

The Joseph Thomson Heritage Centre

Project Ref.No. DGN221

FINAL REPORT

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

1.1 The original Idea:

- 1.1.1 Joseph Thomson was one of the great African explorers of the late Victorian era whose exploits have been sadly neglected compared to more famous contemporaries such as David Livingstone. Thomson led a number of British expeditions to East Africa and a later expedition into the higher ranges of the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and left behind valuable written descriptions and maps of the territories that he opened up.
- 1.1.2 The Joseph Thomson Project Steering Group was established in September 1998 under the auspices of Penpont Community Council. The purpose of the Group is to tell the story of Joseph Thomson, who was born at Sundial Cottage, Marrburn Road, Penpont and to find a place for archives relating to Joseph and the Thomson family as well as other local heritage resources.
- 1.1.3 Sundial Cottage belongs to Buccleuch Estates and in 2003 the Steering Group acquired a twenty-five year lease for a nominal rent. In 2012 the Group re-negotiated the lease for a further twenty-five years at the same nominal rent.

1.2 Individuals and Organisations involved:

- 1.2.1 Since 1998 there has been a vast number of people and organisations involved with the Group. There is an active committee of nine regular members who have progressed the Project along with approximately 40 members of the community who have volunteered their time since the start of the renovation including stripping wall paper, taking off old plaster and filling it into bags, scrubbing out, transporting materials, excavating parts of the garden and pigsty, painting the wash-house, sanding and painting the railings, levelling the path before the slab laying etc. Within this group there are a number of volunteers who regularly assist by cutting the grass, keep the hedges tidy and generally keep an eye on the cottage.

- 1.2.2 As well as time offered to the Project, donations of materials, photographs, archives, artefacts, furniture, printing of leaflets, taking photographs and funds for running costs have been given by a further 30 individuals.
- 1.2.3 Organisations involved with the Project include the three local Community Councils of Penpont, Keir and Tynron with representatives participating on the committee. Thornhill Heritage Group allow the Chairperson of the Joseph Thomson Project to video record their talks and discussions; the Chairperson has also spoken at various local groups such as Penpont Friendship Club, Moniaive Heritage Group and the local Church. The Wanlockhead History Society are interested in maintaining contact with Sundial Cottage and the Project.
- 1.2.4 Furniture was donated to the project by the Forestry Commission; carpet tiles by Sanquhar Tile Company and use was made of SHAX on the Crichton Campus, an organisation which exists to help disadvantaged people and groups.

1.3 The Aims of the Project:

- 1.3.1 To tell the story of Joseph Thomson from the place of his birth.
- 1.3.2 To have a base for his archives.
- 1.3.3 To develop Sundial Cottage as a local heritage resource.

1.4 The Objectives of the Project:

- 1.4.1 To convert Sundial Cottage into a local heritage/community resource,
- 1.4.2 Tell the story of Joseph's Thomson's life
- 1.4.3 Relate other aspects of the local heritage for the benefit of local people, including school parties
- 1.4.4 Attract and inform visitors from further afield
- 1.4.5 Provide a community IT/training/Meeting facility
- 1.4.6 Create new and support existing businesses and employment
- 1.4.7 Facilitate family history research
- 1.4.8 Provide guided local tours
- 1.4.9 Letting an annex to the property to a local business
- 1.4.10 Sales of related merchandise

1.5 The Funding Package:

1.5.1 Acquiring the long-term lease on Sundial Cottage from The Buccleuch Estates gave the group the much needed momentum to attract funding to make the Project work. Buccleuch Estates then re-roofed the property, showing their commitment to the establishment of the Heritage Centre.

