
Client

Youth Hostel Association

Whitby Abbey House,
North Yorkshire



Dating back to the 16th C and YHA in 2006, Abbey House was to become their flagship hostel. We were commissioned to interpret the building, fulfilling the HLF Funding requirements, whilst not interfering with the day-to-day running of the hostel.

We decided to bring the past to life by selecting key characters within the timeline, and using professional actors, film a video guide to the house as well as shoot the characters for display panels.

We commissioned a steel sculpture to commemorate the discovery of a 13th C timber during the renovations, which featured a carved sea serpent, and working with two local schools, organized the official launch event with over 60 children performing scenes from the history of the house.







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Whitby Abbey House

Mary Barker
c. 1652

Mary worked as a kitchen hand during the mid 17th century serving the needs of the House while just 8 years of age. Life in period was harsh, with no day after dark food and candles and few means of heating. The kitchen was a place of islands of charcoal stoves often lit by very sooty and smelly flogs long and intense.

As well as tending to the kitchen, Mary will have been expected to help with the general cleaning of the house and the laundry.

Here she is seen using 'loam' for occupation - covered in loam, dirt, sand and sugar, which would then be added to hot lard, and hung to dry on racks suspended from the ceiling kitchen ceiling.

Corbelled Cupboards
The pair of wooden cupboards with corbelled fronts and other charcoal stoves are visible within the eastern half of the kitchen and were probably finished during the 16th century.

The two black and white photographs were taken by the artist on 22 January 1973 and show the men before the current partition was removed.

Timbers
The timber framing here is of fairly poor quality with the evidence of decay or rotting the result be expected in a 16th century framed structure and in this case appears to have been treated into an existing stone building during the 19th century probably 1750s.

1651: The first timber framed house was erected in 1570 and extended across what is now the Central Block.
1656: Several features of the House are still in evidence after more than 400 years, including the timber frame roof, as well as the wattle and daub infill.
1657: Split lengths of oak (the wattle) woven together with the covered with a mixture of lime, earth, straw and small pebbles (the daub).
1658: The late 16th Century timber framed building was built back in the evidence suggests that it was replaced or extended in the middle of the 17th century.
1659: Christopher Mead was a plaster working in the 16th century and was the son of the 16th century timber framers. It is believed that he worked with long hours in poor working conditions, using hand made tools and a 12-16 day Christopher died at the age of 36 from the pox which swept through Europe during the 16th Century.

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Whitby Abbey House

Christopher Mead
1546-1582

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Whitby Abbey House

Elizabeth Ann Neville
1819-1886

The second wife of Sir Charles Stoddard, Elizabeth was the inspiration for the building of the North Block, which included the Banquet Hall staircase with painted glass balustrade and the Banquet Hall in the range overlooking the garden. The house was built in 1820 by Charles in preparation for the marriage of his daughter.

Also at this time, the front of the house was effectively 'renovated' to show the South West facing facade. The house was purchased by Sir Charles Stoddard in 1819 and he was the first to live in the house after his new wife to Whitby House.

Other evidence of works at this time include the painted glass screens on the North Block and the installed ironwork on the outside walls.

The Stained Glass
The stained glass windows in the Banquet Hall were designed by John Ruskin and installed in 1820. The windows are made of leaded glass and feature a variety of designs, including a central window with a figure of a saint.

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Whitby Abbey House

John Yeoman
c. 1645

John was born in Whitby and fought on the side of the Parliamentarians (Roundheads) during the English Civil War (1642-1651).

From 1642 Abbey House was used by Sir Hugh Cholmondeley after he was forced into exile in France for his Royalist sympathies, and used as a Parliamentary garrison. Evidence of this has been found during the recent renovations, with lead mermen bells being found under the floorboards.

There were two types of musket used during the Civil War, the matchlock and the flintlock, which could be as long as the first having a firing range of up to 300 yards.

These weapons were dangerous and costly to use - some of the longer models needed a rest to balance the barrel on because the men who had to hold them were responsible for a great of musketeers fired a volley of shots at the enemy.

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