; power and slavery; race, gender, and identity; and living with mental and physical disabilities.

In preserving this historical association with diversity, inclusion, and intellectual curiosity, we now seek to secure the future for Dr Johnson's House to ensure that this extraordinary building and the stories it tells enriches lives long into the future.





Need

We believe that communicating with skill and confidence is vital. Worryingly, recent research has revealed an urgent crisis in literacy and oracy skills. A 2024 National Literacy Trust report indicates that only 20% of children aged 8 to 18 enjoy reading daily in their free time, the lowest level since 2005, and levels of writing enjoyment have almost halved over the past 15 years. In February 2024, *The Guardian* reported that the lack of reading support for Early Years is leading to a 'literacy crisis' that could cost the economy £830m for each school year group, with children from the most deprived areas of our country experiencing the largest detriment - reinforcing inequalities for generations to come.

The largest segment of children who enjoyed reading were termed 'Curious Readers' who stated their motivation was learning about new words (51.8%), new things (50.9%), and other cultures (32.4%) or better understanding the views of others (32.8%). By exploring the extraordinary lives and accomplishments of Johnson and his household as well as their experiences with poverty, prejudice, enslavement, and mental and physical illness we are uniquely placed to nurture curious readers. Enhancing our learning and engagement programmes to address these issues while also enriching our interpretation and improving access to our collections will enable us to make a real difference while preserving important heritage.

In the past, we were hampered in realising our full potential by a lack of staff and resources. Recently, to address these issues, we have taken significant steps by growing and diversifying audiences and income; introducing new volunteer, membership, income generation, and event activities; reaching out to new partners and communities; and developing new strategies to enhance learning, community engagement, and the visitor experience. This has led to our doubling visitor numbers and an impressive growth in income in each of the last two years. Much remains to be done, however, if we are to build on these results to enact the strategies that we have developed to make us more financially sustainable, representative, and impactful.

I was especially pleased to see that our very diverse group all seemed to find the experience enjoyable and engrossing.

Alex,
BlindAid client
and recent visitor



Plans

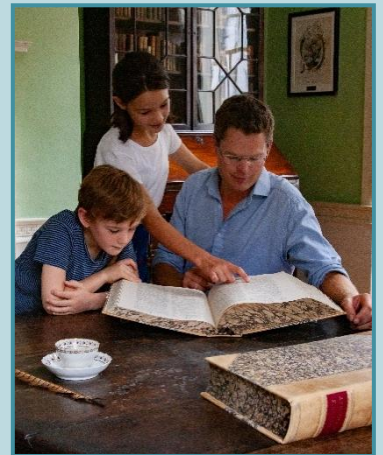
To accomplish our goals, we are seeking support for the following:

- **Enhancements to and an expansion of our learning and community outreach activities.** While schools attending our current workshops feel that we provide content that is strong and meaningful, we are limited in numbers and do not have the capacity to introduce new schools to the programme, engage in sustained community outreach, or develop digital materials for those schools that cannot afford to visit. The programme also suffers from gaps in provision for certain ages which could greatly benefit from the kinds of material we are uniquely suited to present in an entertaining and inclusive manner.

A comprehensive new learning review that has been informed by consultation and engagement with educators and the community has identified a strategy to address these issues. Accessing resources to act on these recommendations will enable us to reach more people and make a greater impact by:

- Providing better access in-person and on-line to a varied audience, including those who do not currently visit the House.
 - Creating a more inclusive and targeted programme for schools and families that addresses declining literacy levels and portrays the history of diverse communities while meeting core national curriculum requirements.
 - Delivering meaningful learning experiences which build confidence, support academic achievement, improve wellbeing, and enhance employability skills.
 - Collaborating with schools, educators, and community groups to ensure that we continue to be inclusive, accessible, inspiring, and relevant.
- **Improvements to the audience experience and increased community engagement through our stories and collections** – Beyond our learning programme, we want to take critical steps to address accessibility barriers, build audiences, expand our work in the community, and deliver a rich, multi-sensory experience to visitors and digital audiences.