1.5.2 Match funding to the Leader funds was as follows:

Dumfries & Galloway Nithsdale Area Committee	£9,094.50 (Public)
Legacy of former member	£5,000.00 (Private)
Work by Group Members (£14/hour)	£8,288.00 (In kind)
Work by Group Members (£16/hour)	£800.00 (In kind)

Total £23,182.50

1.6 Leader:

1.6.1 The grant requested from Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Programme was **£14,255.50.**

2. THE PROJECT EXPERIENCE

2.1 Timescale:

- 2.1.1 With the LEADER funding in place in July 2012 the group set out to get the renovations underway. The project started on 1st August 2012 when the first tenders were sought. The first job to be carried out was the damp proofing in mid August.
- 2.1.2 The key milestones timescale set out in the application quickly went out of sync. This was due to waiting for the tenders from tradesmen for the bigger jobs in the renovation and the length of time taken to complete the work. This has had a knock-on effect on meeting the rest of the objectives of the project as they depend on having a base from which to work. On saying this, the group met on a very regular basis and key players in the project have spent a lot of their time overseeing the work and pushing it along. The project was finally completed on 30th November 2013.

2.2 How the Project was delivered:

- 2.2.1 While the renovation work on the cottage was on-going, a public meeting was held in November 2012 where a paper was produced setting out the aims and objectives of the Project as seen at that time. Twenty local people attended this meeting to get an update on progress.
- 2.2.2 The group set about producing the interpretation boards for the house. A workshop was arranged to decide on the number of boards and the information required. The production of the panels included gathering the information, checking the authenticity, agreeing the design, getting the right photos, proof-reading numerous times before finally taking delivery of them to hang in the house. As the cottage is quite small it was agreed early on that the panels would not be permanently attached to the walls to allow for temporary exhibitions etc.
- 2.2.3 The room in the Cottage where it is likely that Joseph Thomson was born has been named the Thomson room and tells the story of his and his family's life. In this room there are the interpretation panels, the box bed has been re-instated and various African artefacts are displayed. Talks on Africa and Joseph Thomson's journeys are an integral part of this room. More detailed research on his life is ongoing and will be included in the website.
- 2.2.4 A very successful trial visit by a group of infants from the local school took place in June 2013 while a number of individuals and families have also visited during the summer. They were very interested in some of the original features still in the house, like the washhouse and boiler, the box bed and the little cupboard in the community room which housed the chamber pot long before a

toilet was installed in the house. The idea that you used an outside toilet and had a pig in the garden is of great interest to the children.

- 2.2.5 A group of pupils from Wallacehall Academy completing a project on Joseph Thomson and another 50 pupils from Penpont Primary visited in early December.
- 2.2.6 A member of the group and his son re-instated a box bed in the recess of the Joseph Thomson room using traditional tools and methods. This was done during a workshop where the heritage of the local area was on show in the rest of the house.
- 2.2.7 Three computers have been purchased and set up for the use of the community along with a printer and other equipment for individuals and community groups to use. Training sessions and the use of the rooms for meetings are being offered.
- 2.2.8 Most of the renovation work in the cottage was carried out by local businesses.
- 2.2.9 Locals and visitors have been assisted in their family history research as well as two guided walks having been organised.
- 2.2.10 The group is investigating a range of merchandise to sell and also setting up a register of local artists and craft workers who wish to use the cottage for exhibitions and a place to sell their work.

2.3 Marketing

- 2.3.1 Events already organised – the public meeting in November 2012, fund-raising quizzes, the trial open day in September 2013, the Day of the Region involvement and more recently the archive browsing afternoons have all been advertised locally by posters displayed in the local shop and tearoom (see copies of posters).
- 2.3.2 Prior the trial open day, a leaflet drop throughout the three communities of Penpont, Keir and Tynron was organised. This leaflet also asked for volunteers to become involved in the project (see copy of leaflet).
- 2.3.3 Talks and DVDs have been shown at meetings of local WRI groups, Friendship Clubs and Church functions.
- 2.3.4 The website, incorporating the original heritage site has been discussed and is about to be set up with appropriate contact e-mail addresses.
- 2.3.5 A 'Friends of Joseph Thomson' section has been started.
- 2.3.6 A Facebook page is also being looked at as a way of advertising events, getting feedback from the local community and from further afield etc.
- 2.3.7 Word of mouth is one of the best ways to advertise the project.

