

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Conservation and repair of a Grade I building of national and international significance
Name of project/group:	Strawberry Hill
Location:	London
Duration (if applicable):	

Short description of project:

The Grade I-listed Strawberry Hill Villa is of national and international importance, as the most significant Gothic revival example of the 18th century, with significant influence on the architecture of the subsequent century.

Created between 1747 and the 1790s, it was the home of Horace Walpole (1717 - 1797). In the 19th century, Walpole's buildings were linked by their new occupant, Lady Frances Waldegrave, who built an additional wing and adapted some of Walpole's rooms. The garden and grounds are Grade II-listed. Strawberry Hill is regarded as an iconic building with high architectural significance and 'Strawberry Hill Gothic' has become an internationally-recognised architectural style.

This project comprises the completion of conservation, fit-out and interpretation of Walpole's Bedchamber, the Holbein Chamber, The Green Closet, the Red Bedchamber, Mr Chute's Bedchamber and the Breakfast Room comprising restoration work to wallpaper, chimneypieces, decorative ceilings, stained glass and joinery, appropriate redecoration throughout the rooms following scientific analysis, dry scrubbing of floors, and reinstatement of chimneypieces. In addition, a new building will be erected to provide improved visitor welcome and orientation, storage space, staff amenities and workspace and toilet facilities.

What would have happened without this project/group?

The project has enabled the private rooms of the house to be displayed to the public, specifically the reproduction of wallpaper so different from the other parts of the house.

This project has also provided the opportunity to research the influence from India on the house – the Walpole family heavily invested in trade to India, and a lot of the chintz designs used in the house can be traced back to there.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

Horace Walpole's private rooms have been restored and brought into better condition; heritage training opportunities have been provided to volunteers and students; and interpretation and activities have enhanced awareness of the heritage to a wider range of new and under-represented audiences.

Small pieces of surviving wallpaper were studied intimately to understand their composition and pigment. The wallpaper was difficult to hang as pieces came off as they were put up and the rooms were dusty to work in and therefore hard to keep the work area clean. The research on India involved a lot of the community, including multicultural groups from around London as well as groups from Stepney.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

The house has been fully restored, becoming a much-loved local landmark as it was in late 18th century.

The project has increased the skills and knowledge of volunteers, ranging from room stewards, tour guides to sewing groups who recreated costumes and worked on chintz covers.

The private rooms have now been restored. Work is now to continue with the restoration of the landscape, and to continue to bring objects back to the house.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges would anything be done differently?

The main challenge of the project was to carry out an effective restoration while the rest of the site was open to the public. Timings had to be carefully managed.

Another challenge was the decision on what was to happen to the breakfast room, which had been changed significantly at beginning of 20th century to emulate a Turkish smoking parlour. To revert it solely to a 18th century design would have destroyed a lot of cultural value, especially for people who had studied and worked at St Marys College (as Strawberry Hill was in the 20th century) as they had had their job interview in the room. After a lot of discussion, three of the walls were kept as 20th century, but the south wall that leads into Walpole's 'Green Room' study was restored back to his period. This enabled the two wallpapers to be seen in context together.

What is the future for the case study?

The future is to restore the landscape which surrounds the house, and to bring back the Walpole's collections, which are now dispersed. The project group aims to continue to run study days, with the assistance of HLF. One was run in 2015 on the East India Company and another one is planned for 2016, on historic paints.

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