

# SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

Newsletter - October 2002

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On September 25 we held our first gathering of Friends at Sir John Soane's Museum for a special final viewing of England's Lost Houses. Despite a tube strike that day there was an impressive turnout and Friends rashly said they would enjoy another reunion in suitably architectural surroundings for which they would pay. We are keen to organise this and will propose a date and venue in the next newsletter.

Some of our Friends have been with us for an impressive time, others have recently boosted the numbers significantly. We are preparing a mailshot hoping to enrol those who are Friends in spirit if not yet in name.

Please do send the names and addresses of anyone you think would be interested. This can be a major boost to our work.

*Marcus Binney*

## Whither conservation?

The news in the last 6 months that steps have been taken to rescue two major country houses in England is very welcome indeed, and has no doubt done much to bolster the public profile (and the public's confidence in) the two bodies that are the prime movers in the field of conservation, at least in terms of manpower and resources. These two organisations, The National Trust and English Heritage, appear fit and fighting, and these two buildings – Tyntesfield and Apethorpe Hall, seem to have secure futures. But what about the rest, buildings and organisations? Preliminary research on the state of country houses by SAVE shows that there is still a problem of country houses at risk across the nation. In Scotland there have been several high profile cases of recent, one of which has resulted in the demolition of Lanrick Castle, while the owner of the another complains of not being able to either repair or demolish. Poor poppet – why not sell?

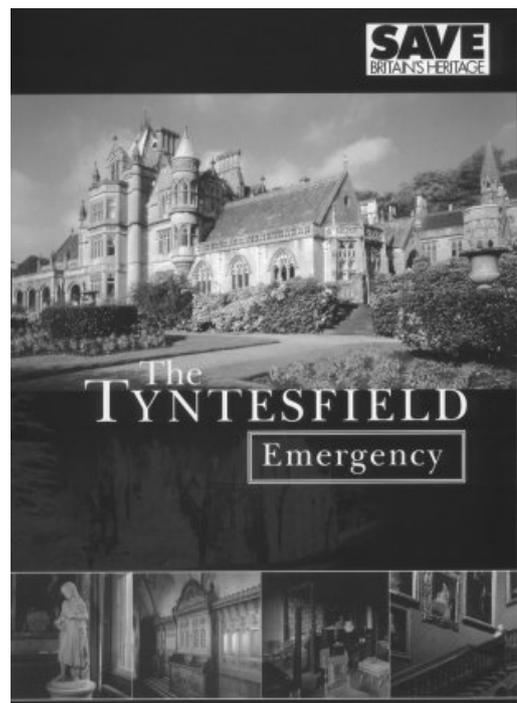
There are still thousands of other listed buildings at risk, yet there is a lack of clear Government policy to guide local authorities on this, one of the major challenges in conservation. Indeed, is there a clear vision at Government level about what needs to be done in the realm of the historic environment? Wise words are spoken by Ministers at Westminster on regeneration, sustainable communities and social inclusion in the historic environment, yet these

skirt the main point. In Scotland, the executive seems to have put the historic environment firmly on the backburner with its bonfire of quangos (while the culture Minister admitted to being unable to name a living Scottish architect). It is in this atmosphere that Historic Scotland fights on. Likewise in Wales Cadw carries on, despite the historic environment being very low on the list of priorities of Welsh politicians at all levels. The dire situation in Northern Ireland has been well reported by us of recent, although at least there is at least some sign of light at the end of that particular tunnel.

So, in the corridors of power, not much has changed in recent years. However there is one part of the conservation world which seems fit, healthy and raring to go: the grass roots voluntary sector. In Britain, the many and varied organisations which make up the voluntary sector in the world of heritage are to come together under the banner of the soon to be launched 'Heritage Link'. This new organisation will be able to dedicate time and energy to putting effective messages across to all levels of government on behalf of its members more forcefully than any of them might do alone. This is a great challenge: despite the historic environment playing a role in the everyday life of the nation, net expenditure on the historic environment by local planning authorities over the last few years has been on a downward path. The Heritage Link could be the tonic the government needs for its conservation hangover, blundering oblivious to the outside world, and the springboard the heritage sector needs to help the rest of the world realise the historic environment is a broader part of everyday life. We remain eternally optimistic.

## Tyntesfield victory

In our last newsletter we highlighted the huge challenge faced by those (including ourselves, of course) wishing to save this splendid Victorian pile and its contents for the nation. Our fears were for a Mentmore situation, seeing the contents sold off and divorced from the house.



However, fast work on the part of the National Trust, a quick reaction from the Minister in response to requests to upgrade the listing of the building to Grade I, and an open mind on the part of the Heritage Lottery Fund / National Heritage Memorial Fund have ensured that Tyntesfield has not gone the same way as so many distinguished others.

The response to the appeals for help were fantastic. Many Friends wrote to the Minister, to the Director General of the National Trust, and to the Director of the Heritage Lottery Fund in response to our lightning report on the situation, 'The Tyntesfield Emergency'. Every ounce of pressure that was brought to bear counted.

Tyntesfield showed that people really do still care about the major set pieces of our heritage, a message which should not be lost on the Government, which it seems had long ago consigned these less fashionable parts of our heritage to the back room.

