

# **Mavisbank House saved for the nation**

10 May 2024

Thanks to NHMF funding, Landmark Trust will acquire and stabilise Mavisbank House in Midlothian – 50 years after a devastating fire left the 300-year-old building and its fascinating story in a critical condition.

The Landmark Trust has been awarded £5.3million, saving the Category A building, and the heritage it represents, from being lost forever.



Mavisbank House. Credit: Rob McDougall.

## **A fascinating story**

Mavisbank House, just outside Edinburgh, was built by celebrated Scottish architect William Adam in 1723. The house was a summer residence for John Clerk of Penicuik, a leading figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, and signatory of the Act of Union (1707), whose European travels provided the inspiration for its design.

Mavisbank was a pioneering example of a neo-Classical style which William Adam's son Robert Adam and others would develop for Edinburgh's New Town a generation later. Mavisbank was built by a workforce of outstanding Scottish craftspeople whose names and individual contributions are recorded in

remarkable detail in the surviving archive.

In the 19th century, Mavisbank became a ground-breaking mental hospital where reforming Doctor John Batty Tuke developed compassionate approaches to mental illness, including through exercise and gardening. His work to reform the national Lunacy Laws in Parliament helped stop those with poor mental health being regarded as ‘psychological curiosities’ but treated instead as sufferers of illnesses that might be understood and cured.

After the closure of the asylum, Mavisbank was sold and, following a major fire in 1973, it was at risk of demolition. However, volunteers staged an emergency round-the-clock vigil until the decision could be halted. Since then, a number of attempts have been made to secure funding to save the building.



Mavisbank House. Credit: Rob McDougall.

## **A brighter future**

Now, the Landmark Trust have been awarded £5.3m in National Heritage Memorial Fund support to purchase the house, re-establish public and vehicular access via an access road and carry out vital work to stabilise the building.

This funding is the first step in the Landmark Trust’s ambition to use Mavisbank House for residential stays and other uses for public benefit.

Anna Eavis, Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund panel, said: “Mavisbank House is a building of outstanding importance to Scottish and UK national

heritage and the National Heritage Memorial Fund is delighted to make this award to save it from being lost forever. This funding will enable the Landmark Trust to acquire Mavisbank House and safeguard the historic fabric of the Category A building, laying the foundations for a sustainable and brighter future.”

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