

In October 2016 several enthusiastic members of Lowick Heritage Group, under the leadership of Phillip Hanson, began a project to conserve the remains of the Dryburn Limekiln. The structure has been scheduled as a Grade 2 listed building by Heritage England and is situated about 200m east of 'Doll's House' at the junction of Eelwell Road and the B6525. The derelict cottages at the roadside once served as homes for the lime workers. The ultimate aim of the project is to make the site accessible to the public and to provide the principal focal point along a proposed 'Heritage Trail' around the village of Lowick.

The Dryburn Limekiln was one of several that were in operation around Lowick from the early 18th until the late 19th Centuries. Coal, together with limestone was prevalent in the area and was relatively easily accessible. Limestone and coal were the essential components for producing quicklime for use as a soil conditioner on the fields and for use in buildings as lime mortar. As many as 4000 people may have worked in and around Lowick during this period providing custom for the local pubs and healthy attendances at church.

The Dryburn kiln is a monumental structure and was one of two kilns that operated on the north bank of the Dryburn but probably not at the same time. The feature that makes it somewhat unusual is the presence of four entrances, one at each cardinal compass point. Wild vegetation is growing in and around the kiln, together with strong rooted plants growing within the stonework. It was felt by those involved in the project that the vegetation, together with exposure to the weather, was endangering the structure and action was urgently required to ensure that the kiln survived for many more years to come.

As a scheduled structure it was necessary to consult Northumberland County Council before any work could begin on the stonework itself. Several conditions are applied, via the Council, to ensure that any work done is consistent with the requirements of Heritage England. In the meantime a professional, non-invasive structural survey was conducted together with ground clearance of wild vegetation. As a consequence of clearing the vegetation a magnificent view of the limekiln is now available from several points along Eelwell Road. These images show the outcome of the vegetation clearance.



One of the conditions imposed by the Council was that an archaeological survey be performed prior to the commencement of any work on the structure. Members of the Archaeology section of Lowick Heritage Group under the guidance of Dr. Kristian Pedersen of Edinburgh University and using equipment bought with a grant from the EDF Barmoor Windfarm Community Fund, have spent many hours excavating around the site. As is often the case, our archaeology has asked more questions than it has provided answers. The dig revealed several Victorian artefacts, and has uncovered a cobbled pavement immediately to the west of the kiln, possibly a turning area for hand pulled and horse drawn wagons. We suspect that the cobbled surface will have joined the kiln to the road near the cottages. Five deep post holes at the main south entrance to the kiln suggest a possible platform for loading the wagons with quicklime. The purpose of shallow troughs at the base of both the south and west walls of the kiln have baffled even the experts!



A second condition of the Council required an ecological survey of the area to determine the flora and fauna, especially for the presence of rare species. We know from photographic evidence that great crested newts are present. In addition a wide variety of birds and butterflies are regularly seen at the site.