## **Apethorpe Hall**



English Heritage were quick off the blocks following the Tyntesfield success. The Secretary of State served a repairs notice with an intention to compulsorily purchase Apethorpe Hall from its present owners shortly after the good news that the National Trust was to buy Tyntesfield for the nation. Only once before has the Secretary of State taken advantage of these powers, with the compulsory purchase of Carr of York's Crescent at Buxton. This latest move is to be welcomed, as it had the immediate effect of forcing the absentee owner to sell up to a new owner who has the intention of carefully dividing the Hall into 5 units of accommodation. Some of these will undoubtedly be vast, given that it would be impossible to divide up the splendid state rooms. The new owner has assembled an experienced professional team to advise on the best way forward, but it is certain that a priority should be placed on rapidly carrying out essential repairs to prepare the building for winter. Whether the Secretary of State should proceed with the compulsory purchase is a tricky issue: does one give the new owner a chance to prove the honesty of his intentions, or just pile in there with the order? Ultimately it should be down to what is best for the Hall, and given the building's location and the lack of any real parkland, the chance of the building paying for itself if opened to the public as a visitor attraction is low. A sensitive conversion doing away with some of the detritus in the grounds may be the only realistic option.

There are two messages that this case sends out. The first rather mixed message is that the Minister takes historic buildings seriously. Our hopes not too high yet, in light of the lack of anything extra for the historic environment in the spending review. The second is that English Heritage is willing to push for this sort of action, to be clear, loud and firm in dealing with the problem of buildings at risk where local authorities are not succeeding. It would seem that the fire in the belly of the beast has been stirred – perhaps the combination (for the first time) of a Chief Executive and Chairman who both have historic buildings backgrounds has something to do with this.

What, then of all the other remarkable piles across the nation owned by landlords with either a lack of ability to deal with or a lack of concern for the buildings in their trusteeship? The list is long, distinguished, and worthy of further investigation.

## **Tall buildings**

### **The bad news: Heron Tower decision**

Floodgates open or shut? Planning seems to be the portfolio no Minister really wants, and has been regularly handed from department to department, most recently landing back in the red box of Mr. Prescott, now at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Thus, the man that passed the Gherkin also held the fate of Gerald Ronson's Heron Tower in his hands, and gave it his blessing just before the parliamentary recess in July, with an indication that towers are vital to London's future. The very next day, though, he decided to call in Irvine Sellar's dream of a 66 storey spike at London Bridge. There has been much clamour about the need for clear policy guidance on tall buildings, and probably rightly so – public inquiries are expensive affairs, and if every application for a tall building is called in, there will be an even greater and more confusing mass of case studies and precedent for the lawyers to trawl through. However, it should not be forgotten that of the current tall buildings applications, only two have been called in. While the lack of a policy does in some ways make it easier to oppose tall buildings, it is not sensible – it is a piecemeal approach indicating a lack of any general plan amongst those who have decided they want these buildings as to where they should go.

Is there anything positive to take away from the Inquiry? Yes. The Inspector made it clear that economics are not an excuse to inflict harmful development on either St. Paul's or the Tower, or for that matter St. Botolph's. He also highlighted the Mayor's frivolity in specifically mentioning the Heron tower in the London plan. In what is referred to as the City's eastern cluster (which implies some form of grand plan, curiously absent in the formation of this loose amalgam), the Inspector identified Tower 42, formerly the Natwest Tower as the apex. Although Tower 42 is a rotten example in terms of both architecture and origins, it might at least provide a focus. Inconsistencies were found in English Heritage's approach to tall buildings following the fiasco over the Gherkin, and it seems the Inspector saw this as a weak point in their case. This makes it all the more important that English Heritage continues the approach it took in the Heron Inquiry, looking first and foremost at the impact of the building on

the historic environment, rather than the architectural statement it may make.

So, applications for tall buildings have started to roll in and there are rumours of plenty more to come. However, permissions have not started to roll out. More of a shower, then, rather than a deluge.

## The good news: Transport, local government & the regions committee's sixteenth report - tall buildings

SAVE was one among many voices that made submissions to the Committee on the subject. As reported briefly in the last SAVE Newsletter, the amalgam of these made interesting reading, but not half as interesting as the Committee's interpretation of them and the oral evidence supplied from a select band of witnesses. The Committee's key findings are worth restating in brief here:

- Tall buildings are not key to the Urban Renaissance: they are more about power, prestige, status and aesthetics than efficient development.
- They are not essential to the future of London as a global financial centre: more important is the capacity of London's public transport system.
- There should be a suitable planning framework for all buildings to avoid past mistakes.
- The one powerful and irrefutable argument in favour of tall buildings is that some people find them very beautiful.
- English Heritage need to adopt a consistent approach to tall buildings and CABE needs to take steps to prevent it from being seen as a representative of the modernist architectural establishment.

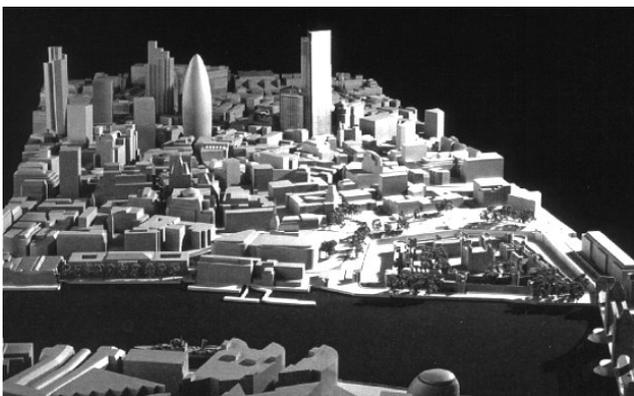
The message is clear.

