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SOCIETY

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# Survey Report

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Reference: **Survey Report No. 76**

Author: **G.M. Johnston & Liz McShane**

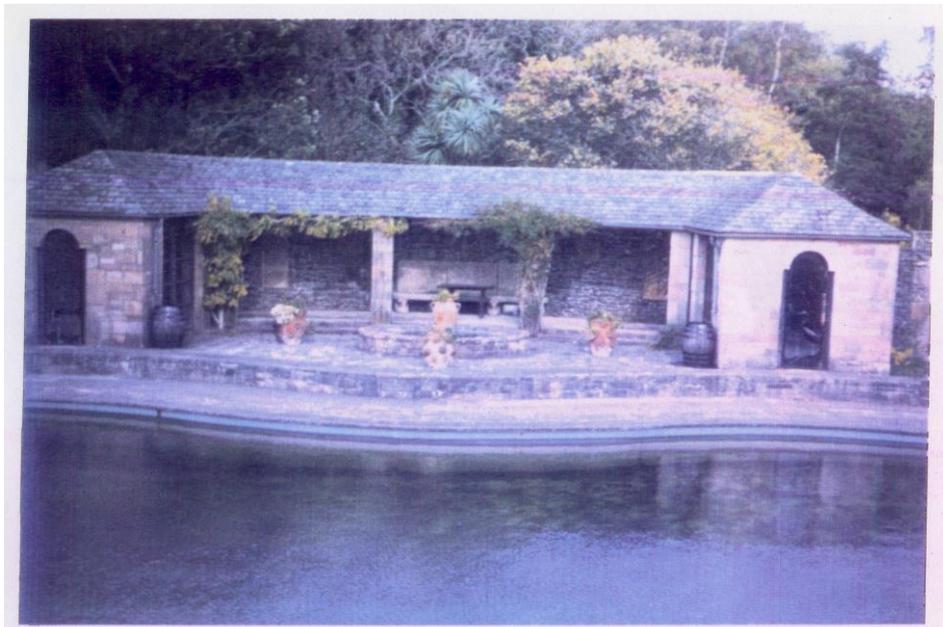
Location:

**Survey of Swimming Pool  
Sea Plantation  
Mount Stewart  
County Down**

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In association with:

 **National Trust**



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Ulster Archaeological Society  
c/o School of Natural and Built Environment  
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Belfast BT7 1NN

Cover illustration: The swimming pool pavilion, c. 1930 *National Trust*

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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at the remains of an abandoned swimming pool at the Sea Plantation, Mount Stewart, County Down. This site forms part of the National Trust Mount Stewart property, but is separated from the remainder of it by the A20 Portaferry Road. The survey was the third in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society (UAS) during 2019.

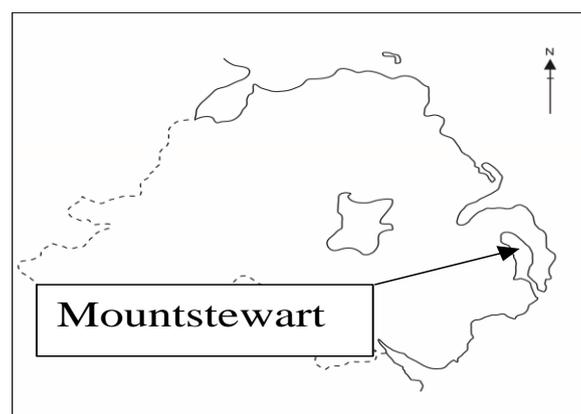


Figure 01: Location map

### 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. Data from the National Trust in the form of photographs, old maps, written records and actual artefacts stored from when the pool was abandoned. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the National Trust and to the archives of the UAS.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The survey of the Swimming pool was undertaken on 18 April 2019. It was carried out by members of the UAS, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to

survey these sites and the Mountstewart Swimming pool was subsequently chosen to be the seventy-sixth of these.

## 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

The area containing the swimming pool is known as the Sea Plantation. It contains several interesting old structures, two of which have surveyed by the society. See UAS Report No.70 Mount Stewart Southern Quadrant Shelter (Stevenson 2018) and a forthcoming report on the nearby Summer House.

