The Botanic Cottage throws open its (traditionally



The Botanic Cottage in its new location

The Botanic Cottage at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has opened its doors to its first visitors, including local school pupils, volunteers with an edible gardening project and even a former resident of the building. Rescued in 2008 from demolition at its previous location, the historic RBGE site on Leith Walk, the 18th-century cottage has undergone a wholesale move and a traditional rebuild, reviving the historic building as a new centre for community and education work in the Garden.

The Georgian cottage, now officially the newest and oldest building at RBGE, reopens 250 years after it was first completed. Records show that as well as craftsmen finishing off small jobs, in May 1766, the very first students arrived for teaching sessions within the building – which is exactly the case today. The Botanic Cottage is now ready for use by community organisations, local societies and educational groups.

Simon Milne, Regius Keeper at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh said: “The completion of the Botanic Cottage is such an achievement for everyone involved. It’s taken a lot of grit, determination, skill and commitment to get the building from Leith to Inverleith, and reconstructed, and I appreciate the efforts of everyone who has played a part in bringing it back to life. As a focus for education and community work, the building is a perfect space, and we hope that the groups using it in the years to come will be inspired to greatness by the history in the walls, the glorious setting and the unique craftsmanship around them.”

In celebration of its completion, a public Garden Gala will be held on Monday 30 May (12pm-6pm), the last bank holiday of the month, allowing visitors the opportunity to look inside the rebuilt cottage. At this event, visitors will have the chance to explore inside the cottage and learn about its historic journey while enjoying an afternoon out with live music, creative activities, cooking demonstrations, dancing, storytelling and more.

Thanks to campaigners, generous donors and funding bodies, including the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), this unique and historic building was saved from demolition in 2008, carefully dismantled stone by stone, marked, transported, and reconstructed at RBGE's present site in Inverleith, using traditional techniques and historically accurate materials.

Lucy Casot, Head of HLF Scotland, said: "While today marks the end of the most incredible piece of conservation, it also marks the beginning of a new lease of life for this historic cottage. Thanks to players of the National Lottery, it will be a lively, welcoming hub where young and old, many with more challenges in life than others, can be inspired by and learn from these wonderful gardens and collections. We are delighted to have played our part in this project and look forward to seeing Botanic Cottage blossom."

The building was the idea of the then Regius Keeper and leading figure of the Enlightenment, John Hope, and originally served as the head gardener's home, the main entrance to the garden, and as a teaching facility for Edinburgh's medical students learning about botany and horticulture. It was used in this way until RBGE moved to its present site in the 1820s. It was then used as a private dwelling, and more recently as business premises, until in 2008 it was threatened with demolition to make way for new development, until the Botanic Cottage Trust formed a campaign to save the building.

RBGE's Community engagement coordinator for the Botanic Cottage project, Sutherland Forsyth, said: "The Botanic Cottage reconstruction has been a project like no other and we are delighted that it once again provides an inspirational learning space that can be used by a wide range of school and community groups.

"Detailed records kept by the original builders show that in April and May 1766, craftsmen were adding the final touches to the building, which is exactly what is happening in the present day, making the timing of the reopening particularly special. We owe a great debt of thanks to the many campaigners and craftsmen that helped bring the cottage back to life and for the support and huge interest we received in the project."

Situated within the community and teaching gardens, the Botanic Cottage will be at the heart of RBGE's community education programme. It features a spacious gathering room upstairs, where lectures used to be held, and downstairs, the heart of the 'home' has a kitchen along with a potting shed and additional education space housed in the wings. Groups of all ages will be able to use the Cottage for classes, workshops, demonstrations, talks and meetings.

In December, in an early testament to the unique nature of this project, the Botanic Cottage received a commendation at the UK Georgian Group's prestigious annual awards, recognising exemplary conservation and restoration projects in the United Kingdom, and rewarding those who have shown the vision and commitment to restore Georgian buildings and landscapes. In their commendation, the Georgian Group said: "The Botanic Cottage rebuild is a heroic rescue of a garden building of real historic importance, and a triumph of craftsmanship and scholarly research. The upper floor in particular, which will function, once again, as a botany classroom, was beautifully restored."

Notes of editors

The Botanic Cottage project - In 1763, the Regius Keeper of RBGE John Hope moved the Royal Botanic Garden to its third site, on Leith Walk. The following year he commissioned John Adam, one of the most eminent architects at the time, and James Craig, who would go on to design Edinburgh's New Town, to design a cottage for his head gardener to live in.

As well as being the home of head gardeners, the cottage also served as the gateway for visitors to the Garden and had a classroom on the upper floor where John Hope lectured medical students about botany and horticulture.

After the RBGE moved to its present site in the 1820s, the cottage was left behind. By the mid-2000s it was threatened with demolition until a community campaign, which later formed the Botanic Cottage Trust, recognised the significance of the building and partnered with RBGE to find a new future for the cottage.

The Heritage Lottery Fund, as well as other generous trusts, foundations and individuals, have funded the rebuilding of the Botanic Cottage as a new community and education centre for the Garden.

Further information

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