The full text of the report can be found on the internet at:

[www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/trlhome.htm](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/trlhome.htm) .

For some totally partisan views on towers (no pun intended) have a look on the internet at [www.skyscrapernews.co.uk](http://www.skyscrapernews.co.uk), and for a rather more objective glance at the topic, [www.skyscrapers.com](http://www.skyscrapers.com) .

## The Minerva Tower, Houndsditch, City of London



The latest tall building application (right of the picture) to thud on our desks is for what is hoped to be the City of

London's first 'million footer' – fortunately not a reference to height, but to floorspace. Designed by Nicholas Grimshaw Architects to look like a series of open books standing upright, if built it will reach up 712ft / 217m / 50 storeys, with the obligatory restaurant on the top floor. Could one refuse to pay for dinner on grounds of damage to London's built heritage? It seems almost obligatory to try to build these towers opposite City Churches – the victim this time is St. Botolph Aldgate. With the various points made by the inspector at the Heron Inquiry and the parliamentary select committee's findings, this one ought not slip through the net, looming over the Tower of London World Heritage Site.

Look out also for Richard Rogers' Partnerships proposals for a 47 storey behemoth on Leadenhall Street in the City of London – the latest of many rumoured tall building developments in the centre of the City which should be opposed. The economic cycle could do the work for us though – there are 6 million square feet of spare office space in the City at the moment and rents are falling.

## St Mildred's tannery, Canterbury



Central Canterbury is crammed full of interesting buildings, but one particular corner has remained pretty much off limits to the general public for the last few hundred years. The city's tannery, located in the south-western quarter of the old town's conservation area, closed down a couple of years ago, much to the relief of long suffering residents of the surrounding streets (tanning can be a rather smelly process). The legacy of hundreds of years of tanning is a very interesting collection of industrial buildings from the Georgian period through to the present day; a substantial amount of archaeology, happily preserved in the waterlogged soil; and some patches of contaminated land.

What has occurred since the tannery's closure has none of the charm or romance of the louvered drying sheds along the banks of the river, the brick stump of the chimney, or the ramshackle ranges of workshops and warehouses. The developer of the site, Bellway Homes, commissioned a development brief for the site, which can only be described as utterly inadequate. Despite this being a conservation area, the retention and reuse of the historic buildings is not seen as an option – only one single façade is suggested for retention. The historic buildings assessment for the site, also commissioned by the

developer, rubbishes the historic buildings, despite there being only five remaining historic tanneries in the country.

We have written to the local authority demanding that the development brief for the site is dropped immediately and a fresh, conservation based approach is taken. Furthermore, we have suggested that the authority hold an architectural competition for the site, which historic Canterbury surely deserves – the site represent the chance to create a wonderful new urban quarter based around the historic buildings, while reconnecting the site with the rest of the city centre after so many years' separation. A Canterbury theme park is not needed, nor wanted.

So how has this wretched situation come about in the first place, given Canterbury City Council's previously excellent reputation in conservation? At the root of this could be the splitting of the planning department about two years ago (for political reasons) into a development control department and a policy and conservation grants section (under the Chief Executive). The two now have divergent views, with development control continuing to push for conservation, and the policy wonks for economic development, apparently at any cost. It makes the blood boil.

## **Reports: Law Courts**

SAVE's long promised report on historic law courts, '*Silence in Court: the Future of the UK's Historic Courthouses*' is now reaching the final stages of production, being carefully laid out before printing. It is shaping up to be a really splendid publication with a huge number of high quality black and white images spread across its 150 pages, which we think will more than justify its £20 price. Full marks to former Secretary Pollard for a sterling effort, including a gazeteer of a selection of the more important and interesting historic law courts, as well as a discussion of the problems faced by this remarkably broad typology. To pre-order your copy, (which should be with you before Christmas....) please contact the SAVE office. More on the plight of historic law courts in the next newsletter.



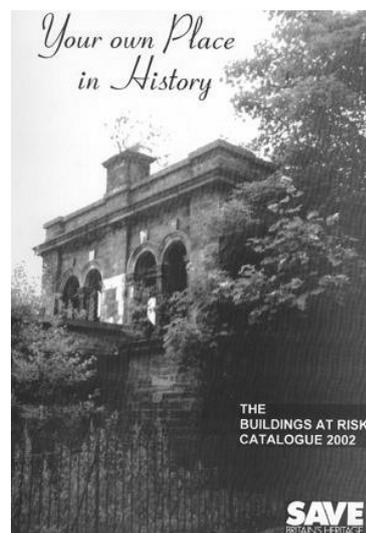
## **Buildings at risk**

From the very outset, SAVE have been at the forefront of campaigning for the rescue and reuse of buildings under threat. The buildings at risk (BaR) register has become one of our major tools in this, highlighting endangered buildings that are vacant and whose future is not secure, with the aim of finding potential restorers and new uses for them. Properties under threat are compiled and published in SAVE's annual catalogue and in the online register of BaR. As the only national source of information on Grade II BaR in England and Wales, the register plays an important role in highlighting the scale of the problem. Public interest in the register remains steadily high, showing that there is a huge demand (and a great deal of sympathy) for buildings in need of repair.

