



WHITEHAVEN TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE INITIATIVE



Early photograph at 1900

Newsletter

THI Events

It's been a busy few months as far as community events and training activities are concerned.

As part of the national Heritage Open Days annual events weekend, the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) opened the doors to the renowned Grade-II

listed former YMCA building, on Irish Street to give people an opportunity to view the property for one last time before work got into full swing to transform it into the Whitehaven Foyer.

The tours on 12 September started at the Howgill Family Centre with a brief talk about the history of the building and a chance to view the plans for the site.

The original building is being sensitively renovated to provide a resource centre for the local community. It will be an exciting new hub of activity for the town, with the centre providing 17 flats in a new building to the rear and job training and support for those in need, especially young people aged 17 to 23, in the newly refurbished building to the front.

The building is steeped in history and the day was an opportunity for people to see it before the work began, take photographs and mark the day as another milestone in the town's chronicles. The tour was designed to give people the opportunity to learn more about and enjoy their local heritage, whilst at the same time raising awareness of the benefits of conservation led regeneration.

Quite a few of the visitors had links to the building and it was lovely to hear their stories. Some had worked there, some had lived there, one had met his wife there.

Stuart Woodhall of Day Cummins Architects, leads tour of the former YMCA



Recording the history of the former YMCA

Along with the Howgill Family Centre and St Benedict's School, Whitehaven, we are hoping to record people's memories of the former YMCA building.

Following on from the successful tours for Heritage Open Days, when many visitors had tales to tell about what they did there, who they met there and how they helped there, we have decided to record these memories for an exhibition to be held when the refurbished building opens in the autumn.

Members of St. Benedict's School's History Group will help shape and lead the project and will record and present these memories.

Patrick Leonard, Chief Executive Officer of the Howgill Family Centre, who is applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund to fund the project, said "I was really moved to hear some of the stories visitors had to tell and to find some magazines in the Archive Centre hand written by people staying at the YMCA just before the First World War. Whilst we know about the Georgian history of the building I am keen to record details of its later history, whilst those who were part of it are still alive to tell their stories. I am also delighted at the enthusiasm to get involved shown by the young people."

Inside this issue

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Heritage Open Days Event | 1 |
| YMCA History Project..... | 1 |
| Budding Archaeologists | 2 |
| Students Lime Taster Day | 2 |
| Traditional Buildings and Lime .. | 3 |
| Skills Masterclasses | 3 |
| Public Realm Works | 4 |
| Community Events | 4 |
| Contact Details | 4 |



Budding Archaeologists

A group of budding archaeologists visited the former YMCA building in November, along with building archaeologist Phil Cracknell, to examine how the building has changed over time.

You can see from looking at this one elevation that there have been numerous alterations to the property over the years and Phil helped attendees discover why and when these alterations took place.

Attendees also visited the Whitehaven Archive and Local Studies Centre to learn more about the buildings history and about how to use the Archive Centre and what types of material are kept there. Included



in the finds were two beautiful hand written magazines that had been produced by residents and visitors to the YMCA in the early part of the last century.

For details of opening times and information about the Archive and Local Studies Centre visit:

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives/archivecentres/whalsc.asp>



Skills Training

The Townscapes Heritage Initiative helps property owners in the Old Town Conservation Area with the costs of repairs and helps bring vacant floorspace back into use. However another important element of the THI is helping local people and contractors learn about the benefits of conservation led renovation work and teaching them traditional skills, which they can then use on their own properties or in their day-to-day work environment.

Sixteen Lakes College construction students learned how to maintain older buildings using traditional techniques and materials when the THI organised a Lime Taster Day for them. They learnt how to mix and apply lime mortars, plasters and renders and how they allow buildings to 'breathe,' preventing many of the problems found when modern materials are used.



William McKenzie, a Level 2 Brickwork Diploma student, said: "I really enjoyed the day and found it educational - doing the plastering and learning about all the materials and different types of wall they can go on."

Some of the fund is used for community activities and heritage skills training. Jane Taylor, Copeland's Townscape Heritage Initiative Officer, said: "It was great to see the young students learning that new isn't always necessarily the best, and that using modern techniques in old buildings can often create more problems than it solves."



Traditional Buildings and Lime

Traditional solid wall properties built of stone, brick, clay, earth or timber all relied on the use of lime as the key ingredient in mortar, plaster and render, as its porosity and flexibility allows the structure to 'breathe' and move with the changing seasons. But as these products take longer to make, apply and dry, and require skill and patience, builders in the late 19th century began to use cement and gypsum based products because they were speedier to work with and they dried much more quickly. The demand for mass housing and the increased production of cement and gypsum led to a different method of building which relied on the structure repelling moisture rather than allowing moisture to pass freely in and out of the structure as with traditionally built properties.

