

ALGAO: Historic Buildings Workshop

Dunbar Town House, May 2013

To coincide with the issuing of an ALGAO:Scotland guidance note on the recording of Historic Buildings a workshop was organised in May 2013 in Dunbar Town House, East Lothian.

The aim of the workshop was to bring together a cross section of professionals who work with historic buildings, to look at the different aspects of these structures and how archaeological recording and analysis can bring another dimension to the table when looking to renovate, care and manage these structures.

A wider range of talks were presented which looked at how we deal with historic buildings from a number of perspectives: a Local Authority archaeological curator; a Local Authority conservation officer; a conservation architect and the RCAHMS survey and collections team. Unfortunately the speaker who was due to present from the archaeological contractors perspective had to pull out at short notice, but archaeological contractors were represented within the audience.

The talks were all stimulating and looked at the different ways that archaeological and historical recording, research and analysis has been used to enhance our understanding and management practices of historic buildings and indeed towns. The value of seeking to understand how buildings developed and grew when looking at reuse and the pitfalls of relying on 'inherited wisdom' was examined by Bruce Mann, the archaeological curator for Aberdeenshire Council, and Andrew Wright, a conservation architect in Moray. Bruce highlighted the Granary Building in Banff which although previously recorded turned out to be a far more complex building than was thought once redevelopment started. While Andrew explained the complexities of dealing with rural structures and understanding their place in the landscape through the redevelopment of Beaton's Cottage in Skye.

The value of looking at the context of historic structures was further examined by Paul Zochowski, a local authority planner and conservation officer with East Lothian Council. Paul explained how the understanding of the historical and archaeological context helped in forming the conservation area management plans for the historic town of Dunbar.

The national perspective was examined by Miriam McDonald and Iain Anderson from RCAHMS who highlighted the number of industrial buildings that are now being redeveloped and which need to be considered as archaeological and historical monuments. They also outlined the process by which RCAHMS selects which structures to record to enhance the national collections.

The talks were followed by a lively discussion which covered numerous topics a number of which have been taken forward for further discussions between the relevant parties.

The day ended with a tour of the newly refurbished Dunbar Town House by Dr Mike Cressey of CFA Archaeology Ltd who undertook the recording project on what is thought to be the oldest continually used municipal building in Scotland.