The online register is now in its fourth year of operation and we are very pleased that due to a generous donation from one of our Friends we are able to put the position of Buildings at Risk officer onto a full time basis.

Now is therefore an ideal time for the expansion of the register. So far the information on the register has been gathered from co-operative local authorities and concerned members of the public. Judging from the number of buildings we have on the register, there must be a substantial amount more in the areas where coverage is patchy, which can be revealed through more systematic research and your help.

In preparation for this, Regine is currently undertaking a thorough review of the existing database and continues to search for more BaR. Over the last two months we have received information on a number of BaR from Local Authorities, in particular Hartlepool and Liverpool (which had remained silent on the matter until now). The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Society has provided us with over 40 potential candidates for the register, and contacts are being intensified with caseworkers at the other national amenity societies.



This year's buildings at risk report, 'Your Own Place in History', came out in May, generously sponsored by Carter Jonas. It is available from the SAVE office for £10.

## London's suburbs

The initial work on a report on London's suburbs is underway, focussing on areas planned and built from the mid-Victorian period through to World War II. The idea is to have a look at the huge architectural set pieces these estates often formed, and to form some practical guidelines for local authorities and owners alike on how to retain some of the qualities these areas possess in the face of the densification agenda.

In the course of the study we expect to come across some gems, and indeed we have recently helped in the case of **Good Hope**, a 1905 Cape Dutch style house in the Highbury Road area of Wimbledon (worth a wander around if you are passing) by the little know arts and craft architect Spencer Carey Curtis. The building was threatened with massive alterations and extension following a change of ownership, and its rather rare 1907 motor house was to be demolished. Thankfully the rapid spot listing (it can still happen!) of both house and garage stopped the plans dead.

The suburbs project is to be partly supported by English Heritage, and we are still looking for other funding partners. Likewise, we are still looking for funding to help our study of the problems faced by conservation in Wales get off the ground, as well as for various other publications and campaign ideas. Anyone interested in supporting these should contact the SAVE office.

## Other Cases

### Kidderminster

What is it about these midlands industrial towns that attracts such joys as inner ring roads and retail park developers? Is there a collective lack of ambition amongst their leaders, or an embarrassment at their industrial past, seemingly irrelevant in our high tech age? Kidderminster it seems is stuck somewhere geographically and metaphorically between the Merry Hill Centre and Worcester, both centres for shopping at the opposite ends of the scale. Kidderminster is veering headlong towards the Merry Hill style (if it can be called that) of nowheresville giant retail stores, at the expense of some wonderful industrial buildings, and perhaps even its magistrates court, a proud civic landmark.

Last year saw the demolition of the Wool Hall, a polychromatic Italianate mill which partnered the splendid Slingfield Mill. In its place will be – you guessed it – more retail park. Slingfield Mill is listed and stands empty and untouched, which the smaller Piano Building next to it looks to be the next before the firing squad. Its crime is that it is in a convenient location for a new cinema. This is daft, as the town centre has any number of single level car parks that could easily be built over, while perhaps putting up a multi-storey car park if space is really that tight. The Piano building is a handsome part of the remaining group of canal-side mills and its loss would be unnecessary – along with the Rock Works over the other side of the canal, it presents a fine opportunity to inject a little life back into the town centre through conversion to housing (or for that matter practically any other use).



The Piano Building, Kidderminster

In response to the fuss we kicked up in the local press with the local Civic Society (formed to oppose the demolition of the late Victorian library in the 1990s), at least the Council's Environment and Economic Regeneration portfolio holder has come out in favour of old buildings. Encouraging signs, but the proof will as ever be in the pudding of the planning committee.

### Farnborough update

A tough nut that we're beginning to crack. This time last year, the developers, Slough Estates, put in their first attempt at a development brief for the site, which would form the framework for any future development. This was totally unsatisfactory, and so they have recently submitted a second effort. This too fails to make the grade, representing a little altered version of the original, rather than a fundamental re-write which places a priority on the conservation and reuse of the remains of the Royal Aircraft Establishment.

We have commissioned our own study of the site, with the backing of English Heritage, to look at how the maximum number of buildings could be retained the most profitably. The results of this will then form the basis for discussions with Slough Estates on how to deal properly with this remarkable site.

In the meantime, the first of what we expect to be a number of listed building applications for the site has come in, looking to demolish buildings and structures associated with the operation of transonic wind tunnel. No real justification has been provided - permission simply

cannot be granted and must not be granted until such a time that there is a clear plan for the future of the building, and indeed the rest of the site

We hope to hear soon from DCMS as to whether any more buildings on the site are to be listed – Farnborough Air Sciences Trust have been moved from the unlisted building R52 (the first wind tunnel building on the site – 1916) leaving it vulnerable to alteration and the 1940's wind tunnel within it completely unprotected

## Northern Ireland response

We continue to press for action in Northern Ireland, and it seems that we are beginning to have some success. The demolition of a Seamus Heaney's old house in Belfast made it to the front page of every paper locally, and also attracted media attention at a national level. This is a reflection on what seems to be a gradual change in attitude towards the built heritage, and it would appear that the Environment and Heritage Service is beginning to make itself heard within the devolved government: the recent planning amendment bill contained a number of measures designed to cover gaps in the system. Most notable amongst these was spot listing, although precisely how this will work is not yet clear. What is now required is a long, determined effort on the part of all parties interested in Northern Ireland's Heritage (not just those in the province) to push heritage up the political agenda, and to make the various departments within government which touch on heritage (from the Department for Regional Development to the Planning Service to the new Ministers in London) join up their thinking and actions. Although the statutory consultees in England have no official role in Northern Ireland, the occasional comment from them on some of the more controversial cases would not go amiss. Furthermore, bodies such as the HLF and the National Trust could exert significant pressure to ensure that their own interests in Northern Ireland are not compromised.



