

Learning from the past, caring for the future

Buxton Crescent Heritage Skills Programme 2017-18



A creative partnership

Buxton Crescent Heritage Skills Programme was developed by a team from local consultancy – Creative Heritage Ltd – in collaboration with main contractor, Vinci, and subcontractors working on different aspects of the restoration of Buxton’s premier historic building.

Heritage Skills tasters

The aim of the Heritage Skills days has been to enable local people to visit the site, to understand the challenges facing the contractors, and to learn about the materials and methods used in historic building conservation.

We decided that the people most likely to benefit from the opportunity were: local building contractors, who might be commissioned to do repairs or maintenance on pre-1900 buildings, students on construction courses looking for a career in the industry, and owners of older houses who might not feel confident briefing builders correctly about their properties.



Learning about lime plastering



BSL interpreter helps a Deaf student follow the tour

The programme so far

Between September 2017 and May 2018, we have run four Heritage Skills days: one for local builders, two for students from construction colleges and the fourth for owners of pre-1900 houses in Buxton.

A total of 119 people have taken part in the visits. After a short introduction from the Creative Heritage team about the principles and philosophy behind building conservation practice, and the vital role that the Heritage Lottery Fund is playing in the preservation of our historic buildings, participants visited the site accompanied by staff from Vinci and Creative Heritage.



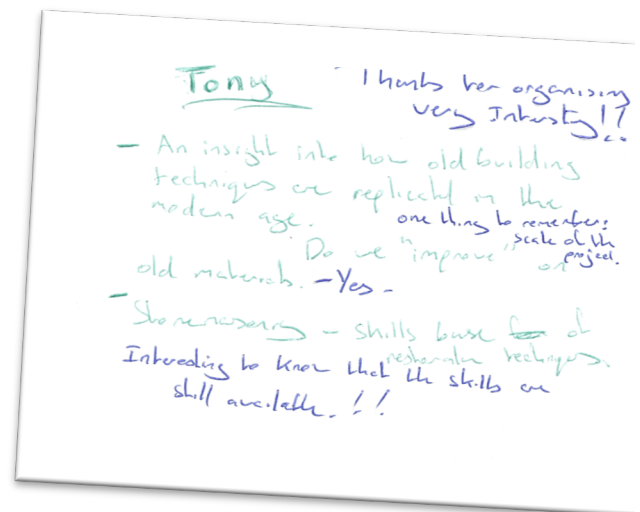
Scaffolding supporting the cantilevered stairs for repair

The Heritage Skills groups have explored this unique site from basement to roof, learning how the Crescent is being resurrected room by room. Along the way, they have met a range of contractors happy to share their knowledge and demonstrate their expertise in heritage building techniques: stone masonry, lead work, window repair and restoration, structural woodwork, and lime plaster.

A number of participants said they have picked up tips they can apply directly in their coursework, their jobs or their homes.

Vinci and the subcontractors have engaged enthusiastically with the opportunity to share the Buxton Crescent project with the wider community. They have taken care of safety on the site and treated participants to bacon butties in the morning or a sandwich lunch for those attending the afternoon sessions.

To evaluate the programme, we have offered each participant a postcard as they arrive and asked them to write down why they have signed up and what they hope to gain from the visit. At the end of the session we give their postcards back to them and invite them to tell us whether the experience met their expectations and what they will remember most. We have also taken photos and filmed participants talking about their visit. The video is available on the Creative Heritage website.



Example of postcard evaluation

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive – people have hugely valued the chance to go behind the scenes and learn about such an ambitious, complex conservation and restoration project.

Many said they felt privileged or honoured to have had this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Local builders (19 Sept)

We raised awareness of the programme by visiting builder's merchants with flyers and haunting cafes and sandwich shops selling builders' butties.

A total of 12 men and two women from the construction industry attended morning and afternoon sessions.



Up on the roof inspecting lead work

The weather was glorious, which may explain why numbers were lower than we had hoped – Buxton builders need to take advantage of dry spells whenever they happen!

The 'Subbies' Barry, Sam and John deserve a special mention for passing on their knowledge of stone masonry, lead work and joinery in such an engaging and entertaining way.

One of the participants specifically asked us to pass on his admiration for Adam's commitment and his enthusiasm for communicating his extensive knowledge of the project.

The participant said, "He knows his onions but seemed more than happy to spend time explaining things to us."

Construction students (8 Nov & 25 April 2018)

For the first day, we approached four local colleges directly, as well as contacting the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). Priority was given to students from the Buxton area.

14 students from Buxton and Leek College, including two young women, were signed up to visit the site and 19 from Burton & South Derbyshire College (BSDC). Disappointingly, BSDC cancelled at the last minute because of issues with staff cover.

By November the lead work on the roof was finished, so the students were instead given a masterclass in sash window restoration from Joinery Workshop.



Sash window restoration

14 students from Derby College joined us for the April session, along with seven from Zink Employability – a project helping people back into work, organised by Buxton Food Bank.

The Zink visitors were delighted to meet the contractors. One wrote: "I will remember the passionate and inspiring people we met. Their enthusiasm for the project was catching."

Home owners (16 May)

We decided that the most effective way to engage home owners would be a direct marketing campaign, so we designed a flyer and mapped out areas of the town where older houses are concentrated. Creative Heritage consultants took to Buxton's leafier suburbs and delivered door to door.



Heritage Skills programme flyer

The response was immediate and enthusiastic – calls came through to the Creative Heritage office as soon as the flyers started dropping through letterboxes and several people who were at home asked if they could sign up on the spot! Before long, every place was taken and we had a growing reserve list of people eager to take part if anyone dropped out. There is no doubt about the desire to go behind the hoardings and watch the work in progress.



Home owners admire the new indoor-outdoor pool

The visit was extra special for many of the home owners who were long term residents – some have known the Crescent all their lives and had watched the building's decline with sadness and frustration. For those people in particular, witnessing the army of skilled workers each doing their bit was cause for optimism and celebration.

One participant wrote on her postcard: "I had looked forward to this for weeks – and am amazed. The challenge of managing and working on the site is awe-inspiring."

The future of heritage skills

We know from the positive feedback that we have been able to provide an unforgettable experience for over 100 people and helped raise awareness of the importance of heritage skills, not only for the Duke of Devonshire's masterpiece, but also for the more humble homes that contribute to the historic character of our spa town.

Most of all, we hope that the visit has inspired the next generation of heritage craftsmen (and women!) to carry the cause of heritage conservation into the future.