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NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND SAVES AT RISK ROYAL PICNIC COTTAGE

- **A picnic spot enjoyed by Queen Victoria saved from ruin**
- **Work commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland has brought the former picnic cottage back into use**
- **Project supported by funding from the NTS USA Foundation**

A picnic spot enjoyed by Queen Victoria on her visits to Balmoral has been saved from ruin by the National Trust for Scotland.

The picnic cottage in woodlands near Linn of Quoich on Mar Lodge Estate, Scotland's largest national nature reserve, close to Braemar, has been restored to its former glory with contractors completing the building work this autumn.

Moxon Architects helped Scotland's largest conservation charity to develop the plans for the restoration work early last year that were well received by Aberdeenshire Council's planning department, with listed building consent granted in September 2023.

Contractors Bruden Joinery were brought on board to carry out the work and started in June 2024.

They initially focused on clearing rubble from inside the dwelling, before repointing mortar and harling on the cottage walls, dismantling dormer windows and installing doors, windows and floors to make it watertight and accessible. In addition to repairing the fabric of the building, a covered wooden porch was added to the exterior of the property to help reinstate the cottage's original features that were discovered during research for the project.

David Frew, National Trust for Scotland Head of Mar Lodge Estate, said: "Our archival research and subsequent archaeological survey showed that there used to be a porch on the property, with our archaeologists discovering post holes for the structure during research on site. We have tried to reinstate this sympathetically with the help of our architects Moxon and archival architectural drawings, so that it's in keeping with the rest of the property and the 19th century period when it was originally constructed.

"The cottage, built by Princess Louise, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, around 1850, was saved from disrepair after it was placed on the Buildings at Risk register. The property was in a poor state when the Trust acquired Mar Lodge Estate in 1975, and subsequent works had taken place to stabilise its condition including fixing walls and installing a new roof and shingles in the past. The building is a fascinating look back at how the royals used to spend their free time and we're incredibly proud to see it

restored to how it was in its heyday when Queen Victoria and the royal family would holiday in Balmoral.

“We’re excited to welcome visitors to experience the new cottage when it officially reopens in 2025 where they will be able to engage with its history. New information boards will be added, and specially commissioned furniture created where they can relax and immerse themselves in the surrounding woodland and nature.

“I’d like to say a huge thank you to our members and supporters as well as the generosity of our colleagues at the NTS USA Foundation who have made this project possible. This project contributes to the Trust’s objective, outlined in our 10- year Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone strategy, to stabilise and improve the condition of our heritage buildings and structures, ensuring their longevity through restoration and conservation to ensure that they survive for the enjoyment of future generations.”

The cottage is accessed by a footpath leading from the car park at the end of the public road on the estate, with 15 parking spaces currently available.

Andrew Macpherson, Director of Moxon Architects, said: “As an architecture practice deeply invested in the region's heritage, we have proudly worked with The National Trust for Scotland to preserve a significant piece of local heritage on the Mar Lodge Estate. Our comprehensive survey of the existing structure enabled us to adopt an approach that required minimal interventions while being durable and resilient – something key to the building’s remote location, challenging climate, and role as a visitor attraction. We worked closely with the Local Planning Authority and conservation specialists to successfully balance preservation and modernisation to safeguard the building’s history and ensure its 'fairytale' charm remains intact for years to come.”

Further information about Mar Lodge Estate is available on the National Trust for Scotland website, <https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/mar-lodge-estate>.

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Editor’s Notes:

Images: <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/PbRMw93k33>

Moxon has restored the cottage using local materials, sourcing timber shingles through a local contractor to blend with historic original features and the local landscape. In addition to repairing the fabric of the building, the architects have sympathetically reinstated the wooden covered entrance porch to the exterior of the property, an original feature of the cottage discovered through historic survey drawings during archival research for the project.

Moxon has also re-installed 12 pane timber sash and case windows, complete with a new timber front door to match existing timber details, making the cottage both watertight and accessible. Structural repairs carried out include repointing external and internal stonework with lime mortar and harling on the cottage walls. Steel conservation rooflights have been fitted on the rear elevation of the building to maximise natural light entering the bothy.

Internally, timber flooring has been laid over the solum on new floor joists, as well as repairing and replacing existing hearth stones where required. The existing timber roof structure has been sanded and hand-oiled for an exposed, dark-timber oil finish. Original fireplaces and chimneys have also been restored to working condition.

Project Team

Architect: Moxon Architects

Client: Nation Trust Scotland / Mar Lodge

About Moxon

Founded in 2004, Moxon has attracted major clients in a variety of sectors, from national rail providers to leading cultural institutions. Among them: Transport for London, Hauser & Wirth and the City of Westminster.

The common threads are bold vision and versatility. Moxon approaches each project with fresh eyes, first understanding the needs and ambitions of the client, and then striving to elevate them. The result is distinctly individual work, clear in its purpose and appropriate to its context.

Moxon prides itself on a diverse team that allows the practice to provide multi-disciplinary solutions for clients in any category – commercial, residential, product design, or public. The practice is committed to sustainability and beauty throughout each project.

The practice is split across its two offices in London and in Aberdeenshire.

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.