## 2.3 Cartographic Evidence

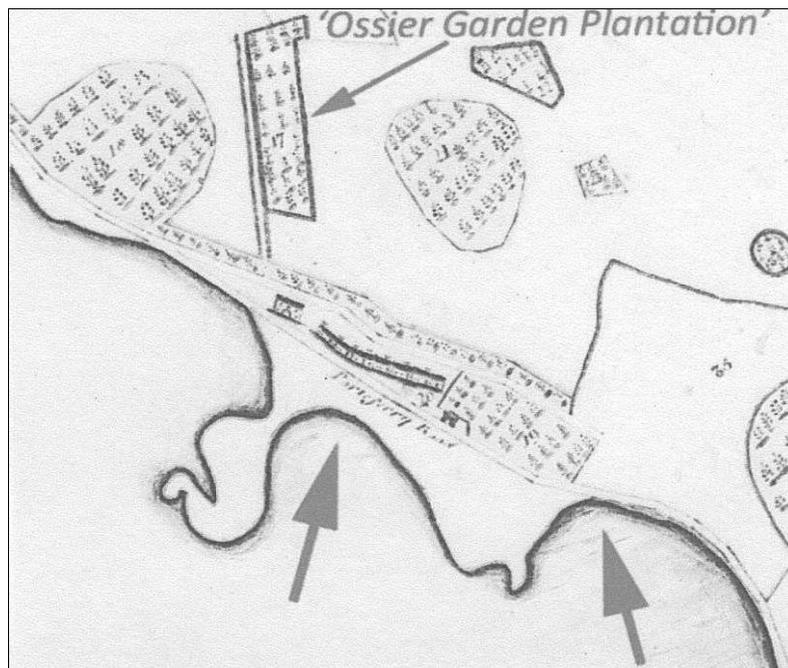


Figure 02: Geddes map of 1790. *National Trust*

The Geddes map (Figure 02) in the Londonderry papers, held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, shows that an area of marshy land to the north of Mount Stewart house (the *Ossier Garden Plantation*) was drained under the Portaferry Road into a linear canal. This is marked on the Second and Third Editions of the OS County Series maps (Figs 03 and 04). The canal in turn was drained via a sluice into Strangford Lough at low tides.

An embankment around this area was constructed between 1793 and 1803 and became known thereafter as the *Sea Plantation*.



Figure 03: OS County Series, County Down, First Edition 1834 map (part of).  
Note the wooden bathing house and canal

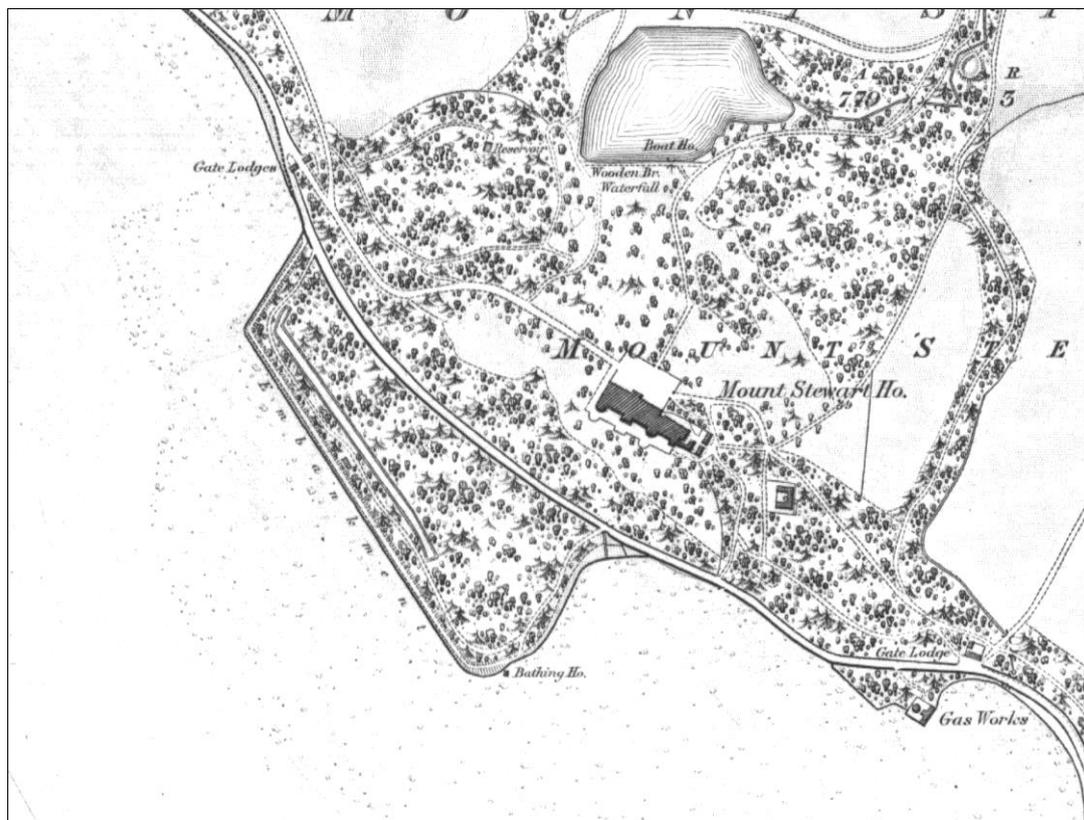


Figure 04: OS County Series, County Down, Second Edition 1858 map (part of).



## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by George Johnston and included Michael Catney, David Craig, June Welsh, Liz McShane, Colin Boyd, Anne MacDermott, Janna McDonald, George Rutherford, Harry Welsh, Kate Crane, Ian Forsythe, Leo van Es and Paula Sandford. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access. Thanks are also due to Mr Andrew Corkill of the National Trust, Mount Stewart.

