

Bristol volunteers receive Ecclesiastical's Heritage Heroes Award

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A group of volunteers who have supported Clifton Suspension Bridge have been recognised for their exceptional service to the UK's heritage sector.

The Ecclesiastical Heritage Collaboration 2023 Award, one of two Ecclesiastical Heritage Hero Awards¹, celebrates the Clifton Suspension Bridge Volunteer Hard Hat Tour Guides, a group of volunteers who lead hard hat tours into the Leigh Woods Abutments – a series of twelve vaulted chambers supporting the structure of Brunel's Victorian suspension bridge.

Volunteers have researched and created props to bring the story to life and their enthusiasm and dedication led to visitor numbers doubling.

Sponsored by specialist heritage insurer Ecclesiastical, the Heritage Heroes Awards, now in their 14th year, are the Heritage Alliance's celebration of the outstanding contribution Britain's heritage volunteers make to society.

Volunteers are vital for the protection of England's heritage. From caring for rural heritage sites to engaging the next generation of visitors, volunteers' skills, passion, and commitment are the backbone of the heritage sector.

The awards were presented by Laura Carter, Customer Segment Director at Ecclesiastical and Ingrid Samuel OBE, Interim Chair of the Heritage Alliance. Each of the winners received an Ecclesiastical Heritage Hero 2023 winner presentation plaque.

The awards ceremony coincided with Heritage Day², a key event in the heritage sector calendar, with speakers including Lord Parkinson, Minister for Heritage, Lord Neil Mendoza CBE, Chair of Historic England, and Ros Kerslake CBE, Chief Executive of the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Laura Carter, Customer Segment Director at Ecclesiastical, said: "As the leading insurer of Grade I listed buildings in the UK, we're passionate about Britain's heritage. We're proud to sponsor the Heritage Heroes Awards, and this year celebrates two incredibly deserving winners for their outstanding contribution to the heritage sector. Congratulations to the Tyne Theatre & Opera House Performance Research Volunteers and Clifton Suspension Bridge Volunteer Hard Hat Tour Guides!"

Lizzie Glithero-West, CEO at the Heritage Alliance, said: "It's a pleasure, yet again, to see such a high-quality and diverse range of nominees for an award that celebrates the commitment and passion of volunteers in the heritage sector. These projects are driven on voluntary effort and are achieving incredible things in conserving, celebrating and opening up special places to new audiences. We're grateful for Ecclesiastical's continued support for these special awards and congratulations go to the winners, alongside all those nominated, for their hard work and dedication."

A spokesperson for the Clifton Suspension Bridge Volunteer Hard Hat Tour Guides said: "We are absolutely delighted to have won the Heritage Heroes Award! The Clifton Suspension Bridge Hard Hat Volunteer team put a lot of time and effort into developing their knowledge of the bridge's history, engineering and geology and work hard to share the vaults with a wide range of people. The team do everything from helping visitors to overcome their vertigo to explaining how stalactites are formed and answering technical questions from professional engineers! This kind of recognition is a celebration of the work of our incredible team and all of the individual achievements which led to a record breaking 2023 season!"

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