

SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE

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Dumfries House saved for the nation

Against one of the toughest deadlines in the history of heritage, SAVE's campaign to preserve Dumfries House, its magnificent contents and beautiful 2000 acre estate has reached a triumphant conclusion. The intervention of HRH The Prince of Wales with the stated intent of setting up a trust to own and open the house to the public, provides Dumfries House with a secure future of the best possible kind. It completes the financial package needed to secure the cancellation of the Christie's sale due to take place on July 12 & 13 at King Street, London.

SAVE's initial plan for the house was drawn up with Kit Martin, the well-known rescuer of endangered historic houses, and developed into a detailed business plan by local surveyor Mark Gibson.

The SAVE campaign received its first initial boost from the Art Fund with an unprecedented pledge of £2million, the Garfield Weston Foundation (£1million) and the Monument Trust (£4million, subsequently increased to a magnificent £9million). Further funds have been raised with the approval of a grant of £7million from the NHMF and £5million from Historic Scotland. The shortfall has been covered by the Prince. Further funding will come from development of adjacent land, next to the town of Cumnock, with a model development through the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment.

SAVE's President Marcus Binney says "SAVE has fought many battles, but we have never had a success such as this. It saves not only the whole estate and one of the finest collections of furniture made by the greatest name in the whole of history of furniture, Thomas Chippendale. With this comes the best collection of contemporary 18th century Scottish furniture by the leading Scottish cabinet makers of the day. This furniture was all commissioned or bought for the house, has always remained there, and is all in superb condition. As Christies handsome catalogue shows it is all superbly documented and would have fetched record prices at auction as collection of such provenance and quality has come on the market in many years."

SAVE extends thanks to both Christies and John Bute for leaving open a window for realistic pre-sale bids till just three weeks before the sale.

SAVE wishes to pay special thanks to the many people in the town of Cumnock who have supported the campaign with £1 donations to the fighting fund, through the Kyle and Carrick Civic Society. In two afternoons more than a thousand signatures and a £1000 were collected in the High Street and the current total stands at £1250. Other important pledges to the fighting fund have come from a number of generous individuals.

Adam Wilkinson Secretary of SAVE says "we have had fantastic support both locally and nationally in the form of donations and people's time and energy, in the belief that the saving of the Dumfries House can provide a major boost to Cumnock and the countryside around it while giving the public access to a cultural gem".

James Knox and Mark Gibson, who formed SAVE's Ayrshire action group said "this is a stunning result for Ayrshire, with the saving of Dumfries House there is now a cluster of internationally important buildings including Adam's Culzean Castle and the neighbouring Auchinlech House. The heritage led regeneration will breathe new life into this hard hit area."

ENDS

Notes to editors

DUMFRIES House is a complete and undisturbed work of the Adam brothers, John and Robert and James -exquisitely built, perfectly symmetrical in plan, with ornamental plasterwork of great delicacy and fine marble fireplaces.

It contains, intact, Chippendale's first important commission, consisting of an extensive set of mahogany chairs, sofas, giltwood overmantels, girandoles and pier glasses, exotically crested rococo four poster beds, and towel rails, chamber pot cupboards and trays -the full range of kit that could be bought or commissioned from England's most famous cabinetmaker.

The house was commissioned by the 4th Earl of Dumfries, a man of exceptional taste with a fine picture collection. His new drawing room was designed round a magnificent set of Gobelins tapestries given to his cousin the Earl of Stair by Louis XIV while ambassador to France. Dumfries House also contains furniture by the best Scottish makers, notably Francis Brodie, William Mathie and Alexander Peter.

Sebastian Pryke, an expert on the Edinburgh furniture makers, says: "There is more documented mid-18th-century Scottish furniture here than in the whole of the rest of the world."

The correspondence shows that Lord Dumfries consulted the Earl of Hopetoun about the design; he in turn wrote to the high priest of Palladianism, Lord Burlington, shortly before his death. Robert Adam came to stay at old Leifnorris Castle in 1754 as the guest of the Earl for three months, laying out the foundations.

The house stands in an Arcadian park with a handsome three-arch bridge over the River Lugar. It could be straight out of a Claude Lorraine landscape painting, with its two sets of John Adam lodges, an ice house and a Gothic temple on a hill by Robert Adam.

Dumfries House passed by marriage to the Butes, who in the 19th century were to build two of the most astonishing houses in Britain, Cardiff Castle and Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute. Dumfries House became a dower house, left untouched until the 3th Marquess, feeling that it was the only one of his houses where he could be warm and comfortable, commissioned Robert Weir Schultz to extend it. With great subtlety Schultz doubled the depth of the wings, introducing domed corridors and a gallery to display all the Gobelins tapestries.

The SAVE plan for the estate showed how the major interiors could be opened to the public, while ancillary accommodation, including the wings, the home farm and the laundry be used as holiday accommodation, generating income to look after the house. Up to 26 apartments can be created in this way with no damaging alterations to the fabric or fine interiors. Further income was to come from visitors and events. The report was written by **Mark Gibson** who has rescued the nearby 2000 acre Craigengillan estate from dereliction, and supported by **The Pilgrim Trust** and the **Georgian Group**

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