## 3. 2019 UAS Survey

### 3.1 Site Description

- From the road, the site is reached by a path through mature trees. At the entrance to the site, there is a stone wall on the left, which is curved at the back. It has flattened stones at its edge and shows the remains of a wall joining at right angles.
- The pool complex is a circular site with a depression in the centre. It is 27.34 metres in diameter, with an elevation of 6 metres + OD.
- Stone walls surround the boundary of the site. On the north side there is a low wall covered with vegetation. On the south side there are three tiers of stone walls with flat ground in between them, finishing in a higher boundary wall next to Strangford Lough. This top wall has two gaps in it, corresponding to two entrances to the pool from the Lough side. These spaces are now blocked up. The base wall nearest to the pool consists of large blocks of smooth dressed stone.
- To the west of the site there are thirteen steps of differing widths in two sections, which curve up to a stone archway entrance to the pool from the Strangford Lough side. At the base of the steps, there is some paving and two concrete blocks. The steps are connected to a wall, which borders the pool area and includes a broad structure, 1.22 metres wide. There is also a wall behind this, presently covered in vegetation.
- There is a small area of wet ground near the tiered walls which may be the location of a valve to drain the pool.
- The Strangford Lough side area outside the pool has the concrete base of a revolving summer house, previously surveyed by UAS (forthcoming).
- From the Lough there is a path to the wooded area at the entrance to the pool. A low stone wall separates the path from this area. There is a memorial cross to six people, including Mount Stewart staff, who were lost in a boating accident in April 1895.

### 3.2 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings and elevations, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

### 3.3 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings and elevations were completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:500 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film, secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing. Vegetation from nettles to trees 30 cm in diameter prevented more survey points being taken.

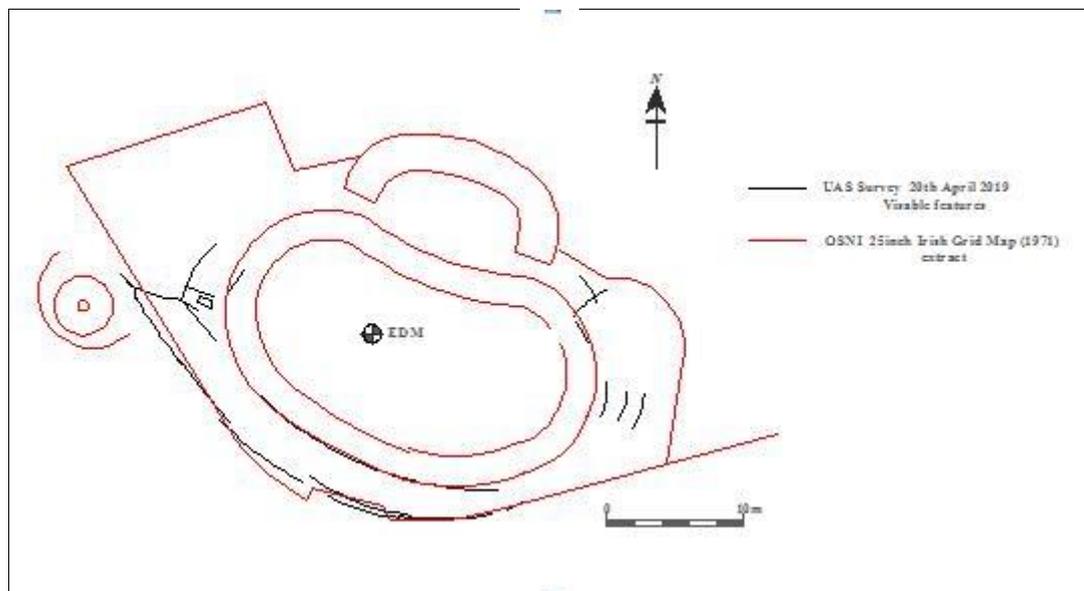


Figure 07: Swimming Pool plan aligned with OSNI 1971

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh G600* 8 megapixel digital camera and a photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 18th April. In this case a slightly different approach has been used, as the National Trust has provided photographs of the site from its early days up to when it was abandoned. In the report, where possible, the old photographs have been paired with the new survey photos, taken from the same spot as the old ones. The result gives a quick visual idea of what will be required to bring the site back to its former glory. The remains of walls and other features are indicated on old National Trust photographs. These are not dated but are likely to be from the 1930s, probably taken by Lady Rose, held at the Public Record Office of Northern

Ireland, with copies held by the National Trust attributed here accordingly. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.