Currently, most of our interpretation focuses on Johnson's intellectual achievements and is provided on densely packed A4 information sheets. Following recent audience research and community consultation, we know there is an appetite for interpretation that explores a broader range of the stories we can tell, and that we need to illuminate them in more varied ways. We plan to use low-tech, but high-quality techniques in the House to provide multi-sensory and multi-format interpretation and interactive experiences. These will allow us to share a greater range of our stories in more depth in a way that can be enjoyed by those of all interests and abilities. We will improve the management of and access to our collections while engaging scholars, volunteers, and the community in researching their history and significance. This will provide new social media and digital content, inform enhanced interpretation, act as a basis for community outreach, attract new



audiences and support inter-generational activities that help to combat social isolation.

Key to these efforts will be the development of collaborative partnerships with groups that reflect the experiences of those living in the House with Johnson. Such partnerships will result in joint exhibitions, programming, engagement activities, and the ability to reflect in our interpretation the views of those who have similar life experiences to those who lived in the House.

Securing the Future

Having survived three centuries of urban evolution — to say nothing of the Blitz — we continue to reflect the experiences of an extraordinary man and the diverse and fascinating people around him during a transformational time in British history. The potential to join communities around the world to celebrate the power of language through these stories is almost limitless. Our Board is determined to anchor our financial foundations, enliven our historic site and expand our educational mission to realise the house's full potential.

We are seeking £250,000 for this project of which £50,000 has already been committed. Details of what we aim to fund follow below. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss them in more detail with you.

This is a critical juncture for Dr Johnson's House, and we welcome your support as we plan for the future.



The House of Words; Preserving History, Enriching Futures Project Budget

Collections Engagement and Access A part-time, three-year Collections Engagement and Access Coordinator will research the collection and foster new collaborative partnerships leading to exhibitions and engagement activities while developing new digital content for interpretation, the learning programme, website, and social media. They will also contribute to the on-line speaker programme; train volunteers to assist with collections care and research; and oversee an upgrade of the collections management database.	• Salary (part-time, 3 years): £ 75,600 • Collections management software and archive transfer: £8,300 • Activity budget: £10,000	£93,900
Increasing Language Skills A part-time, three-year Learning Officer will develop and deliver a high-quality learning programme based on our new learning strategy; foster partnerships to meet the needs of local schools and the surrounding community; develop new digital content; help to market the programme to new schools, enhancing our reach and inclusivity; advise on and help to deliver programming for families; and train and supervise learning and family activity volunteers.	• Salary (part-time, 3 years): £ 75,600 • Activity budget: £10,000 pa	£85,600
Enhancing the Visitor Experience and Telling our Stories Inclusively This will include: • Consultation with related community groups and stakeholders leading to richer and more inclusive, interactive, and multi-faceted interpretation. • The creation of new multi-format interpretation materials, including cost-efficient, web-based mechanisms that are engaging, accessible, and inclusive. • New accessibility tools such as a hearing loop, improved lighting and wayfinding, and on-line access to information about our collections.	• Interpretation consultation: £15,000 • Production of in person and online interpretation: £15,000 • Accessibility enhancements: £23,000	£53,000
Knock on Impacts •The Director will have time to lead on intellectual content development, strategic direction, fundraising, staff management, and network building. •Our social media and website will be populated with richer content and we will have expert assistance to create new initiatives such as an on-line speaker series. •Volunteers will be upskilled in new and continuing roles, such as creating content for digital platforms and helping to deliver family programmes. •The collection will be better managed and understood and more accessible. •Community partnerships will be multi-faceted and built for the long term, rather than based on one event or short-life exhibition.	•Event budget £5,000 •Contingency £12,500	£17,500
	Total Project	£250,000
	Already committed	£50,000
	Remaining need	£200,000