In spite of progress, attitudes are slow to change, and the application to demolish the Grade B+ listed **Tillie and Henderson Shirt Factory** in Londonderry is just one example of this. The factory, at the time of its construction in 1856 the largest shirt factory in the world, forms part of a group of industrial buildings in the centre of Londonderry. Its current owners are looking to demolish it on the grounds that it is beyond repair, yet all alternative avenues have not been exhausted. Independent structural reports are being prepared by the planning division to find out if the building really is in as bad a state as the owners

claim, and the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society are warming up for a fight. The building could probably be reused relatively easily, and given its town centre location, would be ideal for a whole range of potential new uses.

## The SAVE Trust: Castle House

After a long and rather frustrating period, the SAVE Trust is now the proud owner of one derelict concrete Castle in central Bridgwater. Listed at Grade II\*, this 1850's concrete show-home exhibits a number of innovative uses of concrete, some of them sadly rather too visible though failures of various aspects of the buildings (such as the roof, floors, a couple of windows etc.)

The building represents a huge challenge for SAVE – it will cost approximately £500,000 to repair the building as shell. Given a market value of roughly half that, we are left with a deficit £250,000, some of which will be covered by grant aid, and the local authority's townscape heritage initiative. Should you fancy being knight with a shining chequebook for the concrete castle, you know who to contact. Please also help direct us to any concrete enthusiasts in the world of architecture and construction.

With any luck, the building should get a mention in a new TV series called Restoration, currently being filmed. The programmes will look at buildings at risk across the UK and there will be a chance for the public to vote for their favourite, which will then receive funding towards its repair. What this says about the other buildings, Lord only knows, but this sort of serious publicity for buildings at risk shouldn't be sniffed at.

## Huge empty brick things:

### Tobacco warehouse, Liverpool

Reputedly Europe's largest brick built structure, Tobacco warehouse is an old SAVE case, which resulted in us producing a report in 1989 looking at how it might be adapted. Although demolition of this stupendous landmark was avoided, no moves have been made towards reusing it until recently, when the owner put the building and the rest of Stanley dock on the market. This was seen by the local press as a move to pre-empt the condition in PPG15 that a listed building cannot be demolished unless all other alternatives have been pursued, including placing it on the open market at a fair price. We will obviously act to oppose any moves to demolish.

### Greenock sugar warehouses, Glasgow

Not to be outdone by Liverpool, the massive Greenock sugar warehouses on the Clyde are also seeking a new owner and a new use. At the moment, it looks as if the Phoenix Trust are progressing towards some sort of solution, but nevertheless we think the warehouses deserve to be known about by a wider audience than is presently the case.



## Bishopsgate goodsyard

Railway enthusiasts of the world unite! The Bishopsgate goodsyard on the fringe of the City of London is faced with certain demolition unless the London Railway History Society succeed in their judicial review of the proposals for the clearance of the whole site other than the listed Braithwaite viaduct. Put simply the goodsyard is an exciting collection of railway arches, incorporating the Braithwaite viaduct which until recently were occupied by a series of small businesses. These have all been turfed out by the owners of the site (none other than Railtrack) who want to clear all of the site apart from the Braithwaite Viaduct, ostensibly to allow the construction of the East London Line Extension and the redevelopment of the rest of the site. This is a tad premature, given that the route of the extension is not yet settled, nor is the source of the massive amount of funding required. English Heritage has taken a commendable lead in the campaign to save the arches, alongside the likes of CREEP (Campaign for a Real East End Plan). EH have produced several reports highlighting how the existing structures can be retained and reused with the tube extension and new development above. Together, these factors make a strong case for preservation, yet the publicly owned London Underground is stonewalling all opponents of its (as yet unrevealed) scheme. We expect to hear any day of the result of the JR.

The individual bringing the action on behalf of the LRHS was assaulted on the first day of the proceedings, with his assailant allegedly telling him, 'That'll teach you'. He has also received a number of threatening phone calls inviting him to drop the action. It makes you wonder.

## Schools

Threatened schools continue to be something of a theme of here, with the **Rachel McMillan Nursery School** in Greenwich, and **Willesden High School** being among the most interesting current cases. Rachel and Margaret McMillan broke new ground with their life-long campaigns for child health and welfare in London and Bradford. The original school of 1918-21 survives substantially intact and was the only large school built before the War for the under fives. It has been listed Grade II following a request for spot listing from local campaigners and ourselves.

Willesden High School is a very handsome neo-Georgian composition, by William Thomas Curtis, Middlesex

County Council's architect in the 1930s. The school is earmarked for demolition to make way for a Norman Foster building and playing fields. Surely this is too much to inflict on our school-going populace? A group of former pupils have come together to fight for the building, and we are backing their attempt to get the building listed. Allegedly that splendid 80's children's TV series 'Grange Hill' was based on the school (although we consider it unlikely that this will sway the listing inspectors).