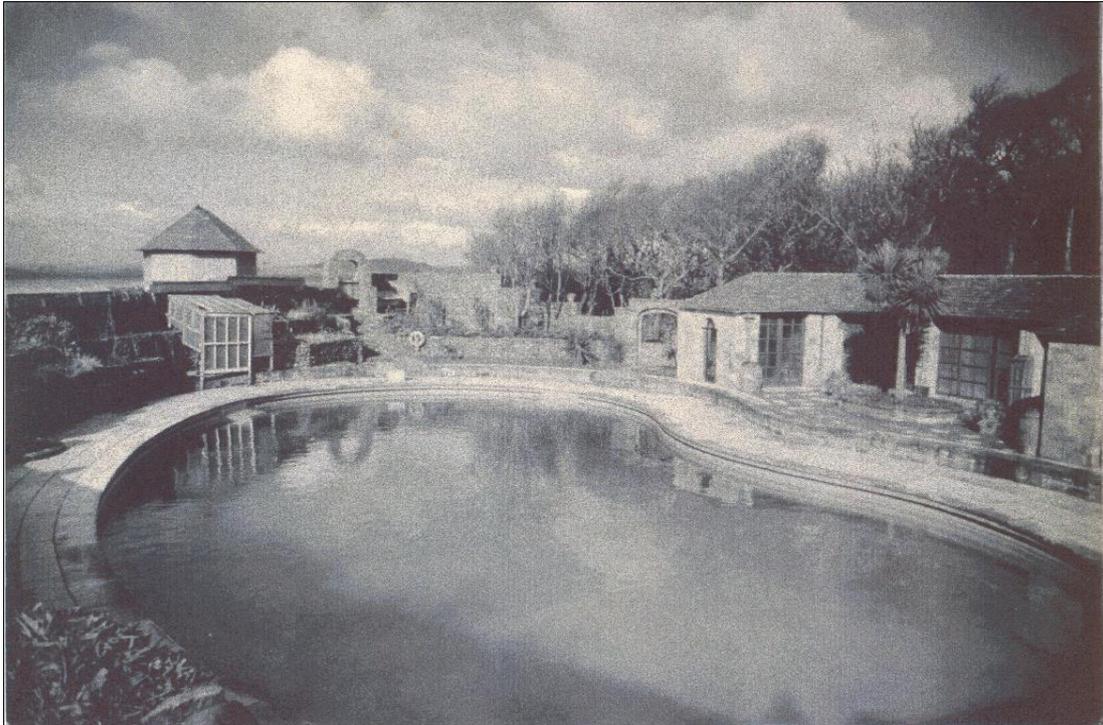


Figure 08: Looking north-west towards the diving board and the arched gateway leading to the sea wall and the summer house. The following features are not visible on the survey photo: the glass house like structure; the arch at the gable end of the pavilion; the stone structure to the right of the arched gate. *National Trust*



Figure 09: Same view as Figure 08 in 2019.



Figure 10: A low level view looking north-west directly across the pool to the diving board. *National Trust*



Figure 11: The same view as Figure 10 in 2019.



Figure 12: View from diving board across the pool, looking east. *National Trust*



Figure 13: The same view as Figure 12 in 2019.

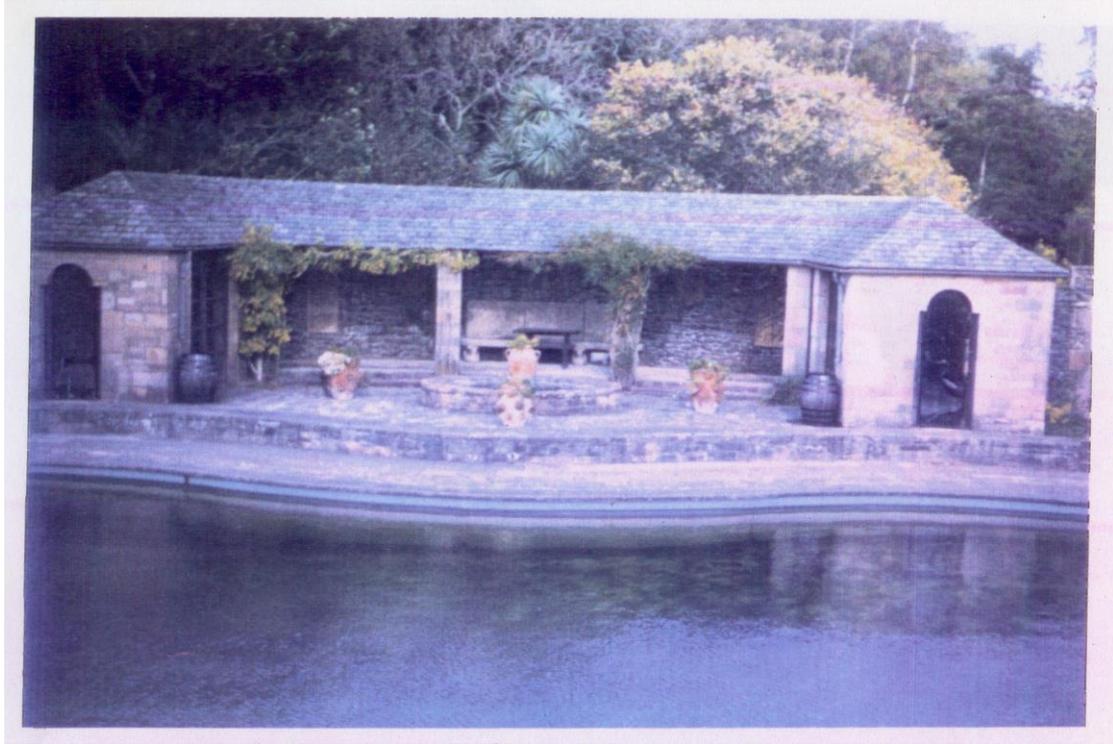


Figure 14: The pavilion looking north from high up on the terraces opposite.  
*National Trust*



Figure 15: The same view as Figure 14 in 2019

When the pavilion was demolished, the stonework was recovered and preserved and is currently held by the National Trust at the Mount Stewart estate.



Figure 16: Pavilion stonework preserved at Mount Stewart



Figure 17: Western end of the Pavilion, showing glass doors in situ. *National Trust*

The glass doors of the Pavilion have also been preserved by the National Trust and are currently held at the Mount Stewart estate farm buildings.



Figure 18: Preserved glass doors from the Pavilion, now stored at Mount Stewart



Figure 19: View through the southern arched gate, looking towards the northern entrance arch above the diving board. *National Trust*

The wooden doors from the arched gateways have been preserved by the National Trust at the Mount Stewart estate.



