

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: D34 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Restoration of Stirling Castle Palace: Providing insight into life at the royal court
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The historically accurate restoration of six Stirling Castle Palace apartments and replication of the Stirling Heads by Sally Rush of the University of Glasgow has transformed academic and curatorial understanding of how the Palace looked and functioned and enhanced popular understanding of life at the royal court. A £12 million restoration has brought to life one of Britain's most architecturally complete Renaissance buildings – Stirling Castle Palace – securing its position as a prime educational and tourist attraction – voted the UK's top heritage attraction in a 2012 *Which?* survey and in Europe's top 40 'amazing experiences' in the July 2013 *Lonely Planet* guide. Visitor numbers increased by 17% and annual revenue by £1M in the year after the reopening of the Palace.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

While it was known that Stirling Castle Palace was constructed to showcase the political success of James V's two French marriages, the interior decoration and furnishings had been completely lost, following the 18th century conversion of the Castle site to military use, which continued until 1964. The necessary primary sources for the furnishing of James V's palaces survived but had never been fully analysed. Careful cross-referencing of inventories and accounts by Sally Rush (University of Glasgow, History of Art, Lecturer, 1999-2008; Senior Lecturer, 2008-present) revealed details of the provenance, acquisition, manufacture and material quality of the items listed in the inventories. Their character and form was determined by comparative analysis with visual records or surviving examples of Renaissance furnishings. Research insights and findings included:

- The decoration of Stirling Castle Palace demonstrates a close familiarity with artistic developments in Italy and Europe. For example, the sculpture in Bay 17, formerly unknown, was identified by Rush as a figure of Abundance or Flora. It compares closely to the ancient *Farnese Flora* excavated in Rome in the 1530s. It is an important indicator of the cultural sophistication of the Scottish court and its direct contact with Rome, that a figure of Flora appears in Scotland at such an early date.
- Rush compared the inventories and accounts of furnishing and dress at the Scottish court with those of the English and European courts to establish the relative magnificence and cultural sophistication of the Scottish court within its European context.
- Rush assembled a Source File for Historic Scotland that identified the items of furniture and textiles that may have been present in each room and suitable models for their recreation. This involved the trawling of all major European collections of Renaissance furniture and decorative arts as well as extensive searches for representations of furniture, objects, textiles and lighting in contemporary paintings, prints and manuscripts.
- The circumstances of the manufacture and acquisition of the items of furniture and the textiles used. This was published by Rush in 'French Fashion in 16th Century Scotland: the 1539 inventory of James V's wardrobe' in *Furniture History*, Vol. XLII (2006).
- The identification of the clothing colours favoured by James V and Mary of Guise was used to develop a methodology for selecting textile items from the inventories to furnish the royal apartments. Rush studied art for clues about the fashions of the period, as many paintings of the day had quite a photographic quality and recorded people's clothes and rooms in great detail – for example, showing the quality of hand woven materials, and colours such as red and purples being used to demonstrate royalty and rank, as these dyes were particularly rare and expensive. This was published by Rush in, 'French Fashion in 16th Century Scotland: the 1539 inventory of James V's wardrobe' in *Furniture History*, Vol. XLII (2006).

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- Identifying and interpreting each of the Stirling Heads and external sculptures was extremely difficult as there was no surviving primary source material. Standard research methodologies were redundant. This is the reason why, although it is such an important monument to Scotland's cultural heritage, Stirling Castle Palace has remained untouched by art historians into the 21st century. The research process was close observation and isolation of the singular characteristics of each item. These characteristics were made the starting point for identification, initially through keyword searches via both academic and art databases. The findings of these searches then allowed the construction of an academic argument through reference to contextual material and the assembly of comparative visual material to support the proposed identification and interpretation.
- As many of the Stirling Heads have been shown to be portraits, they are the only surviving evidence of a portrait collection at the Scottish court since lost and forgotten. For example, formerly unknown Stirling Head No. 39 was immediately identified by Rush as Henry VIII due to its resemblance to the portraits of the Tudor king by Holbein. The subject, however, has a lion draped around his shoulders, never seen in the portraits of Henry VIII. Dr Rush has argued that the lion represents tyranny and that this Stirling Head presents a complex dialogue on the hostile relationship between Scotland and England. Moreover it is a uniquely satirical portrait of Henry VIII unknown to scholars of Tudor portraiture. This argument was developed into a research paper given at a *Palatium* conference in Copenhagen in 2012. This has introduced new visual evidence into what has so far been a purely text-based and events-based discussion of Scotland's foreign policy.