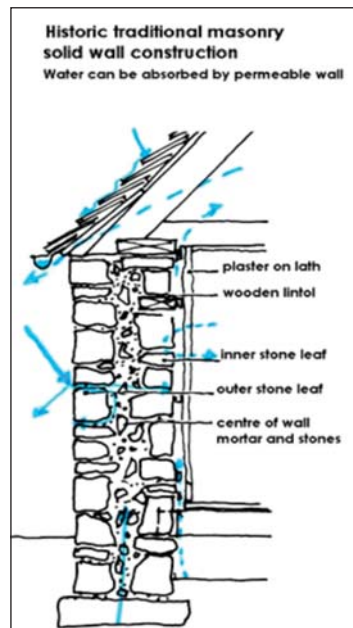
As cement is a much more rigid product, when used in older properties as a mortar or render, it will not resist movement in the structure. This will in turn lead to hairline cracks forming which will draw in moisture and then trap it within the structure.

Subsequent periods of frost and thaw will in time cause expansion within the structure, eventually leading to failure of the structure – most dramatically in clay or earth buildings when the whole wall can collapse within its cement rendered shell.



Moisture generally evaporates from a wall through its joints, and as cement is denser and generally much stronger than a lime mortar, it is then trapped and will move through the face of the brick or stone instead of the joints, which will in time erode the face of the material (see photo). Lime for building comes in the form of a putty (non-hydraulic lime) or a dry powder (natural hydraulic lime), but either needs to be mixed with an appropriate measure of sand and water to produce a soft, flexible and vapour permeable mortar, render or plaster, which is far more suited for use on solid wall traditionally constructed buildings than cement based products.

Richard Majewicz, Conservation Officer, Copeland Borough Council



Why not join us

The THI is running free masterclasses, open to all construction firms who feel they have staff who may benefit from gaining or improving specific heritage techniques. Attendees will get hands on experience working on the former YMCA on Irish Street, Whitehaven.

This Grade II listed building is currently being sympathetically transformed into a Foyer for young people. The masterclasses will be led by experienced craftsmen and include:

Lime Render

11th-15th May

Learn how to mix and apply lime renders.

Lime Plastering

1st-4th June

Learn when and how to use lime plaster.

Laying setts

17th-18th August

Come and learn how to lay cobbles in a courtyard setting.

Interested in coming along to any of the masterclasses?

If so contact **Jane Taylor**, details overleaf.

Further courses will be arranged in due course so register at www.copeland.gov.uk to receive updates.



Public Realm

One element of the THI is to improve the public places in the THI area. Although the budget for this is relatively small it is hoped that the large and intrusive signage at the entrances to Market Place and James Street can be removed and replaced with something more in keeping with a conservation area. It is also hoped to place some seating and a few low density trees on the area at the end of James Street.

Did you know that a tramway used to run through Market Place and James Street, connecting the harbor (in the vicinity of the Customs House) with Preston Street goods depot? The 600 yard long line was authorised on 4th August 1853 and opened on 27th January 1854. The rationale behind its construction was to handle the increasing traffic from the Cleator iron ore mines to the port.

The 1853 Act prohibited the use of locomotives between Preston Street goods yard and the quayside, so only horse traction was used. Howard Quayle, the author of *Whitehaven - The Railways and Waggonways of a Unique Cumberland Port*, states that while he has no information on actual traffic volumes over the tramway, bearing in mind the limitations of horse traction and the fact that around 500 horse-drawn wagons were travelling each day between Cleator mines and the harbour, it must have been quite a busy route.

Unfortunately no photographic evidence of these "waggon" (as these ancient vehicles are normally spelled) can be found but they were probably similar to this one, which shows a Chaldron Wagon at Seaham Harbour, taken by K.Fleming.



Howard Quayle states that "Whitehaven Harbour Trustees' Minutes show that the tramway was still in use in 1886, and it is likely to have continued in use until 1896, when ore traffic through the harbour finally ceased. OS maps show that it was still there in 1924, but I suggest that it did not survive long after this date."

As part of the THI works it is hoped that intermittent horseshoes and rails will be inset into the paving across the area at the end of James Street, along the route the wagons would have travelled, as a reminder to this important part of Whitehaven's past.

Come and have a go at improving your Heritage Skills

The Townscape Heritage Initiative is offering a range of "taster days" for the public to have a go at various heritage techniques. More detail will be available nearer the time but the dates for the diary are:

- 16 May: Lime rendering
- 6 June: Lime plastering
- 18 July: Internal lime pointing
- 15 August: External lime pointing

The taster days will be led by expert craftsmen with many years experience of working on heritage projects. Attendees will receive the benefit of their knowledge and have hands on experience of working on a live project in Whitehaven town centre.



If you would like to reserve a place on any of the taster days please contact Jane Taylor, the THI Officer:

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