



Tea House Test

Teams of bankers got down and dirty at Newhailes this Autumn in a Corporate Challenge to recover stones of the Tea House from the burn.

The Tea House is one of the most important garden buildings in Scotland, built in a Classical style around 1740. But about 50 years ago it was partly demolished by a fallen tree in a storm, and has gradually been deteriorating ever since. Beautifully carved architectural fragments have gently been eroding in the burn that flows under the building, and some pieces are even believed to have been taken for local rockeries.

In what must have been one of the dirtiest ever Corporate Challenges, teams from HBOS spent the day excavating, recording and moving almost 200 stones to safety nearer the house. Putting together the jigsaw of stones is not too difficult for this Classical façade, and new features have already been detected compared to the English examples on

which the Tea House was based.

This was a really popular Challenge, and HBOS are keen to return next year to finish the job. Meanwhile a stone conservator is assessing the condition of

the stones to see if they might be able to be reused to reconstruct this elegant Enlightenment building.

Robin Turner, Head of Archaeology



HBOS staff encounter a different sort of branch at the Tea House

St Kilda: Mapping Archipelago Archaeology

St Kilda's dual World Heritage inscription came with a condition, charging the UK government with ensuring that all archaeological sites across the archipelago are recorded. It was probably a surprise to many that this had not already happened, but the reality is that only some aspects had been thoroughly investigated, and large areas remained.

So this year staff from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) returned to the islands armed with the latest GPS technology to address the gaps in the archaeological sites and monuments record for St Kilda.

Two 10-day visits to Hirta have been undertaken to extend their survey area and accurately map all of the cleits and many other features. Two teams, each consisting of a surveyor and an archaeologist along with an NTS archaeologist, have recorded hundreds of cleits, including producing monitoring photos and condition reports.

The work will continue into 2009, by which time it is intended that Dun and Boreray will have been visited. Soay and the stacs are to be assessed too. The World Heritage Site will then have an extensive and accurate record, helping ensure that all of the elements of the archipelago's landscapes can be cared for appropriately.



The RCAHMS team on Hirta, bristling with satellite technology

Leith Hall makes a grand entrance

This summer our property at Leith Hall in Aberdeenshire swept into focus in rather stately fashion, as excavations revealed a remarkable part of its mid-18th-century designed landscape.

The sweeping parkland which sets off the house today is a product of the late 18th century, and a far cry from the formal grandeur of the gardens and courts which set off the house earlier in the century. A beautifully detailed Estate Plan of 1758 depicts Leith Hall with an elaborate entrance courtyard opening off the straight entrance drive, flanked by two single-storey garden pavilions or porter's lodges. Over the past five years, a suspiciously square feature has been becoming ever more obvious in the lawn, in effect rising up as increasing



The foundations of the pavilion, showing the unusual stone cystem.



Plan of 1758 showing the two pavilions in front of the house

dryness means the surrounding ground is sinking. It had become so prominent early this year that it began to pose problems for the grass cutter. Could this, we wondered, be the remains of one of these buildings?

As part of the ongoing Historic Landscape Survey at Leith Hall, and to inform events management and turf maintenance, we decided to excavate the feature. We discovered an unexpectedly robust, two-roomed building about 5.5m by 11m in size, with good evidence for a graded slate roof and glazed windows, and a possible slate floor. The building appears to have been connected to a screen wall, in which the entrance to the formal courtyard was situated.

Most exciting of all, there is an unusual water feature in one corner of the building – a circular, stone cistern about 1m deep. A conduit leads into this feature, and another leads out of it, meaning that the water level would always remain the same. Is this the remains of a grotto with a miniature pool? Or did this have a much more prosaic function? Hopefully this will become clearer as research progresses!

The dig attracted huge visitor interest, and we hope eventually to be able to present this intriguing part of Leith Hall's past to the public on a permanent basis.

Shannon Fraser, NTS Archaeologist East

The excavations were carried out for the NTS by Murray Archaeological Services Ltd.

Archaeology Panel inaugurated

The first meeting of the new NTS Archaeology Panel took place in August, bringing on board 10 experts with a spread of interests ranging from rural conservation to buildings archaeology. The Panel is being Chaired by Prof. Richard Fawcett, an eminent architectural historian and archaeologist from St Andrews University.

One of the underlying principles behind the new expert advisory system is that there is a good deal of flexibility in how each Panel chooses to work. For the Archaeology Panel we are experimenting with having fewer formal meetings, but more integration with the other Panels. Each of the seven other Panels has been assigned an archaeologist to look out for matters of mutual interest. In this way we hope to embed archaeological

perspectives even more deeply in the Trust's work.

Having recently attended a meeting of the National Trust Archaeology Panel, it is obvious to me how effective it can be to bring on board such wide-ranging expertise, which not only improves the way the Trust works on its properties, but spreads best practice conservation messages into the wider professional community.

The Archaeology Team are already building up a list of thorny issues that we'll be seeking our Panel's help to work through, and we are looking forward to working closely with some of the most respected practitioners in Scotland.

Robin Turner, Head of Archaeology



Richard Fawcett, Chair of the NTS Archaeology Panel

Photo: Aberdeen City Council

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