Figure 20: Preserved wooden doors from the arched gateways



Figure 21: View of the revolving summer house, c. 1930, looking north. *National Trust*



Figure 22: 2019 view of revolving summer house area

Figure 23 (below): A composite photograph, looking north-west, of the Pavilion before it was demolished (*National Trust*). Today nothing remains of the window arch. The following UAS survey photographs show the limit of the walls towards the pavilion and relate to the walls at the west end of the Pavilion.

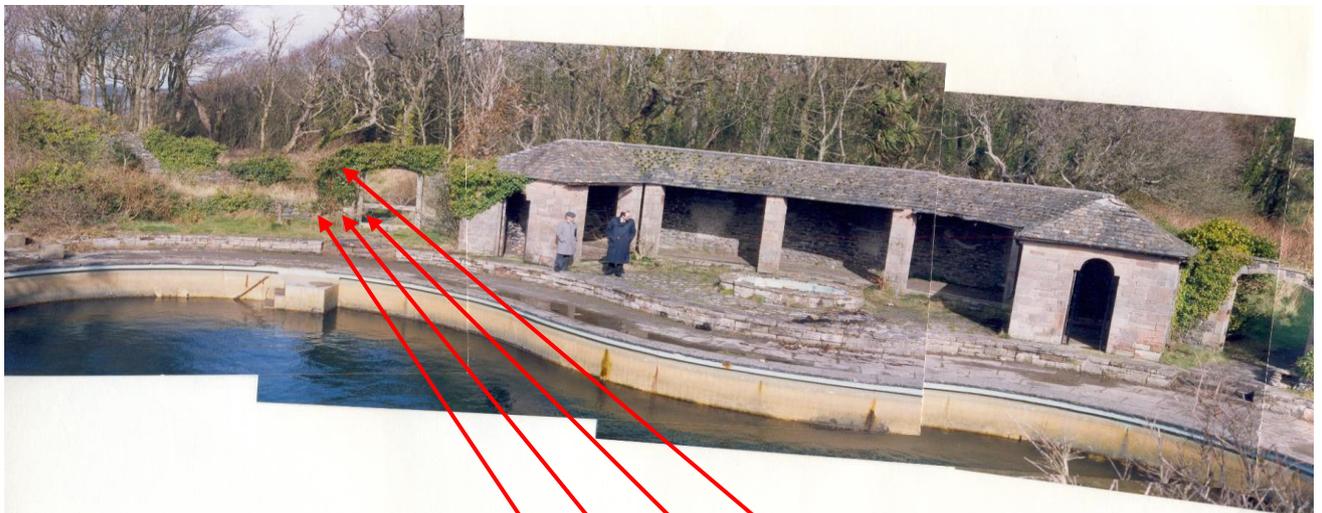


Figure 24 (below): End of the planter wall

Figure 25 (below): Longitudinal view of wall

Figure 26 (below): Wall joining the planter wall and the back wall.

Figure 27: (below): End of the back wall



Figure 24: End of the planter wall



Figure 25: Longitudinal view of wall



Figure 26: End of the back wall



Figure 27: Wall joining the planter wall and the back wall

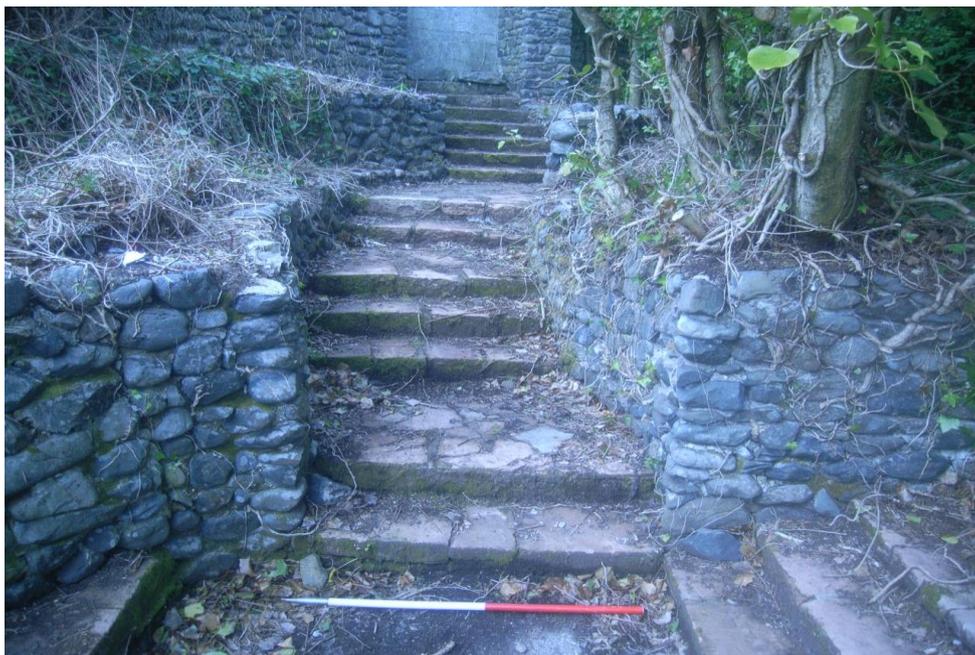


Figure 28: Steps leading to the northern arched gate, looking north-west



Figure 29: Pool side view of the northern arched gate, looking north-west



Figure 30: View of the Diving Board in the 1930s. Note the archway and stone wall, which have now been demolished and the plant post on top of the wall. *National Trust*



