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Sir John Soane's Piercefield House is in peril: handsome offer made to repair it – SAVE urges its owners to give the offer serious consideration.

One of Britain's great country houses in peril, Piercefield House, situated half way along the picturesque Piercefield Walks on the River Wye, has been lying as a picturesque ruin for decades, steadily worsening in condition. It is owned by property developers, owners of the In and Out Club in London, the Reuben Brothers.

SAVE calls on the Reuben Brothers to give proper consideration to a serious offer that has been made to acquire and restore the house. In addition the Piercefield Walks are on the market presenting an extraordinary opportunity to reunite the house and its historic landscape, a few miles from Tintern Abbey.

Piercefield House is a Grade II* listed building, built by Soane for George Smith in 1785-93. One of his early works, here Soane moved towards an ultra-sophisticated, stripped-down Classicism with only the shallowest relief.

The house has been empty and disintegrating since the Second World War, and is now on the edge of collapse – only four roofless walls and two pavilions that were once attached to the house by wings remain standing. The wings were designed by Joseph Bonomi, who came to England to work for the Adam Brothers and is alluded to as a fashionable architect in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Contained within the Soane shell is the substantial core of an earlier Baroque house. Part is visible as a freestanding wing at the back with giant Ionic pilasters and arched windows. More is revealed inside Soane's shell, where wall plaster has fallen away to reveal Baroque quoins, windows and niches.

Part of Chepstow Racecourse, it was bought by property developers the Reuben Brothers in 2006, when they purchased Northern Racing. Some temporary repairs were carried out on the house as holding measures a few

years ago, but these are now in need of replacement. A handsome set of stables rots beside the house.

Piercefield House was on the market with estate agents Jackson Stops when the Reuben Brothers acquired it, and yet several serious offers made on the house were ignored.

This week a new cash offer was made on the house by entrepreneur Edward Strachan, backed up by a pledge of three million pounds towards repairs, with half a million every year until the house and interiors are fully repaired and restored. In the meantime, others who made offers on the house in recent years have made themselves known to SAVE following an event we held in Piercefield Park last month.

In addition, last year the main house was separated from the park and parceled off into an off-shore company. This divides a site that should not be divided – the house was built to complement the park and the park landscaped to showcase the house. By separating the house any potential rescue of the house is being severely compromised.

In July, SAVE conducted a walk through the grounds and held a picnic in front of the house at which SAVE President Marcus Binney appealed to the Reuben Brothers to follow the example of the great rescues of other Soane ruins, such as Pell Wall and Boconnoc House.

Guests at the picnic included local conservation officers, and people involved in the restoration of the Piercefield Walks, local museum directors and architectural historians, Sir John Soane's biographer Gillian Darley, a curator from the Soane Museum, entrepreneur Edward Strachan, architect Michael Davies who has worked on restoration plans for the house, and many others.

The Piercefield Walks that meander along the edge of the park, following the line of the river, have been cleared and repaired over the last five years. It is a permissive path and has brought increasing numbers into the park, significantly increasing public awareness of the plight of Piercefield House. In addition, the Piercefield Walks have recently gone on the market – this is an unprecedented opportunity for the site to be reunited once again.

We appeal to the Reuben Brothers, property developers of immense wealth, and patrons of a generous foundation, to declare their future plans for

Piercefield House, to reunite the house with the parkland and to give proper consideration to any offers made on the house including the one made this week.

SAVE Director Clem Cecil says: “As the owners of a listed building the Reuben Brothers have a responsibility to either care for it or to allow someone else to do so. It is of utmost importance for the future of this remarkable and beloved building, that all offers made on the house are taken seriously in order to safeguard its future for the nation.”

SAVE President Marcus Binney says: “Piercefield really is an important house. It’s a fine early work by Soane wrapped around an older Baroque house that might have been by William Tulman, Wren’s assistant, and there’s evidence the house has Tudor or even earlier origins. It’s also hugely important in terms of the Picturesque and Romantic movements and, because of its location, it’s truly a gateway to Wales.”

Local press coverage from the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Review:
<http://www.forest-and-wye-today.co.uk/news.cfm?id=25937>

For more information and images please contact the SAVE office on 0207 253 3500 or office@savebritainsheritage.org



Piercefield House in better days



SAVE President Marcus Binney speaking at SAVE's Piercefield picnic event

Notes to Editors: SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

Press release issued by SAVE Britain's Heritage, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ.

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