

# SPECIAL REPORT

## Conserving Benjamin Franklin House: A Legacy of Care

Tucked away on historic Craven Street, Benjamin Franklin House is a rare survival—a Grade I listed Georgian townhouse that once served as home to one of the Enlightenment's most remarkable figures. Franklin lived here from 1757 to 1775, during a pivotal chapter of both British and American history. Yet by the late twentieth century, the house stood empty and at risk of collapse. What followed is a remarkable story of conservation, led by heritage professionals and supported by generous public funding that has not only saved the building but also transformed it into a dynamic site of learning and discovery.

The first major phase of conservation work began in the late 1990s. With early support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and other backers including the American Philosophical Society, the Historical

Society of Pennsylvania, and the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia, the Friends of Benjamin Franklin House stabilised the building's structure and addressed urgent issues. Early works included underpinning and drainage improvements, roof replacement, and reinstallation of windows. Significant attention was given to original Georgian features. Panelling, joinery, and floorboards were carefully conserved, often retaining visible traces of age and repair rather than over-restoring. Fireplaces were meticulously researched and reconstructed, including one based on Franklin's 1758 letter describing an experimental hearth designed to conserve fuel.

Conservation methods prioritised the use of traditional materials and long-lasting repairs. Shellac-based surface coatings were selected over modern varnishes to preserve the historic character of the timber floors. Where elements such as fireplaces were incomplete, missing components were replaced with historically appropriate materials and techniques—blending old and new with subtlety and respect. A central principle was to retain the building's authenticity, embracing evidence of its long life rather than erasing it.

The House opened in 2006, on Franklin's 300th birthday, as a museum and learning centre. But conservation is never truly complete. In 2024, thanks again to NLHF support, Benjamin Franklin House embarked on a new phase of stewardship. This included exterior repairs such as brick and voussoir arch replacements, improved pointing, and the toning of masonry repairs to match the historic fabric. Windows were cleaned and decayed joinery treated. Internally, extensive crack repairs to the plaster ceilings were undertaken, historic floorboards were stabilised and refinished, and historically accurate paints, matched through spectral analysis of original samples, were used to refresh the rooms in colours and finishes Franklin himself would have recognised.



The most recent conservation works were managed through a competitive tendering process, awarding the contract to AGA Heritage Conservation Ltd—specialists who blend traditional craft with scientific rigour. Their work enhances the building's safety, accessibility, and long-term resilience while honouring its unique past.

Benjamin Franklin House is the only surviving home of Franklin anywhere in the world, and its conservation is an ongoing process, shaped by evolving best practice and the dedication of those who care for it. Your support helps us preserve this remarkable building for generations to come.

Scan the code to donate — and help protect the past to inspire the future.

**PRESERVE THE PAST—  
SHAPE THE FUTURE**