While preparing a piece for The Times on the building, Marcus Binney came up against the mighty Department of Education, trying to dissuade him from publishing anything on it with the wonderfully fatuous claim that the building is infested with pigeons. This is about as poor an excuse for the demolition of a building of historic and architectural interest as could ever be thought up – on this reckoning most of London ought to be flattened. A black mark to the Department for feeble fibs.



**The East Dulwich Hospital** has been turned down for listing because of later additions and changes to the building. This complete workhouse infirmary complex is significant not only in townscape terms, but also because it still retains all of the other buildings in the complex. The hospital is innovative in the way the pavilion plan was adapted to make circulation easier, but this and the attention lavished on the administration block and spine corridor were not sufficient in the eyes of the Inspector to overcome the effect of both later additions and the removal of the balconies at the ends of the pavilions. (These were replaced with fire escapes).

This raises some interesting thoughts and questions. The listing inspector remarked that the building was undoubtedly of listable quality in an unaltered state, whereas the alterations to it since construction seriously diminished its historical interest. However, apart from the removal of the balconies at the end of the wards, most of the extensions and alterations did not appear to us to be irreversible. The holy grail of reversibility comes out of this (and the saga of the Beaumont Riding Stables, Aldershot) looking a little tarnished: if it is deemed acceptable to make reversible changes to a listed building on the grounds that they do not detract from its inherent architectural and historic interest, then surely it should be the case that essentially reversible changes to an unlisted (but potentially listable building) do not detract from its inherent architectural and historic interest. The gurus of reversibility need to have a chat with the wonks of policy to straighten out such anomalies, which makes an ass of an otherwise productive (if limited) listing policy.

## GLEEP



Boffin Alert. What on earth does on do with Western Europe's first nuclear reactor? The civil nuclear programme was one of the UK's greatest-ever industrial efforts, and the first fruits of that programme are currently being decommissioned. GLEEP, a graphite moderated low energy pile at Harwell airfield, was designed as a test facility to check the purity of graphite destined for use in later piles. It went critical on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, and remained in use until it was shut down in September 1990. Decommissioning began shortly after and by 1995 the second stage of the three-stage process was complete. What now remains is a concrete box containing the reactor structures.

This rather important concrete box now sits in a rotting 1930s aircraft hangar. The hangar is not in good condition, and while it had been the UK Atomic Energy Authority's intention to keep the box in the building until 2008, it looks like the wait might be rather shorter.

Is the concrete box worthy of preservation? Very probably is the best answer we can muster at the moment. The airfield is earmarked for development as a business park (what else?), which may well put paid to attempts to preserve it in situ. The questions the case raises are twofold – can GLEEP be safely decommissioned without having to move it off site, and allied to this is the question of cost: is it more expensive to remove it from the site than to secure it in situ?

## St Peter's, Birch, Essex.

SS Teulon was never one to hold back when designing a building, but with this 1840s church he was more restrained than usual, with his gothic detailing being rather more organic than in his usual exuberant fantasies. The problem is that much of the building is now actually rather too literally organic, as the rot has set in after years of neglect, as the building has sat waiting for the HLF to decide whether to fund repairs. The Church Commissioners have very patiently given the building a very long stay of execution, but despite the best efforts of a local organisation reuse the building as an community arts centre and raise the necessary funds to sort it out, the future of the church is looking bad. A hardy and

determined individual is needed to take on the building and slowly bring it back. The challenge of a lifetime.



## Seaside towns iii: Berwick upon Tweed

Frankly it is a shame that trains on the Edinburgh to London line don't stop more frequently at Berwick. It is a remarkable town, surely worthy of World Heritage Status for its pioneering role in the evolution of military defences in Northern Europe. Aside from the wonderful redoubts, its architecture has a strong military pedigree – a certain Mr Vanbrugh is held responsible for the erection of the barracks, and more recently the Governor's house, one of the principle detached buildings in the town, has been attributed to him. It is a spot ropey around the edges, with a few single storey sheds in the garden, but otherwise suitably grand.

Having faced off numerous potential invaders over the last few hundred years, Berwick now faces a new threat, in the form of Messers McCarthy and Stone, purveyors of expensive accommodation for the elder generation. Nothing wrong with this in itself, but quite a lot wrong with piling 'em high in the garden of the Governor's House, with no regard to the local authority's development brief. The Governor's House stands with uninterrupted views to the seafront, firmly within the bounds of the town's conservation area, and prominent in Berwick's distinctive townscape.

The local authority quite rightly demanded a better scheme, and we wrote objecting to the proposals. It is not that there cannot be development in the garden, simply

that 36 granny flats, no matter how artfully arranged, are going to be a huge lump too far. McCarthy and Stone appealed against non-determination as the local authority was attempting to negotiate a better scheme, and have been granted a public inquiry. One would have thought this a risky tactic, on the grounds that any sane inspector would throw their case out on spec. What is really needed for the site is a holistic view that takes into account the future of the Governor's house, not piecemeal development. Given the asking price of £175,000 for the house alone, this cannot be too much to ask.



## Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

Proposals for redundant city centre hospital buildings are no rare thing, although the involvement of the great Norman Foster in such projects is. Up in Edinburgh proposals for the magnificent complex of buildings that form the Royal Infirmary are more concerned with flashy new buildings than with retaining and reusing some of the fine old parts of the hospital.

The result is something of a mess, overdeveloping an interesting and important site, destroying some perfectly decent historic buildings, overwhelming those that remain and visually intruding on the Parks. Fosters should take up the challenge of reusing them.

