

## **Wentworth Woodhouse celebrates completion of major roof work**

HOME AND DRY - WENTWORTH WOODHOUSE CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF MAJOR ROOF WORK

Another rainy night in Rotherham, another 180 buckets overflowing with rainwater in the steadily decaying 18th century rooms at Wentworth Woodhouse.

When the Preservation Trust took over the Grade I listed stately home in March 2017 with just six staff, emptying the buckets and mopping up was one of many backbreaking and crucial tasks.

But the buckets are now redundant and the Trust is celebrating a major milestone.

After almost two years of specialist repairs to the roof over the State Rooms, costing £5.5million, Phase 2 of the repair programme is now complete - and the majority of the Palladian-style East Front of the mansion is now water-tight.

Rainwater no longer pours in through holes in historic roofs. Ancient, overflowing guttering and drainpipes have been repaired or replaced, stone features created by artisan masons almost 250 years ago have been painstakingly restored.

Emergency roof repairs have also made endangered sections of the historic Stables and Riding School safe.

The achievements and challenges of this colossal project, which was carried out on-budget, and remained on-schedule during the pandemic, were highlighted at a celebratory event on Wednesday October 6.

Gathered in the mansion's Long Gallery, where rows of rain buckets stood before its own roof repairs were carried out, trustees, supporters and representatives from the organisations who had played their part heard how many years of neglect have been repaired to the highest of conservation standards and the workload involved.

Phase 2 repairs began in 2019. Urgent works across the site had been carried out from August 2017 to March 2019, and Phase 1 repairs at the Riding School and the mansion's Bedlam Wing and Chapel ran from March 2018 to January 2020.

The three repair projects were funded by a £7.6 million Treasury grant awarded to the Trust by Chancellor Philip Hammond in his Autumn 2016 Statement.

Before Phase 2 work could start, scaffold on an epic scale had to be designed. Once erected it encased the mansion in a shell comprised of 700 tonnes of scaffold poles towering 30 metres tall.

Then heritage craftsmen working for project contractors Robert Woodhead Ltd, with guidance and support from Historic England and architects Donald Insall Associates, began repairing roofs the size of three football pitches over the mansion's central block and Long Gallery.

The Trust's CEO Sarah McLeod said: "The project has been one of the most exciting and challenging heritage projects of a generation. Every single person involved has played a vital role - from the contractors through to our volunteers who led tours on our rooftops, enabling the public to watch work progressing.

She added: "We've had many challenges to go through. The scale of Wentworth Woodhouse and its sad state brought particular problems, which expertise and skill overcame.

Then came the global pandemic. We overcame that too; the site was closed for just five weeks and supplies of materials were maintained.

*“The project has been a triumph. The building is now protected for future generations to enjoy and the Preservation Trust can move on to other vital repair and restoration tasks.”*

In January 2021, specialist conservators were also able to start essential repairs to the roof of the North Pavilion, which sits at one end of the Palladian East Front, and the North and South Quadrants.

These repairs were funded by a £811,000 lifeline grant issued during the pandemic by the government’s Culture Recovery Fund. The grant was administered by Historic England and matched with money remaining in the Phase 2 budget and grants from The Swire Charitable Trust, The Goldsmiths’ Company Charity and private donations resulting from a successful public appeal.

The six-month North Pavilion project saw the roof and its stonework, cornices and guttering repaired and key features on the tower restored.

A centuries-old 400kg weather vane was repaired and re-gilded in gold leaf.

Clock restorer Andrew Bates, of Bygone Times in Elsecar, painstakingly restored the tower clock’s mechanisms and gilded the hands. Its two large faces were replaced by Robert Woodhead Ltd.

Giles Proctor, conservation architect for Historic England, the organisation whose expertise has guided the project throughout, commented: “The work to date has been an enormous achievement, protecting the priceless interiors of the East Front and the Long Gallery from further deterioration and rescuing the Bedlam Wing from imminent ruin. *“About 55 per cent of the mansion’s roofs have been repaired, so there remains much to do, but in an astonishingly short time the Trust has secured the future of this magnificent building.”*

### **History of the North Pavilion:**

WWPT’s research team believe the North Pavillion has had many uses over the centuries.

In a 1750 inventory, a list of its contents included one large square table, several slabs of marble, four large leather portmanteaux (storage bags), two iron dripping pans, a cheese press and other lumber.

The tower bed chamber contained two pairs of bedsteads with stiff hangings, two mattresses, feather beds and bolsters with blankets and coverlets, three chairs, two stools a looking-glass and a small table, suggesting it was used as bedrooms.

By 1832, the North Pavilion’s ground floor was listed as a sick room and the principal floor as a ‘Doctor’s Shop’.

During the Lady Mabel College years it is believed part of the pavilion was used as the Butler’s Apartment.

On some 20th Century plans it is referred to as ‘Bluebeard’s Tower’, but it’s a mystery as to why.

### **Emergency Repairs - Fact File**

700 tonnes of scaffolding had to be designed and erected. It was 30 metres high - as high as six double decker buses - and required 50,000 linear metres of scaffolding poles. Laid end to end vertically they would be 5.5 times taller than Mount Everest

The scaffold enabled rooftop tours to be launched, allowing the public to climb to the roof, watch craftsmen at work and understand how the Treasury's grant was being spent. The 5,784 tour tickets the Trust sold raised £26,511 and volunteers gave 2,783 hours of their time to lead the tours.

Repairing the roofs over the East Front main block alone took 52,188 hours of work.

14,000 new Westmorland slates were laid. 85 per cent of the mansion's original slates will be used for other projects at Wentworth Woodhouse.

84 per cent of the Phase 2 budget was spent within 40 miles of Wentworth Woodhouse

A Make Your Mark in History campaign gave people the opportunity to have names and tributes inscribed on slates going onto the roof, and raised £50,000.

Masonry repairs included restoring 19 stone urns - each weighing as much as an adult polar bear. They had to be removed by crane from the mansion's roof for restoration and craned back in place.

### **Captions:**

Celebrating the success of Phase 2 of repairs, LtoR Giles Proctor, Historic England; Sarah McLeod, CEO of WWPT, Dame Julie Kenny CBE, Preservation Trust chair, David Trevis Smith, project organiser, architect Dorian Proudfoot, Donald Insall Associates

Repairs were carried out on roofs the size of three football pitches

Failed roof coverings over the Long Gallery had allowed rain to permeate for years, rotting timbers beneath

Water-tight, the Long Gallery today

Rainwater caused damage to the ceiling in the famed Marble Saloon

A room flooded with water in the Bedlam Wing is now watertight and drying out ready for restoration

ENDS

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### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

Wentworth Woodhouse in Rotherham is one of the largest houses in Europe and was built between 1725 and 1750.

The house was sold in March 2017 for £7million following a five-year campaign by SAVE and the Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust.

Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust is now managing a major project to restore the house and open it to the public.

For more information about Wentworth Woodhouse, go to [www.wentworthwoodhouse.org.uk](http://www.wentworthwoodhouse.org.uk) or call 01226 351161.