Figure 31: Base of the diving board, looking east



Figure 32: View of the boundary wall and the top terrace to the south of the northern arched gate



Figure 33: View of the pool and steps being cleaned. The high quality stonework is evident. *National Trust*

Figure 34 (below): The pool area. (*National Trust*), with associated 2019 UAS photographs

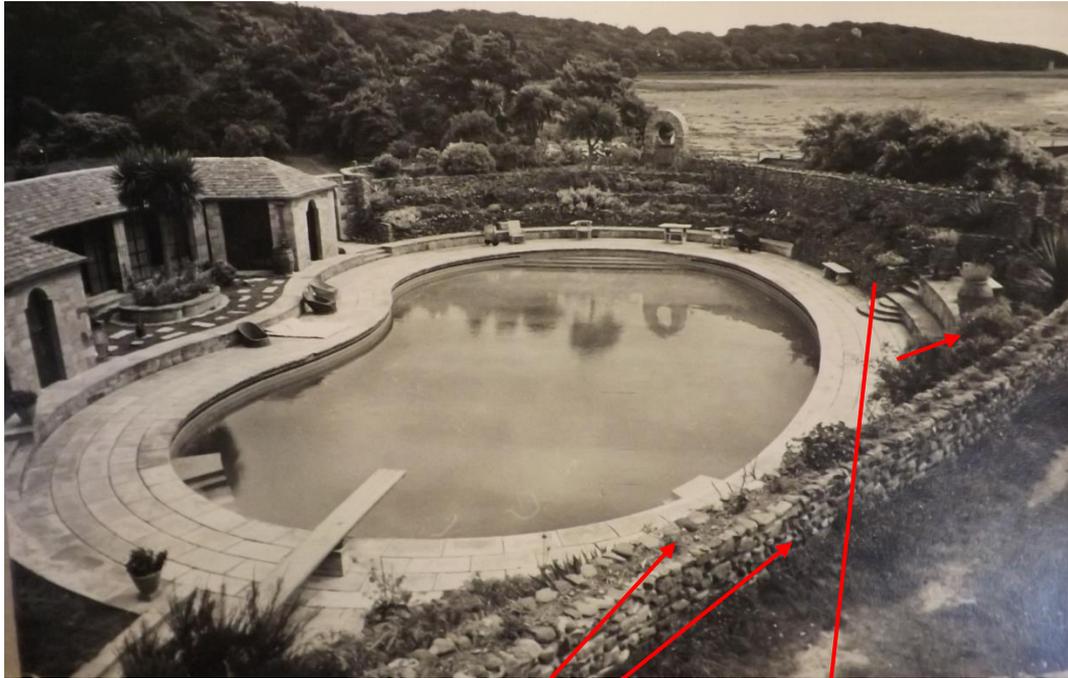


Figure 35: Terraces on the south wall

Figure 36: Sea side of the wall

Figure 38: A gap in the lower terrace wall, the start of steps



Figure 35: Terraces on the south wall



Figure 36: External view of south wall, looking east



Figure 37: Gap in the lower terrace wall, with step access, some of the original stonework can still be seen

Figure 38 (below): East end of the pool area. *National Trust*. With associated UAS photographs below.

