



Coquet Island

Populated by breeding birds, including 90% of the UK population of the protected Roseate Tern, its natural significance overlays an historical legacy of isolated occupation and Christian retreat for those at sea.

A monastic cell already existed there in the 7th century. St. Henry of Coquet (d.1127) lived there as a hermit monk, after which there was a Benedictine presence from the 12th century to the dissolution of the monasteries; the Dukes of Northumberland have owned the island since 1753.

KEY PROJECT INFO

Client:



Skillset: High-Risk Assessment
Stonemasonry
Repointing and Consolidation
Joinery and Plastering
Roofing and Guttering

The Scottish was prompted the building of a lookout tower which in 1841 was adapted into a lighthouse. The first lighthouse keeper was William Darling, brother of heroine Grace Darling; it is still operated today by Trinity House.

Isolation offers safe sanctuary for the birds, but it has caused problems for the building on the Heritage at risk register. Despite the surreal location, works on the island required the arrangement and consent from a range of authorities (Northumberland Estates, Trinity House, RSPB, Northumberland County Council, English Heritage, Natural England).

The necessary repairs called for extensive re-pointing of the masonry, comprehensive overhaul of external joinery and rainwater goods and upgrading the 19th century lighthouse keeper's cottage as essential accommodation for the RSPB wardens.

Working to a schedule of work by adeptness of logistical planning would have frightened off many other contractors. Examples of constraints included working to tide timetables; load capacity of boats when transporting men and materials to the Island; the availability of fresh water; being banished during the nesting season; re-scheduling at short notice when the weather turned.

Risk and method strategy were carried out naturally as you had to think on your feet, and was constantly monitored, sometimes you don't plan for surprise; rough seas out of nowhere were a constant danger boarding and unloading the boat of the materials and scaffolding that we needed for the project.

There was also a risk of being stuck on the island and this did happen on one or two occasions, to get around this we had to take extra provisions at the start including heating, food, and fresh water. We learnt to think about the risks associated with construction on a different level, due to the severity and hazards of this project, this also had a great impact on the team both on the island and for the staff onshore, constant liaising and planning was the key to success.



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Though management of a contract in these circumstances is an achievement, the quality of the conservation work has in no way been compromised, nor has the philosophical justification for the decisions about techniques or specification. It has been an exemplary exercise in its preparation and co-operation of stakeholders, showing that heritage at risk can be safeguarded and sustainable in even these conditions, but especially in contract management and conservation expertise, despite everything thrown in the way (sometimes literally).