2.4 Who benefitted from the Project

- 2.4.1 Within the timescale of the project, the group has been able to attract a wide age range of people into the cottage.
- 2.4.2 The school children who attended with their parents benefitted from parental enthusiasm (their parents keen to share their memories with their offspring), whereas the visits from school were the result of project work on Victorian Times. The infants were given a most stimulating guided tour by one of our committee members, a retired head teacher. This was filmed as evidence of our plans to cater for all age groups. Older children visited in groups with their teachers and readily enjoyed the presentation about the life of Joseph Thomson after which they were given an informative guided tour of the house and garden by three of our committee. The film taken acted as an excellent follow up to the visit of the younger children. Schools are able to avail themselves of suitable archive materials including photographs and film to use before and after visits to the Thomson house.
- 2.4.3 There are over 150 DVDs of local interest available to view within the new Local Heritage Centre as well as many archive scrap books and photographs.
- 2.4.4 During the organised open days many local residents came to view the cottage and reminisce over photographs and artefacts. This brought people together and gave them a feeling of inclusion. An example of this was a 92 year old lady whose husband's grandfather has been a prominent member of the Rifle Volunteers whose arms and ammunition had been kept in the armoury. Her son is one of our volunteers who brought along his great-grandfather's sword and gave visitors a great insight into the activities of the Volunteers.
- 2.4.5 A number of the volunteers who have help the project were either unemployed or in part time work and have since gone on to find other employment. Others continue to volunteer within the wider community.
- 2.4.6 The majority of the committee are retired persons who are committed to the Project and keen to involve others.

2.5 Final Budget

- 2.5.1 The final claim from LEADER is £14,146.97 which is £108.53 underspent from the original grant of £14,255.50. The reason for this underspend is that the group was able to procure better value equipment late in the project and was unable to request virement within the timescale.

2.5. What Lessons have been learnt

2.5.1 The Group has been amazed by the great variety of skills the committee members have brought to the project along with the great diversity of local talent within the wider community without which the project would not be complete.

2.5.2 The delay in completing the renovations of the cottage and the procuring of equipment has meant that completing all tasks has overrun the end of the project time.

2.5.3. In retrospect the group were totally unaware of the amount of work which would be required to fulfil the criteria set out by LEADER and of the difficulties in maintaining the timescales set out in the application form.

2.6 Project mainstreamed or transferred

2.6.1 The Local Heritage Centre will continue to be managed by a committee of volunteers.

2.7 Sustainability of the Project

2.7.1 The projected running costs for the project for 2014/2015 is as follows:

Rent	£100
Insurance	300
Website	55
Telephone	360
Internet	100
Electricity	450
Postage	25
Sundries	100
TOTAL	£1490

2.7.2 Grants from the Local Area Committee of Dumfries & Galloway Council are being applied for running costs; the Volunteering Support Fund has been approached for support for volunteers to collate and record the archives.

2.7.3 Regular fundraising activities such as quiz nights, open nights are being organised.

2.7.4 Donations from visitors/users of the centre will be encouraged.

2.7.5 A 'Friend's of Joseph Thomson' scheme has been set up with the friends being kept in regular contact with the centre and informed of all activities planned.

2.7.6 Sponsorships from local companies are being invited to assist with advertising, assisting with the production of merchandise such as postcards, maps etc.

2.7.7 Rooms to be rented out for training/small group meetings for a small charge.

2.7.8 Family history facilities and courses offered for a fee.

- 2.7.9 Sale of merchandise, DVDs etc. Local artists and craft producers are to be offered the opportunity to exhibit their work for a percentage of their sales.
- 2.7.10 A volunteer register to staff the house, provide tours within the community etc. The long term plan is to create part-time employment to take on these tasks.

2.8 Leader issue – Strengthen community spirit and civic pride

- 2.8.1 The strengthening of the community spirit has already begun with the positive response to the completion of the house shown on the trial open day, the Day of the Region activities and other open sessions. The communities served by the Project are aware of the tenacity of the original group members to stay the course for 14 years and acknowledge the hard work done by many people, whether volunteering to do practical tasks within the house and garden to donating furniture, artefacts etc.
- 2.8.2 The facilities within the cottage are available to all age ranges.

29 December 2013