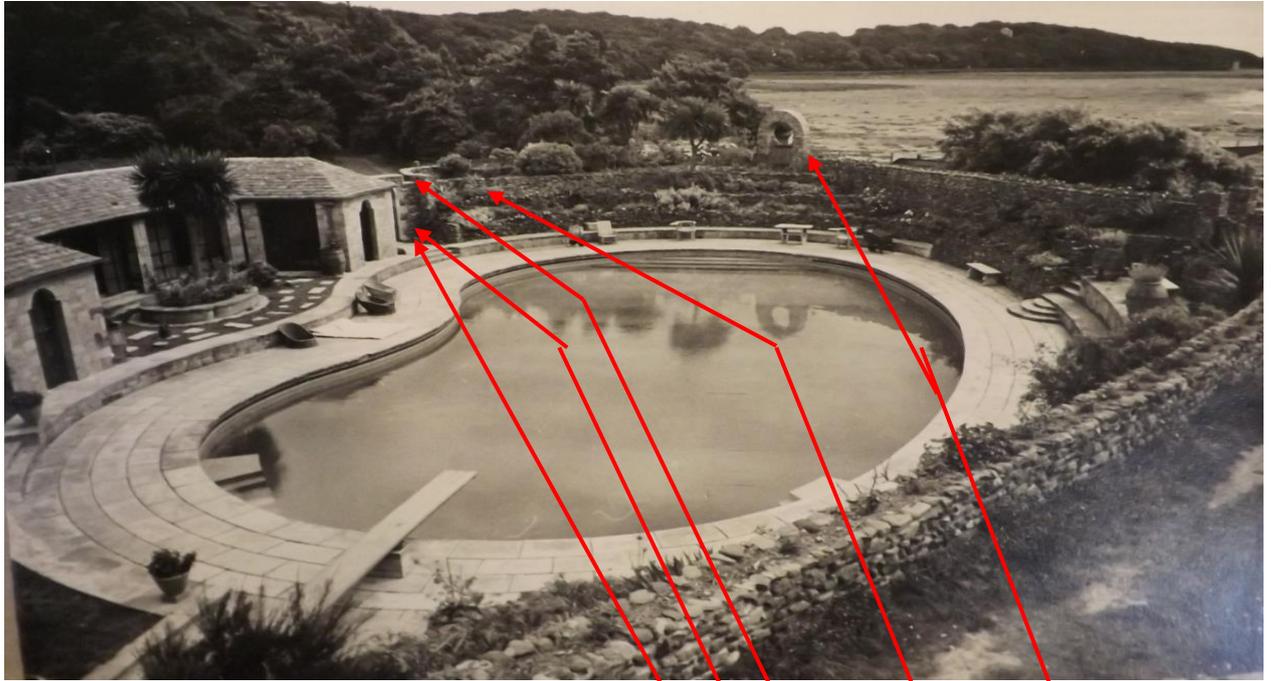


Figure 39: Structural support for the terraces

Figure 40: Lower wall tied into terrace.

Figure 41: Upper wall tied into terrace structure

Figure 42: The terraces

Figure 43: Southern arched gate



Figure 39: Structural support for the terraces



Figure 40: Lower wall tied into terrace.



Figure 41: Upper wall tied into terrace structure



Figure 42: The terraces in 2019



Figure 43: View of eastern end of Pavilion in the 1930s. Note the arch, where ornate gates, known as the *Heron Gates*, were located. This was replicated at the western arch. *National Trust*



Figure 44: One set of *Heron Gates* has been preserved by the National Trust. These gates would have had a sheet of glass behind them to enhance the visual effect.



Figure 45: A stone seat from the Swimming Pool has been preserved and is currently located in the Mount Stewart Formal Garden.



Figure 46: View of base of second summer house, looking east



Figure 47: Remains of the jetty and two slipways, looking south



Figure 48: The yacht *Gweetarra* located on the slipway This vessel is still being sailed on Strangford Lough, but not by the Londonderry family. *National Trust*



Figure 49: Old winch for recovering boats, at the head of the Slipway



Figure 50: Monument to staff drowned in April 1895



Figure 51: Inscription on the Monument.



Figure 52: Sea Wall protecting the monument.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction.

The swimming pool at Mountstewart was located at the edge of the Sea Plantation on the shore of Strangford Lough. The water in the pool was from the lough and it could be refreshed by each incoming tide. The pool, the pavilion and the surrounding poolside terraces were of a quality and standard in keeping with the standing of the Londonderry family, one of the richest families in the UK when the pool was constructed. Swimming in this part of Strangford Lough had been popular throughout the nineteenth century and a wooden bathing house was recorded here on the First Edition OS map of 1834 (Figure 03 above).



Figure 33: A view of Strangford Loch [sic] near Mountstewart photographed c.1890 by Theresa, 6<sup>th</sup> Marchioness of Londonderry. The older bathing house which dated to the 1830's is just visible on the right of the image.

Figure 53: View of nineteenth century bathing houses. *National Trust*

### 4.2 Description of the pool when in use.

A kidney shaped pool 11m by 8m, sheltered from the wind on three sides by terraces built with 6 inch cobbles. The fourth side was the pavilion, a beautiful sandstone single story building with a slate roof. The terraces were mostly used for planting shrubs rather than for accommodating spectators. There was a drive and foot path to the main road and also a roundabout for vehicles turning at the landward entrance to the pool.

### 4.3 Description at time of survey

The pool has been filled with rubble. The pavilion has been substantially removed and the four entrances from the pool to the lough shore have been blocked with concrete

blocks. Some stonework from the demolished pavilion, along with glass doors and wooden gates, as well as some pool furniture (illustrated above), has been conserved by the National Trust at the Mount Stewart estate. The whole site, the terraces, pool area and the foot print of the pavilion, is overgrown with scrub vegetation, hence only a very small surface area is visible. There is nothing now visible of the entire complex, except a small area near the water's edge where there is no vegetation. The National Trust has recently started to clear the vegetation from the area around the old swimming pool and this work was continuing at the time of the UAS survey.

#### 4.4 Construction.

The pool is on land, which was reclaimed in the late 1700s. The means whereby the level of water in the swimming pool was regulated in relation to the tides remains unresolved. The cobbles for the walls and terraces are water-rolled greywacke and probably came from the adjacent shore. The sandstone employed in the construction of the pavilion and associated flagstones was probably imported from Scrabo Quarry, Newtownards, a few miles to the north of Mount Stewart.

#### 4.5 Who used the swimming pool and when?

We are not aware of a formal record of who might have used the pool, but in addition to the Londonderry family members, it is known that there were regular house guests from Royalty to high ranking German officers. There is also anecdotal evidence that Sir Winston Churchill may have used the pool, when visiting the Londonderry family in the years before the Second World War. The family stopped using the pool, when the road to Portaferry became much busier after the Second World War and it gradually fell into disuse. In the 1980s and 1990s the pool area was used initially by a few cheeky locals. Subsequently, groups of people from Belfast started to have large drinking and drug-taking all night parties. This led to local rumours of orgies, bestiality even black magic and included one of the body of a new born baby being found in the woods beside the old gas works just a few metres away. The Londonderry family took action to avoid the possibility of claims for damages if some the revellers got injured and in 1991 the pool was filled in and the pool buildings taken down.



