

## Duff House - Collaborative Working



I started in post as General manager last June, so I've been in post for 9 months already and thoroughly enjoying myself. I have been in Scotland for the last 15 years, after leaving my native London and have been working as an Art researcher, curator and most recently educator for historic houses and museums.

I am passionate about historic buildings, architecture and the decorative arts, as well as social history, because without people and their stories, studying the past would be a bit dull. Of course the stunning architecture of Duff House is a huge bonus to working here but I like to think that the craft skills expressed in the building itself encourages the staff to ensure that we offer our visitors and the local community an outstanding experience too.

One of my challenges is how to encourage repeat visitors to the house and to attract new audiences. To a certain extent this can be addressed by providing a stimulating and constantly changing programme of events and activities and this is something that in my opinion has always been provided.

However long term-planning is needed and to achieve that goal I am working with colleagues in the Education and Recreation department Arts Development Team together with Duff House's strategic partners, the National Galleries of Scotland and Historic Scotland.

One positive aspect of the partnership is having access to the varied training, expertise and experience of their staff. Historic Scotland is responsible for the building and maintains the historic fabric through its on going programme of conservation works.

Staff based at their head quarters in Edinburgh and also from Fort George near Inverness has given talks as part of our regular Winter Lecture series on subjects as diverse as lighthouses and decorative cast ironwork.

The National Galleries will continue to offer us excellent loan exhibitions such as the wonderful portrait 'Portrait of Mrs Markham (Daisy Grant)', painted 1857 by her father Francis Grant, one of Scotland's most successful Victorian painters: and a pair of portraits by Thomas Gainsborough, of Robert and Selena Thistlewayte, now hanging in the Grand Drawing Room.

Just finished is the exhibition 'Home -grown Talent' which featured the work of local artists who have benefited from Aberdeenshire Council's Visual Artists' Award Scheme.

The exhibition included works in mixed media by fourteen artists and we hope to make this an annual event. We want to create a new space for focussing on the Arts in Aberdeenshire and celebrating the work of Aberdeenshire artists past and present. We hope to appoint a researcher this summer to work on this project. Another aspect will be to look at the grounds and how we can improve this space.

This is an important part of our development plan because it will explore ways to make the house relate better to its immediate setting. (i.e. the local landscape and community).

This is also important because the Duff family gave the house into care of the local community and the history of the house and its grounds can offer so much in the way of unexplored natural resources.

*Rachel Kennedy, General Manager, Duff House*