

Derek Clarke – Tyntesfield.

Derek was welcomed to the November meeting and introduced as a Speaker who had previously spoken at a monthly General Meeting on the subject of the Birmingham Back-to-Backs. His career, he informed us had been as a Conservation Architect, and he had worked on National Trust Properties, including nearby Hanbury Hall. In this presentation, Derek would explain the vital conservation work that was done to this unique property in North Somerset that the History Group had visited earlier in the year. This work, begun in 2009, would involve major repairs to the external fabric, renewal of all the electrical wiring and a major upgrade of the central heating.



First, we were given a short history of Tyntesfield. Known then as Tyntes Place, it had been built as a Georgian house and later was bought, in 1843, by William Gibbs (1790 – 1875), who made his fortune by importing guano. In 1850 the name was changed to Tyntesfield and it was rebuilt in Gothic Revival style in 1865, by the architect John Norton, for Anthony Gibbs (1841 – 1907). The House was acquired by the National Trust in 2002, and the upgrading – a 2½ year project – was started in 2009.

The first concern in the renovation was not to disturb the resident bats in the roof space. There are harsh penalties for disturbing, killing or injuring bats. During the renovation project, the bats did not have to leave the roof space and the programme worked round their life-style and life-cycle. At the end of the project, bat entry positions were introduced into the roof space.

Other concerns were about flora as well as fauna. Due to the huge amount of scaffolding needed, concrete trenches were installed on the South Lawn, to support the scaffolding. As the South Lawn was being dug up, rare orchids were discovered. The orchids, in their soil, were replanted in a safe place until the building project was completed and then replaced in their original position.



Derek gave us many interesting facts and figures in his humorous and engaging presentation, coupled with many fascinating details and technical terms. He used photographs that he himself had taken, while working on the project, which gave the Group a captivating insight into the work involved. He explained the difficulties of only having one access road to the property, resulting in 12¼ miles of scaffolding having to be erected around the house to allow the

materials to be distributed wherever required, at any height. A huge crane, 'Tiny Tim', was needed to install massive steel joists above the roof, to protect the building from the weight of the scaffolding. 'Shrink wrap was used to cover the roof of the house during restoration to make it weatherproof.

A temporary external staircase was installed, with a viewing platform, so that visitors could appreciate the scale of the work from a different perspective. The platform remained in place for 2½ years and increased visitor numbers by 27,000.





Major fabric replacement needed to be done. Because of the historic nature of the original fabric, artisans were employed to recreate roof tiles and patterns, gargoyles, central heating, the Bell Tower, wrought ironwork, stonework, chimneys, ridge tiles and more. Each aspect created its own unique problems and solutions. There was always a dilemma – how much of the original fabric should be retained?

Another concern was the state of the original electrics, which had no earth. The original light switches had to be adapted to contain the new wiring, but still retain the appearance of being 'original'. This applied also to the lightning conductors. They had to be effective, without detracting from the original appearance of the building. Ingenious solutions were found.

Door and window glass had to conform to current fire safety standards without losing the appeal of the earlier ones. Radiators were replaced by historically designed new ones. And where to put the boiler for the new central heating system? The solution – a biomass boiler was installed in a former sawmill, ¼ mile away from the house, and the pipes lagged underground, to connect with the house.

Throughout the presentation, Derek used 'before and after' photographs, to convey the processes, the problems and the solutions. This was very much appreciated by the group, who having visited Tyntesfield earlier in the year, had not understood the magnitude of the work that had been undertaken to produce an 'original' property.

As Derek was thanked for his presentation, it was noted that this was a fascinating and amusing talk, which had opened our eyes to the enormous amount of thought, care and expertise involved in conserving a unique property.



Heidy Hague.