Figure 54: Gravestone for the new-born baby to the north-west of Mount Stewart gasworks

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations for further work

At the time of the UAS survey of the swimming pool area in 2019, the area was largely covered by vegetation, but old photographs of the site provided by the National Trust enabled the key features of the site to be identified and located. The swimming pool survey adds to the record of other sites surveyed by UAS in the Mount Stewart estate.

The swimming pool restored to its former glory and the identification of nearby points of interest, would be a wonderful addition to the many other attractions on the Mount Stewart estate, but a major problem is how to get the general public to and from the site safely. Perhaps the provision of another car park within the Sea Plantation, with associated control post may provide a solution. Vegetation should be removed from the surface of the area around the pool and the terraces, to expose the surfaces in order to determine the condition and the cost of restoration. It is probable that the roots of the vegetation are destroying the remaining paving and structures.

The National Trust may wish to consider some excavation of the swimming pool in order to determine the condition of the pool walls and floor. The trust may also like to consider stabilising and conserving the inlet pipe and valves at the Strangford Lough shore.



Figure 55: View of seawater intake pipe for pool, taken in October 2018. Note the supports have deteriorated and no longer support the final section of the pipe.  
*National Trust*



Figure 56: View of pool complex and shore, looking north. The concrete platform which was formerly the location of the rotating summer house and intake pipe for the pool are also visible. *National Trust*

## 6. Bibliography

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- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Londonderry Papers D654, 1612-c.1940.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Site: Sea Plantation Swimming Pool, Mount Stewart, Co. Down

Date: 18 April 2019

UAS photographs ...Ricoh G600 & GMJ's mobile phone  
Old photographs from Lady Rose and PRONI dates and cameras unknown  
(labelled LRP below).

National Trust photographs dates and cameras unknown (labelled NT below).

Frame no	Source	Details
NT 01	LRP	Cover page the swimming pool pavilion
NT 02	LRP	Fig 8 Looking north-west to diving board
RIMG014	UAS	Fig 09 Same view as above
NT 03	LRP	Fig 10 A low level view looking north-west
RIMG 013	UAS	Fig 11 Same view as above
NT04	LRP	Fig 12 View from diving board across the pool
gmj 01	UAS	Fig 13 Same view as above
NT 05	LRP	Fig 14 The pavilion looking north
gmj 02	UAS	Fig 15 Same view as above
NT 08	LRP	Fig 16 View through the southern arched gate
gmj 03	LRP	Fig 17 West End of the Pavilion
NT 07	NT	Fig 18 Pavilion Glass Doors
	NT	Fig 19 View through the southern arched gate
gmj 05	UAS	Fig 20 The doors for the small gates
NT 09	LRP	Fig 21 Revolving Sun House and small gate
RIMG 25	UAS	Fig 22 Same view 2019
	NT	Fig 23 Composite photograph of pool area
RIMG 55	UAS	Fig 24 End of the planter wall
RIMG 20	UAS	Fig 25 Longitudinal view of wall
RIMG 33	UAS	Fig 26 End of back wall
RIMG 35	UAS	Fig 27 Wall joining the planter wall and the back wall
RIMG 38	UAS	Fig 28 Steps leading to the arched gate 2019
	UAS	Fig 29 Pool side view of northern arch
	LRT	Fig 30 View of the Diving Board in 1930s
RIMG 12	UAS	Fig 31 Base of diving board 2019
	UAS	Fig 32 View of boundary wall and Top Terrace
	LRP	Fig 33 View of the pool and steps being cleaned
	NT	Fig 34 The pool area with associated UAS photographs
	UAS	Fig 35 Terraces on the south wall
	UAS	Fig 36 External view of south wall
	UAS	Fig 37 Gap in the lower terrace wall
NT 14	LRP	Fig 38 The east end of pool area with associated UAS photographs
	UAS	Fig 39 Structural support for the terraces
RIMG 63	UAS	Fig 40 Lower wall tied into terraces

RIMG 64	UAS	Fig 41 Upper wall tied into terrace structure
RIMG 47	UAS	Fig 42 The terraces in 2019
NT 15	LRP	Fig 43 East end of the pool area with associated UAS photographs
NT 17	LRP	Fig 44 One set of the <i>Heron Gates</i> has been preserved
gmj 06	UAS	Fig 45 A stone seat from the swimming pool has been preserved
gmj 07	UAS	Fig 46 View of base of a second summer house
gmj 08	UAS	Fig 47 Remains of the jetty and the two slipways
NT18	LRP	Fig 48 The yacht <i>Gweetarra</i> on slipway.
RIMG	UAS	Fig 49 Old winch for recovering boats.
	UAS	Fig 50 Monument to staff drowned in April 1895
	UAS	Fig 51 Inscription on the Monument
	UAS	Fig 52 Sea Wall protecting the monument
	LRP	Fig 53 View of nineteenth century bathing houses
gmj 10	UAS	Fig 54 Grave stone for the new born baby
NT 21		Fig 55 View of seawater intake pipe for pool
	NT	Fig 56 View of pool complex and shore