Our Castle of Kings –project final report/ evaluation

PROJECT SUMMARY

We set out to organise a community volunteer archaeological dig within our community owned Scheduled Monument, employing professional assistance only where essential for training and specialist skills.

The proposal was fully achieved exactly as activity and program in Project Plan in HLF application, exceeding predicted community involvement, and on budget.

It is difficult to summarise such a complex project and the importance of it's results in historical terms which will be the subject of academic study and public interest in the years to come. However as a community activity we can say it has been a 100% success with many requests being made for more of the same, additional benefits being pursued by volunteers and bookings for presentations/exhibitions for various groups in Argyll.

Perhaps the most important outcomes are that everyone enjoyed the project, learnt new skills and indicated a willingness to take part in the future activities.

PROJECT ORGANISATION AND OUTCOMES

PROJECT MANAGEMENT - Tarbert Castle Trust – Team of 4 Trustees and 3 other volunteers on digital presence including web booking system.

PROJECT DESIGN and DIG DIRECTOR – Roderick Regan

EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION – Kilmartin Museum

BUDGET - £30K project completed just below budget despite major discovery requiring additional consolidation.

PROGRAM – 30 days digging during May and June 2019 (program set out in HLF application fully achieved)

VOLUNTEERS – 52 took part from Argyll and beyond.

YOUNG PEOPLE – Over 240 took part schools and youth groups.

VISITORS – Some 9500 visitors to the site during the dig

All aspects of project exceeded expectations including actual archaeological outcomes as detailed in Archaeologists dig design submitted with our application and approved by HES.

The most important discovery being a major Western entrance to the castle not previously recorded in the historical record and surveys. The entrance was shown to have dressed red sandstone sides and is about 3M wide in a 2.3M thick wall complete with door check and portcullis slot. There must have been an arch over entrance with space above for portcullis winding gear and defensive features.

We have many artefacts recovered representing medieval to present day timeline giving us a clearer picture of the castle's occupation with confirmation and additions to the historical record.

From the community point of view the project generated great interest locally with daily updates on the community facebook page prompting visits to the site by residents and visitors as the work progressed.

Some quotes about Our Castle of Kings community archaeological dig

"There are good parts and bad parts to every day.

The good part was my first meeting of the day at the site of Tarbert Castle (a stronghold of Robert the Bruce) where the community has done a fantastic job over the past few years in ensuring that the ruin did not just disappear and the surroundings become a rubbish strewn wild land.
Some years ago I blipped Robert McPhail who has led the process and yesterday he showed me the outcome of the excavations that have recently taken place . They have produced some remarkable new finds including where the original 14th century (or perhaps earlier) gate would have been, and the stones that indicate a portcullis stood within it.
https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/2603525418464052700*. "*

Michael Russell MSP

"*The remains of a portcullis slot were uncovered shedding new light on how the castle was constructed, approached and defended. It represents a previously unknown and highly significant part of the site, and we commend the Trust for its discovery and careful excavation.*"

Barbara Cummins Director of Heritage – Historic Environment Scotland

"It overtook my expectations. The site chosen for the children was ideal. Friends have asked me if it was a set-up with objects planted but I assured them it was not. Thanks for giving me and the children such an amazing experience."

Primary school teacher with children who took part

DID YOU ENJOY THE DIG ?
"Yes because we got to dig up cool stuff"
"It was a little bit scientific and I like science"
"I found "mid evil" pottery and that got me excited."
"It was fun because we got to find things ourselves rather than just watching"
"It was weird to think we had been sledging on ancient things"
"I enjoyed finding the artefacts and the tour was amazing. I learned so much about Tarbert Castle that I never knew before."

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IT TO OTHERS ?
"Yes because it's good to learn."
"Yes because it was really interesting"
"Yes because you're discovering history and it never gets boring."

A selection of answers from primary children's evaluation forms

The project cost was finalised, including more than anticipated stone consolidation at new entrance discovery for which the contingency was expended, with only a small excess met from our own maintenance budget.

ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS EVALUATION SUBMISSIONS AND DAILY RECORDS DURING THE DIG

Age groups of volunteers

Ages 5- 12 - 11% (excluding school and young people's groups detailed in Kilmartin Museum Education Report)

Ages 13 -20 -14%

Ages 21-40   -14%

Ages 41 – 60 -28%

Ages 60 - +   -33%

Most were reasonably fit with 4 having moderate disabilities.

11 Archaeological dig techniques were described *65%* of these were experienced by volunteers (Those who experienced most were those who were involved for longer periods)

6 Questions were asked with ratings out of 10 with overall rating result was **94%**

Comments were asked for and few made any negative remarks the overall impression being that everyone enjoyed the experience and would like to take part in another similar project.

52 volunteers worked for between 1 and 20 days with an average of **6 Days**

WHERE DO WE PROGRESS FOR HERE ?

We have negotiated permission with HES to only partly backfill the newly discovered entrance trench to protect the dressed stonework found and our volunteers will carry out some ground works to ensure the entrance location remains visible and interpreted for the public. This work is now completed.

We expect that in due course greater visitor interest will increase numbers (recorded 2019 year 46,000) extend their visits with related benefits to the local economy and hopefully donations which will improve the Trust's sustainability in managing our community asset.

We have now executed a smaller volunteer dig funded by public donations to determine the location of the Eastern entrance and the scale of its construction. This has been successful and an identical entrance revealed giving direct access by those arriving from the sea from central Scotland. Two fully protected large entrances is unique in a medieval castle in Scotland and simply results from the local geography and its effect on the castles location.

We are now amending all interpretation panels and literature. A summer long public exhibition of finds etc was organised for local heritage display but this has been delayed due to Covid 19 implications.

The Archaeologist's final draft final report is completed but full publication (Over 100 pages of expert detail of dig results) will be delayed until probably late next year due to Covid 19 problems in progressing some important additional scientific laboratory analysis of finds. This work is being done funded partly by ourselves and in kind student work at the University of Highlands and Islands. It is essential that we delay publication to ensure that its outcomes are included. The draft archaeological final report has been paid for as part of this project and if you require to see it this time we can arrange for a "we transfer" delivery by e mail.

Robert McPhail

TCT Secretary and Treasurer August 2020