

The recovering of the roofs over the Principal rooms of West Dean College is progressing well.

The scaffold structure for the first phase of the works was erected at the beginning of the year and the first roofs opened up for inspection by mid-February. The scaffold for the phase 2 works is commencing and by the end of May the next set of scaffold roof trusses will have been craned into place.

The roofs are a mixture of lead and slate with several large lantern lights over key areas such as the main staircase and the Library. New Welsh slates are being used where new are required and any salvaged Ffestiniog and Penryhn slates are being grouped together and being reinstated on various roofs. Milled lead is being used on all the roofs where new lead is required although where previously cast lead this is being melted down and reused in particular situations and locations.

As each roof is opened up the archaeologist visits to date and see if there is any historical information that can be accumulated to add to the West Dean Archives. There have been a few items i.e. a newspaper clipping, a map and a book that have been found in the roof spaces. Charred timbers are visible as a result of a fire in 1899 and have been photographed and recorded over the main stair

The rainwater dispersal has been rationalised to remove the water from the roofs as quickly and by the most direct route possible, New Lead hoppers are being designed in certain locations and existing repaired and reused where possible. A lead motif design has been designed by a student at the College and this will be used to embellish some hoppers.

The coping stones are a mixture of Portland stone and pre cast moulded roman cement stones. Repairs are being carried out where possible and in some instances new precast copings are being introduced all made up in new moulds. The galleted flintwork is being repaired locally and the masonry pinned and repointed as necessary.

Works are proceeding well with at present more than 10 roofs in various stages of repair. The programme is tight and there are challenges every day, many of which need immediate attention to keep the project on programme. The large roof lantern light over the main stair is a classic example where the steels supporting the load are undersized, deflecting and rusting as a direct result of water ingress through the roof covering. This only became apparent when the roof structure was exposed and a solution is now in place to repair this but it has taken time to inspect, record, measure and find a proposal that works within the confined space ensuring the integrity of the historic fabric is maintained and the charred timbers of the 19th century fire retained.

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