The Herculaneum Conservation Project

The Herculaneum Conservation Project (HCP) is a public/private initiative launched in 2001 for the conservation and enhancement of the archaeological site of Herculaneum. This ancient Roman city in Italy was destroyed and buried along with Pompeii by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. It has a history of excavation dating back to the early eighteenth century.

The project was set up by David W. Packard of the Packard Humanities Institute, together with Pietro Giovanni Guzzo of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei, to take the measures necessary to provide a response to the serious condition of the site after decades of neglect. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Director of the British School at Rome, was invited to direct the project, with the guidance of a Scientific Committee of international distinction, with the aim of reversing the phenomenon of spiralling decay that was afflicting the archaeological structures and find long-term strategies that could ensure the survival of this ancient city.

Thanks to donations by the Packard Humanities Institute to reimburse the cost of conservation works carried out within the Soprintendenza’s works programme and through the creation of a small team of conservation specialists that advised the heritage authority, the tide gradually began to turn.

In the summer of 2004 a third partner, the British School at Rome joined HCP and signed a sponsorship agreement with the Soprintendenza that allowed the private partners to provide operational support to the heritage authority. Now able to commission site-works directly and avoid the delays of the procedurally-heavy public-works administrative route, the impact of the injection of external philanthropic support was optimised. A larger project team was established made up of both independent specialists and contractors appointed by the private arm of the collaboration and the public officials working for the Soprintendenza.

The overall aim of the project is to support the Soprintendenza to safeguard and conserve, to enhance, and to advance the knowledge, understanding and public appreciation of the ancient site of Herculaneum and its artefacts. In 2006 the main objectives were better defined (and approved by the scientific committee overseeing the project) as follows:

- to slow down the rate of decay across the entire site so that it can be maintained in future on a sustainable basis;
- to test and implement long-term conservation strategies that are appropriate for Herculaneum and potentially applicable to other, similar sites;
- to provide a basis of documentation of Herculaneum so as to facilitate its future management;
- to acquire new archaeological knowledge about Herculaneum derived as an integral element of the activities devoted to its preservation;
- to conserve, document, publish and improve access to the artefacts found in excavations at Herculaneum;
- to promote greater knowledge of and discussion about Herculaneum among the scientific community, the local population and the general public.

For further information please contact hcp@herculaneum.org
The Herculaneum Centre
Il Centro Herculaneum

The Herculaneum Centre was created by the Associazione Herculaneum, whose partners are the Comune di Ercolano (Ercolano city council), the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei (the local heritage authority) and the British School at Rome (an international research institute already working in the local area).

The objectives of the Centre are:
- to promote the study, preservation and enhancement of the archaeological site of Herculaneum;
- to promote research in the fields of archaeology and history, in conservation and restoration techniques relevant to the site of Herculaneum and similar sites in the area; scientific understanding of ancient construction techniques; and the study of legislation relating to the safeguarding and conservation of archaeological sites;
- to establish a long-term commitment to the promotion of best practices in the conservation of archaeological heritage at an international level;
- to work towards the long-term enhancement of the international cultural profile of both ancient and modern Herculaneum, thereby enriching the experience of visitors to Herculaneum and encouraging them to lengthen their stay;
- to work together with the local community for a programme of Herculaneum-related activities, allowing the local community greater involvement in their own heritage.

Funding has been obtained from the Italian Ministry of Heritage and Culture for an initial three-year programme of activities. Partners in these first activities are the Herculaneum Conservation Project (a conservation project already operating on the site of Herculaneum), ICCROM (an intergovernmental organization dedicated to the conservation of cultural heritage), and Stōa (a Herculaneum-based business school with courses in heritage management). During these first three years the Study Centre is being housed in the historic Villa Campolieto, but will transfer to its permanent headquarters in the Villa Maiuri when restoration works there are completed.

The new Centre is being launched with the advantage of the accumulated experience of its founding partners, its project partners, and its professional and institutional contacts. It is hoped that the new Centre will create a link with the world outside the archaeological site, broadening the positive impact of this unique heritage beyond its physical limits, offering benefits to the local and international communities, allowing even those who are not heritage professionals to share the past, present and – above all – the future of the ancient city of Herculaneum.

By maintaining a constant link to the Herculaneum Conservation Project, various activities proposed for the first three years of the Centre can profit from the knowledge base of its team members, the trials being carried out on site and the results of research carried out on site and international collaborations that already exist.

The activities planned for the first three years (2007-2009) can be divided into three areas:
a) Professional training in archaeological conservation: workshops and continuous professional development, internships, and welcoming professionals to the site, etc.
b) Involving the local community and the general public: exhibitions, workshops and IT resources for teachers, presentations for local people, etc.
c) Research and publications: conferences, publications, etc.

For further information please contact centro@herculaneum.org
Selected project bibliography


archaeological site (Herculaneum, Italy). Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites 8.4: 191-204.