The office has been in mourning over the loss of **Port Appin lighthouse** - painted the colours of Mr. Blobby by local campaigners in the dead of the night, it has fallen victim to the Northern Lighthouse Board's moves to automation. An attempt to placate local sentiment was

made by offering the decapitated light to the villagers, but another locally loved landmark has been lost, lending more weight to the argument for broader criteria for listing and the classification of demolition as a form of development. In the south, the move to automation recently led Trinity House (England's lighthouse board) to announce it was to convert all of the redundant keeper's cottage to holiday lets - a far more satisfactory approach than demolition.

Should you be so inclined, it is worth a peek at the Scottish Civic Trust's excellent Buildings at Risk publication to get an idea of what's going on north of the border.

### Administration

Every month we send out 60-plus reminders to Friends to put a cheque in the post. This is a horribly inefficient and expensive way of operating, and so we would like as many Friends to set up **standing orders** as possible. This involves a quick trip to your bank, where you ask them to set up a standing order for the annual payment of your sub (currently £15). Our bank details are:

SAVE Britain's Heritage  
Account number: 0630114                      Sort code: 309186

Could you let us know once you have done this.

There also remain a number of Friends who have not yet signed **Gift Aid** forms, which enable us to claim back from the taxman 28p in every pound you donate, and you to knock that donation off your income for the year: all to the benefit of everyone. We will dispatch these to you soon.

So valued is the experience of working at SAVE as a volunteer that all of our volunteers seem to have gone and got jobs in the conservation world (either that or there is an excess number of jobs in conservation). While this is wonderful for them, it leaves us a spot short in the office. If there are any of you out there who would like to impress us with your envelope stuffing and stamp licking abilities, please do contact the office - we only have about 3 or 4 major mailings every year, and could do with a few extra pairs of hands.

**Thank you for you generous responses to the SAVE shopping list which appeared in the last newsletter - one generous soul sent in a cheque for the lot (net of VAT!).**

### Out of government

The issue of locally loved but unprotected buildings is the subject Moira McGhie's St. William of York Deposition, which has gained a wide body of support. The deposition would see demolition classed as a form of development and thus make it possible for objections against the demolition of non residential buildings to be lodged with local planning authorities and listened to. The ideal opportunity for this has arisen as a result of the **Planning Green Paper**, where amongst other things, various changes are proposed to the GPDO. These are to be welcomed: currently it is a vast muddle, totally impenetrable to all but the most agile and patient minds.

The idea behind the deposition is not new – we have wanted to see this happen for years, but it is currently gaining increasing momentum due to Moira's great efforts. Each unlisted non-residential building that is demolished against the wishes of local people gives this initiative further fuel.

'Sustainable Communities' is the catchy title of the government's response to everyone else's responses to the Planning Green Paper. Although claiming to be about empowering communities, this is essentially a document with the needs property development industry at its heart, not that this is all bad news – indeed many of the more worrying aspects of the green paper have been successfully rejected following the record 16,000 responses to the green paper. Planning is clearly an area in which people are interested – or maybe this is a sign that there was something not quite right with the green paper's proposals.

First and foremost amongst the changes is that there is now no presumption that the number of statutory consultees will be reduced, although there is a proposal for a 21 day deadline for their responses. More committee meetings to discuss cases in the offing for the amenity societies, poor sods. None the less, a small but important victory.

Other measures include the tightening up of compulsory purchase powers, to make it easier for developers to assemble sites as well as making easier for big projects to move ahead, getting around the obstacles posed by the likes of Mr. Swampy and Co. Although this may whiff of giving license to the big to bully the little, it could have possible effects for buildings at risk, unless of course the measure is made specific to new projects. Still, for local authorities to gain experience and confidence in compulsorily purchasing buildings is no bad thing if they can then be encouraged to use some of that experience to sort out the problems affecting historic buildings on their patches.

So, there is a whole raft of measures that should be welcomed in their own right, but in the wider context of the Green Paper, they might be seen to take on slightly sinister tone, making life easier for those with little or no regard to the historic environment.

The proposed huge **injection of cash into the planning system** by government is of course welcome but whether this will have any tangible benefits to conservation remains unknown. Gaps at conservation officer level still exist in local authorities and the problem of buildings at risk is still way down on the list of priorities: a job advert was recently sent to the office for a buildings at risk officer position in a rural authority, salary £12,000. It is more likely that the money will be spent on more administrative staff with little grasp of conservation issues, who will be able to process more of the paperwork, so speeding up the planning process.

A point to be borne in mind when considering the green paper and its offshoots is the statistic that 30% of all planning applications are reckoned to have some effect on

the historic environment. Surely then 30% of the green paper should look at the historic environment.

## DCMS spending review

So, what was there for the built heritage in this then? Not a sausage.

## Review of the Heritage Lottery Fund

Although there are perhaps aspects of the HLF which could be tinkered with (such as decision making times), wholesale massive reform is probably not necessary, and neither is a decrease in the slice of the lottery cake it receives. However, the DCMS is currently having a look at all aspects of the HLF as part of a wider review of the lottery. One suggestion which has appeared from heaven only knows where is that punters could tick a box on the back of their lottery ticket indicating their preferred area. Wildlife, youth and health would benefit, heritage almost certainly wouldn't.