The research produced initially took the form of series of comprehensive illustrated reports for Historic Scotland on the different research areas. The project concluded with an academic conference (November 2011) placing the research in context, the papers from which will be published by Historic Scotland in 2013.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Sally Rush, 'French Fashion in 16th Century Scotland: the 1539 inventory of James V's wardrobe', *Furniture History*, Vol. XLII (2006), pp.1-25. ISSN 0016-3058 [submitted to RAE 2008 / available from HEI]

All research reports below were produced for the internal use of Historic Scotland; presented to and peer reviewed by the Stirling Palace Academic Research Committee (SPARC):

- Sally Rush, 'Stirling Castle Place: The identification and interpretation of the Stirling Heads', Historical research report, Historic Scotland (April 2011) [available from HEI] *
- Sally Rush, 'Stirling Castle Palace: The identification and interpretation of the exterior sculpture', Historical research report, Historic Scotland (June 2012) [available from HEI] *
- Sally Rush, 'The Colour of the Scottish Court,' in *The Royal Apartments of James V and Mary of Guise: A European Renaissance Palace*, Historical research report (Phase III) Historic Scotland (April 2005) Bath, M., Foyle, J. and Rush, S. (eds) (Section 6, pgs 183-209). [available from HEI] *
- Sally Rush, Stirling Castle Palace Project: Historical Research Report/Phase IV – Palace Source File', Historic Scotland (November 2004) [available from HEI]

* *Publication pending (late 2013) on the project's academic website ([Stirling Palace Academic Research Committee](#), SPARC).*

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Stirling Castle Palace is an outstanding example of Scottish Renaissance architecture and is Britain's most structurally complete Renaissance royal palace. Built by James V, the palace sits within the walls of the 12th-century Stirling Castle, and due to the occupation and use of the site as a British army barracks and recruiting depot (from 1800-1964), it was an empty shell. The research carried out by Rush at the University of Glasgow has been used to transform how material culture is displayed and interpreted – enabling six key apartments in the Palace to be furnished and decorated as they would have been when the palace was first constructed (c.1538),

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and directing the replication of the Stirling Heads, a series of carved oak roundels which were installed in the ceiling of King's Chamber. The restored palace opened in June 2011.

Transforming academic and curatorial understanding of how the Palace looked and functioned

Research undertaken at University of Glasgow now allows visitors to progress through rooms furnished and decorated as they might have been when the palace was first constructed, with historically accurate reproductions created by local craftspeople and artists. As the reconstruction is based upon Rush's study of the royal inventories and accounts supported by contextual research, interpreters are able to explain the provenance, design, material quality, and use of the items seen. Each of the interpreters, who wear historically accurate costumes devised by the University of Glasgow team, represents someone identified as a member of the royal household or court and can add a 'human story' to visitors' visual experience. A children's gallery, the Castle Vaults, describes and illustrates how luxury textiles, rare dyes and pigments, precious metals and early musical instruments were made.

Scotland's most remarkable Renaissance treasure, the Stirling Heads, were originally mounted on several ceilings in the palace but have been in store since the removal of the Palace ceilings in 1777. Although it was always assumed that this collection of oak-carved panels included portraits of Scottish kings and queens and members of the Stewart court, their individual identities and groupings were unclear prior to the research carried out by Rush. Replicas of the 33 surviving heads, painted as it is thought they would have been at the time they were carved, are now mounted on a new ceiling in the palace, while the originals are displayed in a new purpose-built gallery on the first floor (*pictured*).

