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The Irish Times,
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Re: Losing our past in budget cuts

Sir,

The Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland (IAI) welcomes your editorial of 30 August drawing attention to the cuts in state funding for heritage. Heritage has for too long been seen as a low-hanging budgetary fruit, first to get cut when, as you say, 'the State's coffers ran dry'. It is time for the Government to now recognise that heritage does not look after itself and that the State heritage agencies need to be resourced and funded adequately.

The National Monuments Service, which implements legislation and regulates the built heritage sector is struggling to meet current needs, having been impacted by severe funding and resource cuts over recent years. The National Museum of Ireland's budget has also been severely reduced over recent years, putting at real risk, the safeguarding of its important collections. State funding for the Heritage Council which does so much for protecting our national heritage and working with communities across the island has been nothing short of obliterated.

The IAI applauds the commitment in the new Programme for a Partnership Government to develop an updated National Heritage Plan, but it is vital that the relevant State heritage agencies are properly resourced and funded to allow them do this, to carry out their statutory responsibilities and care for our heritage which returns so much economic and community benefit.

Research by the Heritage Council has found that Ireland's historic environment directly supports more than 25,000 jobs and contributes in excess of €1.5bn to the economy annually. Our built heritage is a key driver of rural and regional economies and communities. A Fáilte Ireland study has found that nearly 90% of tourists who come to Ireland claim heritage to be an important factor in deciding to holiday here. In 2014, 7.6 million overseas visitors came to Ireland and by 2025 it is anticipated that there will be over 10 million overseas visitors annually, generating an estimated €5.5bn. Fáilte Ireland's latest tourism brand, *Ireland's Ancient East*, is directly focused on the high-spending, culturally-curious tourism sector.

Such a commitment by Government to marketing the heritage requires a commitment to protect it. It is time to now start looking after our heritage and for the Government to restore funding for those who are responsible for its upkeep and protection, before it is simply too late.

Yours

Dr. James Bonsall MIAI

Vice Chair, Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland

Notes for Editors

The IAI is the representative all-island organisation for professional archaeologists working in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The aim of the IAI, through the representation of our members, is to advance and strengthen the profession of archaeology in Ireland. Our vision is that we will have a vibrant and sustainable archaeological profession that actively contributes to the protection of our archaeological resource, which in turn contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of the entire community.

For further information contact

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