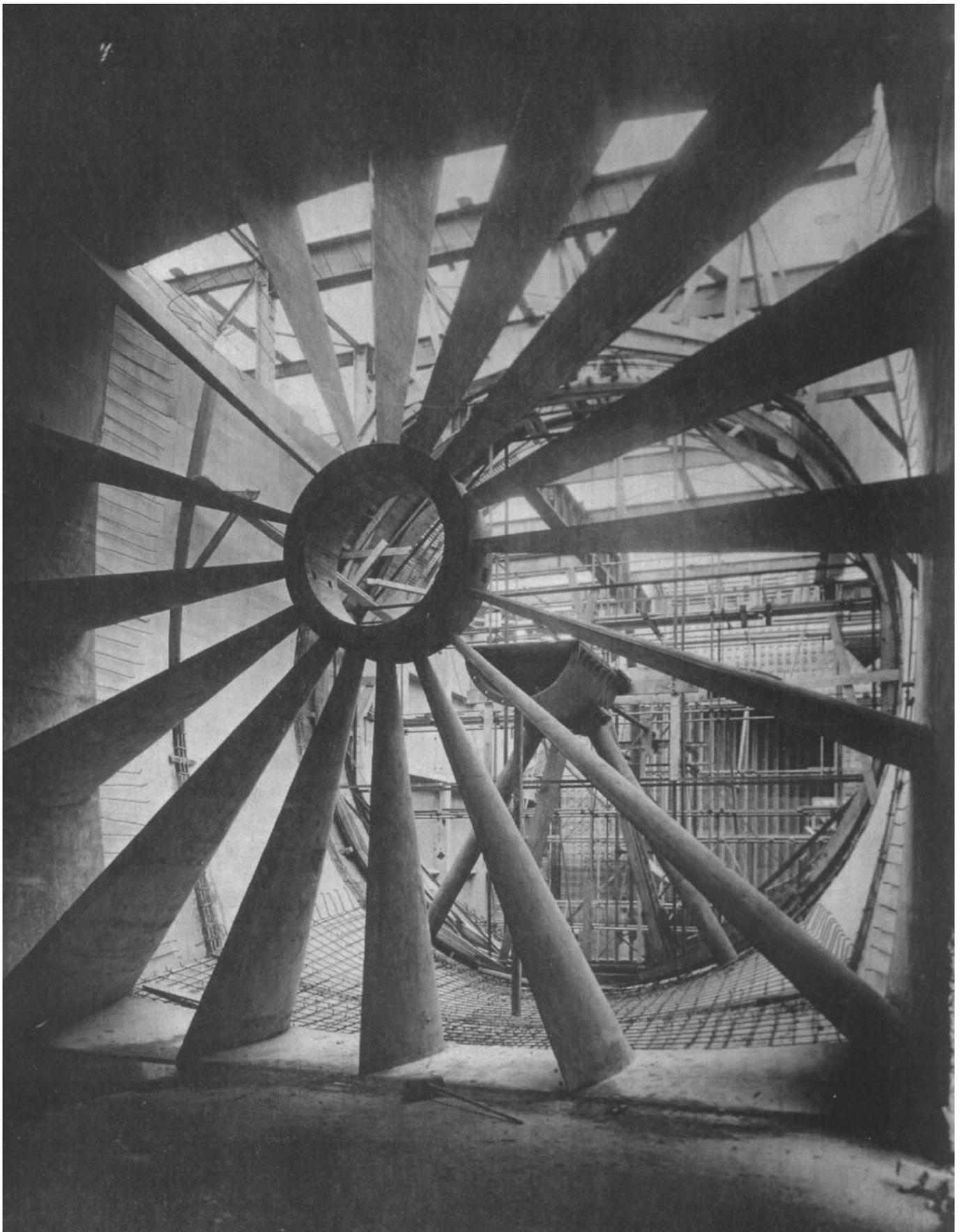
The HLF has had a massive impact on the historic environment at all levels, providing funding for a massive range of initiatives and projects beyond the well known high profile cases. Given that the number of people playing the lottery is decreasing, any diminution of the HLF's share of the proceeds will have a drastic effect on its ability to fund this range of activities, and in light of the lack of extra funds heading towards heritage following the government's spending review, this is the double whammy: English Heritage's ability to fund historic buildings will in real terms continue to decrease, as will the HLF's. A vigorous defence of the HLF must be mounted.

## Maintain our Heritage

The Bath pilot scheme is now underway, testing techniques, service, people and all sort of other considerations. Key amongst these are the insurance and health and safety concerns which could have well strangled this vital initiative at birth. The Department for Trade and Industry sponsored research is kicking off with a module looking at best practice, to be carried out by the University of Western England, and will be followed by other modules shortly.

Maintenance is now creeping up the conservation agenda, with proposals at English Heritage for a whole range of committees and groups to grapple with the issue, as well as a vastly increased budget. Meanwhile, the IHBC have been busy formulating some guidance on maintenance which is of course to be welcomed, and will no doubt be incorporated into the emerging canon on maintenance.

The SPAB's National Maintenance week starts on Friday 22nd November, when Maintain hope to blitz the gutters of a street in Bath, hopefully with some form of celebrity lashed to a ladder. ('we may be in the gutter but we're looking at the stars' quipped one Maintain's directors) That old mantra "staving of decay by daily care".....



The 24 foot wind tunnel at Farnborough under construction.

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