

Invitation for creatives at The Dower House at Bayham Old Abbey.

Dower House Arts Quarter
"Creativity, Tranquillity and Culture"

External invitation Issue date: 16 February 2026

External closing date/time: 15 March 2026 at 23:59pm

Location & address: Dower House at Bayham Old Abbey, Furnace Lane, Little Bayham, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 8LP.

Proposed use of the Dower House: Invitation for creatives to use the Dower House at Bayham Old Abbey, Tunbridge Wells as a creative, cultural hub for the local community. Welcoming all to use the space for creative output, exhibitions and/or workshops. We would encourage, but not be limited to;

- Visual artists of all disciplines (painters, sculptors, photographers, installation artists, ceramists, textile artists, calligraphy specialists, land artists and architects)
- Literary artists (writing, poetry, drama and prose)
- Performing arts (music, songwriters, dance, theatre and film). This can also include physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines such as yoga.
- Digital arts (digital painting, animation and graphic design)
- Local community groups to use the space as a central meeting space or to use to facilitate workshops
- Certain events amongst the Abbey ruins, upon prior approval.

Upon expression of interest, scope of activities will be pre-approved due to the nature of the monument.

Proposed timeframe of residences at the Dower House: Short term and long term residences available upon discussion and agreement. For example, we can house a writer in one of our four (five including the dressing room) available rooms or a regular community group using the grounds for a pre-approved activity. The residences will be available during May-September 2026. For example, we could offer;



- One off/small scale activities/exhibitions/community events
- 2 weekly residences
- Monthly residencies
- Two-three month residencies

Upon expression of interest approval, timings and access will then be discussed.

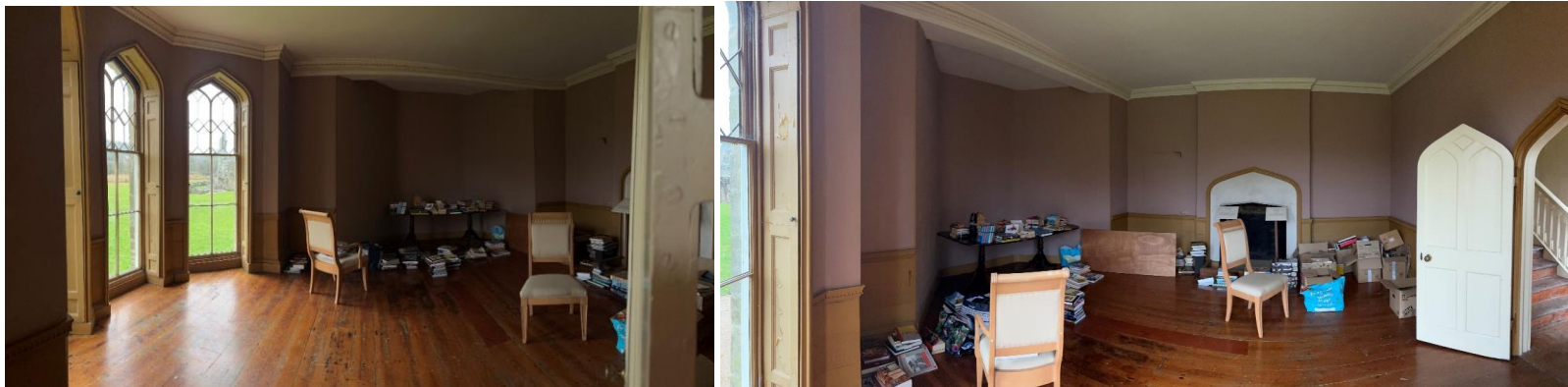
Proposed cost of residences at the Dower House: As the project is a new adventure, it has been agreed that we will initially work off of a donation basis for the use of the space. We are a registered charity (1140351) and any donations help to give the nation's heritage a future. We may ask for a refundable £50 deposit, subject to further discussion and approval of activity.

Spaces available

Entrance Hall – ceiling light.

Ground floor - left (Library)

- No central electric light but plug sockets available
- 1 x large wooden table
- 2 x fold up wooden tables
- 2 x chairs



Ground floor – right (Drawing Room) including small cove.

- No central electric light but plug sockets available
- 1 x round wooden table
- 2 x wooden table tops



1st staircase landing

- 1 x central electric light

1st staircase landing (PT2)

- 1 x central electric light & 1 plug socket.

1st floor – right (Salon) & additional white store room

- No central electric light but plug sockets available
- 4 x chairs
- 1 x fold up wooden table
- 1 x wooden table stand (table top downstairs)
- 1 x small square table



1st floor - Central room (dressing room)

- No central electric light
- 3 x plug sockets
- 1 x easel
- 1 x fold up wooden table



1st floor – left (Primary Bedroom)

- No central electric light but plug sockets available.





Outside area:



Facilities

- On-site parking
- Toilet available (upon prior agreement)

Please note that all material items on site can be utilised, if needed.

Background of site

Founded over 800 years ago, Bayham Abbey was home to a community of Premonstratensian canons – ordained priests who lived according to a strict monastic rule. It was dissolved on the orders of Cardinal Wolsey in 1525 and the buildings were left to decay. In 1714 Sir John Pratt, later Lord Chief Justice of England, bought the Bayham estate, and he and his successors retained the ruined abbey as a fashionable landscape feature for their country retreat.

Today, Bayham is the best surviving example of a Premonstratensian abbey in England, and its impressive ruins show how life evolved at the monastery over 300 years.

In about 1750 Sir John's grandson John (III) extended an existing villa here (later known as the Dower House) by adding a north wing, an early example of the Gothic Revival style. At a time when there was new interest in the picturesque qualities of ancient buildings, the house, close to the abbey, formed a perfect vantage point from which to appreciate the ruins.

It was not until 1870 that the 3rd Marquess Camden had a new, much larger house, Bayham New Abbey, built across the valley, reflecting the family's rise in status and fortune.

John Charles Pratt, 5th Marquess Camden, placed the abbey in state guardianship in 1961, and it has been in the care of English Heritage since 1984.

SUBMISSION FOR RESIDENCES

Name	
Email	
Contact Number/s	
Please share your creative output	
What length of residency are you interested in	
Please detail how you would utilise the Dower House/outside space	

Once expression of interest forms have been submitted, they will be reviewed and discussed with the creative to see what we are able to realistically provide.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE (NB: this timetable is subject to change)

Stage	Date(s)and time(s)
Share invitation externally	16 February 2026
Close expression of interest	15 March 2026
Review expression of interests & discuss possibilities with creatives	19 March 2026
Plan internal/external visits to site to view the space	WC 23 March 2026
Prepare schedule of residences/change over & share with creatives	WC 30 March 2026
Agree and provide third party documentation for creative to sign/risk assessments completed	WC 30 March 2026
Build up social media presence on Facebook	April 2026
Prepare space	April 2026
Start of residency programme	1 May 2026
Schedule TBC	TBC
Close of residency programme	30 September 2026
Review	October 2026 onwards

[Any queries must be raised via email to dowerhouser residencies@english-heritage.org.uk]

NB: leave sufficient time to allow the us to respond, no less than six days before the expression of interest closure.