


Blair House – one woman's vision



'For the children of staff it was all holiday; it was our lives.'



Eleanor Harris has wonderful memories of **Blair House**. As a child she tagged along when her father, a teacher at The Edinburgh Academy, led study trips to the farm cottages and lodge that the school had purchased in the 1970s. The headmaster at the time, **Bertie Mills**, had used a bequest to buy the property in **Glen Doll** in the Angus mountains; teachers fitted it out and it became the school's field centre, used for everything from camping to climbing, biology to music, bouldering to botany. Even on Easter revision camps the pupils would study in the mornings then head off into the hills after lunch. People came back from Blair House changed, says Eleanor, for the better; friendships were made, creativity nurtured, countryside discovered. She calls it '**the spirit of Glen Doll.**'

 Last year, however, the school made the decision to close Blair House. It was inconvenient, had no water sports, was unsuitable for co-ed groups (though Eleanor and her friends clearly survived...) and did not meet new fire safety standards. The Academy put Blair House on the market. And Eleanor Harris decided to buy it. For her it is 'all my first and best dreams come true.'



Eleanor's vision is to transform the property into a 21st century field centre, not just for the pupils of a private school but for *all* children – and students, and adults; Blair House will welcome a wide range of groups who want to study, climb, paint, walk and generally appreciate the spectacular grandeur of Glen Doll. She wants to make Blair House available not only to schools but also to universities – it's within reach of all the Scottish ones. And as soon as her plans were known more ideas came flooding in – residential art courses, retreats, botanical surveys (Glen Doll is home to the **Corrie Fee Nature Reserve**); Eleanor has received huge support not only from her friends but what she calls 'the wider Blair House diaspora.' 'I feel as if I've gained an enormous extended family.'



There's still a long way to go before Blair House re-opens its doors. Eleanor is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of

West Scotland, not a millionaire – she’s looking at crowd sourced funding schemes, business plans, and anything else that will help her realise her dream. She has no experience of running a business nor of masterminding a refurbishment; what she does have is vision, energy and hope: in today’s cynical world, these are worth having.

Eleanor still has a piece she wrote in junior school prior to a visit to Glen Doll: ‘I always get butterflies if I am going to Blair House....it is my absolute favourite place to be.’

Soon a new generation will have the chance to feel those butterflies.

If you would like to know more about Eleanor’s project you can visit Blair House’s facebook page [here](#), or email Eleanor: eleanormharris@gmail.com

