

KISIMUL CASTLE



HISTORIC SCOTLAND
ALBA AOSMHOR

MONUMENT UPDATE - Aug 2012

Issue no. 5



The services refit of Kisimul Castle was successfully completed in March 2012. The works were delivered on time, on budget, and to the required standard. This project was also delivered safely in compliance with the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007, which aim to integrate health and safety into the management of all projects. The new shop fit out occurred in tandem with the services refit. This has seen an improvement in our spend per visitor figure of 48%.



Historic Scotland undertook an Outreach event with pupils from the local school in June 2012 overlooking Kisimul Castle. The focus for the event was on how lime mortar would have been produced locally on the Island of Barra to build the Castle.



The original lime for building the Castle would have been produced from burning local shell and peat. The pupils got hands on experience of placing the alternate layers of shell and peat in the small kiln HS staff had built on the foreshore. The kiln was then fired and left to burn whilst the pupils were given a tour of the castle to look closely at the historic build mortars. During the course of the event older members of the community came forward with accounts, passed to them by their parents, of lime being produced in this way but on a much larger scale (15 feet diameter fires). These reminiscences have helped HS's understanding of lime production on Barra.



Once the shell had been burnt, the resulting calcium oxide was mixed with cold fresh water resulting in an instantaneous exothermic reaction. This is known as slaking. This image shows the temperature of the slake being taken about 4 minutes after the initial slake. The temp had dropped but was still relatively high 113°C.



The lime putty produced from the slaking process was then mixed with local shell sand to produce lime mortar. A skilled HS stonemason showed the pupils how to build a small section of wall using this mortar and local stone. All this was done with reference to the historic build types observed at the Castle. The children then had the chance to build a portion of wall.

This form of outdoor hands-on education was well received by the pupils, their teachers, and the wider community. HS are keen to repeat this form of event.



In Aug 2012 HS gave a talk to the Clan Macneil Gathering. The themes of the talk were what HS do generally, then more specifically recent works at Kisimul Castle and the lime mortar workshop above. HS would like to thank Rory Macneil and his family for this opportunity to engage further with the community.



The replacement brazier and flambeau installed in Aug 2012 at the top of the tower by HS Specialist Rope Access Team (see image top left). The old brazier dating from c. 1960's had become corroded and was removed by HS some years ago. This new brazier, made to the same pattern, is of stainless steel and is expected to last longer. The flambeau has a bottled gas supply and power supply to provide constant ignition. Initial trials were successful in a strong wind which is a common feature on Barra.



The brazier was unveiled by Alasdair Allan, local Member of the Scottish Parliament. The flambeau was visible during the day from Castlebay, however the full effect was best observed at night.

