

Archaeology at... ...Culzean



Robert Adam's Culzean Castle through the Ruined Arch – built as a romantic ruin

There is a constant demand for archaeological activity on the magnificent Culzean Estate on the Ayrshire coast. Recording, survey and excavation are often needed as part of building conservation projects. As a result, much new information has come to light about how the estate worked – both from the viewpoint of the owners and their guests, but also about the lives of the army of servants who carried out their masters' wishes.



An elaborate system of 'air drains' led warm, dry air to the roots growing outside the glass house

Kennelmound Cairn

Above: Digging the kerb of the cairn
Below: Devastation after the storm



A rare 3500-year-old 'Yorkshire Vase Food Vessel' urn found in the cairn – made to hold the cremated bones of the dead

While searching for the location of 18th-century beacon sites (used for signalling), archaeologists discovered a small mound on Kennelmound Hill, concealed under a modern tree plantation. On further investigation this was found to be a Neolithic burial cairn, also used for burial in the Bronze Age.

Soon after the exploratory dig, the Boxing Day Storms of 1998 destroyed 95% of the trees over the mound, causing much damage to the prehistoric monument. Trees have now been removed from the cairn.

Archaeological investigation of the ruined vinery led to some amazing discoveries, including finding a complex heating system – designed to protect the delicate roots of the vines from cold and damp.

Documentary research revealed some of the varieties of grapes once grown, and also a wealth of information about the gardeners whose job it was to ensure that fresh grapes were available all year round.

The vinery was divided into six compartments, each with a different grape variety, and each with soil that was conditioned especially to suit the grapes – with ash, charcoal, lime and even the carcasses of horses which were considered to be the ideal thing to help vines grow.



The exhibition in the restored vinery tells the story of the gardeners who tended the vines

Further details about Culzean Castle and Estate are on our website at: www.nts.org.uk.