

VIVO Defence assists Operation Nightingale in Tedworth House dig for recuperating Armed Forces personnel

1 year ago



Operation Nightingale – which assists recovering military personnel and veterans by involving them in archaeological digs – has made some surprise discoveries at one of England’s finest 19th century country homes.

The team, led by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation’s (DIO) Senior Archaeologist Richard Osgood and supported by [VIVO Defence Services](#), carried out the investigation for a week at Tedworth House, near Tidworth, in Wiltshire.

There, they sought to discover more about the existence of a mausoleum formerly located in the grounds of the Grade II listed country residence until its removal in 1954, which included the exhumation from the graves inside.

The mausoleum was constructed a century earlier, according to the Illustrated London News of 1858, which stated it was a “Mausoleum in Memory of Thomas Assheton Smith Esq’, a former politician, industrialist and sportsman who passed away in 1858.

The newspaper said the mausoleum was about twenty feet square, built in the Roman Ionic style with domed roof and cupola and was about fifty feet in height at its extreme.

It added that ‘the whole of the windows are filled with stained glass, and the floor is covered with elaborate mosaic pavement. The mausoleum is similarly paved and glazed, and is separated from the chapel by a handsome open-work bronze gate...The whole building is beautifully designed and executed,

and well placed amidst the fine Tedworth trees.’

The Operation Nightingale team, assisted by VIVO Defence Services – which provides Facilities Management services at Tedworth House and prepared and oversaw the dig – Wessex Archaeology, DIO and the volunteers set about trying to find if any traces of the mausoleum had survived and to discover more detail about its appearance.

Tedworth House itself, which sits in 28 acres of gardens and land, acts as a recovery centre for wounded, injured and sick serving military personnel – known as Personnel on Recovery Duty (PRD).

At the dig, the team discovered much more remained of the mausoleum than expected including brick foundations, indicating the main building (and adjacent chapel) were brick built and faced with stone.

Elements of the ornate architectural mouldings were also found as was lead sheeting from the chapel roof and elaborate wrought-iron components from an imposing fence that once surrounded the structure.

But while the newspaper report above showed there had been stained glass windows there, and local accounts say it was removed and sent to the Caribbean, they didn’t find coloured glass, just plain glass. This perhaps indicates this glass was, indeed, well removed.

They also discovered a small piece of wood from one of the three coffins – including Assheton’s – that were in the mausoleum, but removed for reburial in 1950.

Major Dean Holder, the Officer in Command of Tedworth House Personnel Recovery Centre, said: “The dig provided an opportunity for Personnel On Recovery Duty (PRD) to come together and form a team with a shared purpose of exposing the remnants of the former mausoleum.

“Participants enjoyed the chance to operate together and relished the new found camaraderie. Additionally, PRD were able to bring different skill sets from across the three Services and all contributed to a highly successful dig. The benefits were not only in what was uncovered from an archaeological perspective but also in providing PRD with a sense of achievement and a positive social environment.”

Richard Osgood, from DIO, added that around two thirds of the site was excavated with plans to undertake another dig in 2025 and to display the finds within Tedworth House.

He added: “We hope to keep the footprint of the chapel and mausoleum visible within the grounds, perhaps with an explanation board to highlight the significance.

“The project was synonymous with resilience and recovery – not only of nature and the mausoleum, but also of the participants involved.”

Jerry Moloney, Chief Executive Officer at VIVO Defence Services, said: “Having taken on providing Facilities Management and maintenance services at Tedworth house in April, we are really pleased we were called on to support this dig. The house helps rehabilitate serving members of the military and we are certainly proud to be involved in an activity that helps with this.”