Rush's identification and interpretation of each head was essential to understanding the stories of these long ago inhabitants of the palace, which are used to enhance the visitor experience. In the Stirling Heads gallery visitors can now meet Scottish kings and queens and members of the Scottish court face-to-face and reflect upon their lives, values and ambitions; study historic fashions from different European countries; while the presence of foreign princes tells of the power games at play across 16th century Europe.



The achievements of James V shown in the display of sculpture on the outside of the palace were previously incomprehensible to visitors. Following Rush's work in interpreting the sculpture and her recommendations to Historic Scotland, a section of the Stirling Heads gallery has been allocated to explaining what some of the figures represent, encouraging visitors to spend time looking at the outside of the building and learning about Renaissance imagery.

Enhancing popular understanding of life at the royal court

Following the opening of the palace by Her Majesty the Queen in July 2011, Historic Scotland gathered evidence of the quality of the visitor experience and increased visitor numbers, including data from over 200 different types of interviews (such as international and UK visitors, educators on school visits). In its [annual report for 2011-12](#), Historic Scotland noted a 'significant increase' of almost 70,000 visitors over the previous year, and a rise of almost £1 million in revenue for Stirling Castle. Of the Scottish visitors surveyed in the first year since the restoration, 39% came in order to see the refurbished palace and almost one third indicated that they were likely to visit again within the next year. The survey concludes that 'The refurbishments are a hook and add to the overall positive views'.

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On 30 August 2012, Stirling Castle was named the UK's top heritage attraction in a [Which?](#) magazine poll, surpassing the Tower of London and Houses of Parliament. In July 2013, the [Lonely Planet](#) included Stirling Castle in its top 40 'amazing experiences' in a 40th anniversary publication rating unmissable destinations in Europe. Senior staff from English Heritage visited Stirling Castle in June 2013 to view the palace restoration firsthand, to inform similar projects elsewhere. Head Properties Curator for English Heritage stated:

My take on the wider function of the gallery... is that by highlighting the research that has been carried out on this element, in reproducing and commenting on the various sources from contemporary publications, the gallery serves an incredibly important purpose in asserting to visitors that the whole re-presentation scheme that they have seen in the royal apartments is authoritative. The presence at one end of the film about the external sculpture and the decorative finishes seems to me to amplify the messages that in its presentation of this site Historic Scotland knows what it's talking about, and the underlying historical point is that the culture of the Stewart court in the early 16th century was cosmopolitan and significant on an international scale.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Corroboration of the role of Rush's research in restoration work

1. Historic Scotland: Detailed Design Pack, The Renaissance and Sculpture Galleries (pg2) [available from HEI]
2. Head of Cultural Resources, Historic Scotland [contact details provided]
3. Head of Interpretation, Historic Scotland [contact details provided]

Corroboration of value of Rush's work to the public experience

4. Executive Manager, Stirling Castle [contact details provided]
5. Historic Scotland, Stirling Castle Visitor Research Findings Document (24 November 2011) [available from HEI]
6. Marketing Society Star Awards: Dynasty Campaign [evaluation of the Stirling Castle project's success in enhancing public experience] [available from HEI]
7. Two successive Ministers of Culture have spoken at events marking key stages in the progress of the project, acknowledging its impact and the contribution of the University of Glasgow: Mike Russell (completion of Stirling Heads phase of project) (2 June 2009): [BBC coverage](#); [Historic Scotland release](#) and Fiona Hyslop (completion of the redecorated interiors) (11 August 2010): [BBC coverage](#); [Stirling Castle Palace release](#)
8. Head Properties Curator, English Heritage (statement on authoritative nature of restoration; contact details provided)

Historic Scotland – Recreating the Palace ([link](#))

Tour of the project including the Stirling Heads zoom gallery ([link](#))

Media Coverage

[Doors open after £12m Stirling Castle royal palace revamp](#), BBC News (4 June 2011)

[Stirling Castle 'top European experience](#), BBC News (14 July 2013)

[Stirling Castle 'among the most amazing experiences in Europe'](#), The Times (15 July 2013)