

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **BULLDOZERS THREATEN FORMER HOME OF LEADING BRISTOL MAYOR**

SAVE Britain's Heritage is calling on Bristol City Council to abandon plans to demolish a fine Italianate Victorian villa with important links to the city. Ashley house was commissioned by Sir Charles Wathen, six times Mayor of Bristol between 1884 -1890, and is rich in original details such as ornate plasterwork, decorative tiles and coloured glass.

Ashley House is one of a series of large villas built for leading local grandees in what was then a new and airy suburb. It was designed to command fine views across the city. Today, although its setting has been compromised by later development, Ashley House stands out as a building of great quality and, combined with the Edwardian Sefton Park School behind, it lends great interest and character to the area.

SAVE Britain's Heritage was alerted to Bristol City Council's intention to demolish Ashley House early in 2008. We are urging the Council to reconsider its proposals and to investigate retaining and reusing the existing buildings in order to provide new educational facilities.

Andy Foyle, author of the recent authoritative guide to Bristol says, 'Ashley House is a good example of its type both stylistically and in draughtsmanship. If it were located in Clifton or Redland it would be listed already.'

Marcus Binney, President of SAVE says, 'Ashley House is a charming Italianate villa with crisp, still beautiful stone detail, standing amidst plentiful trees that give its grounds the feel of a Georgian town square. The delightful double and triple arches of the porch and upper windows are one of the most distinctive features of the Italianate style. SAVE is utterly opposed to the demolition of such a handsome house designed by a significant local architect for a man who was six times Lord Mayor of Bristol. Ashley House could and should be retained and refurbished in any expansion proposals for the adjoining school.

'The principal trees in the grounds should also be preserved and protected. Well built Victorian stone houses are the delight of many residential streets in Bristol and this is definitely an important landmark.'

The architect, Samuel Burleigh Gabriel was Bristol based and was responsible for five other buildings which are listed. Ashley House was in residential use until 1935 during which time it housed two further Bristol Mayors. Since then it has been occupied by various educational facilities. Most recently, it has functioned as a popular youth centre which has now moved to allow for the building's demolition.

Sir Charles Wathen's contributions to Bristol are significant. He was responsible for a number of public buildings including the City Museum. He is also remembered by his donation of a stained glass window located in the transept of St Mark's, the Lord Mayor's Chapel in Bristol.

#### 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.

In addition to our active campaigning, we maintain a register of buildings at risk. Friends of SAVE (an annual subscription costs £25) have free access to our online register. In addition each year we publish a catalogue of over 100 buildings at risk which have come to our attention over the previous 12 months. Our latest catalogue, *Cherish or Perish?* is available from our office for £12 (incl. p&p within the UK).

For further information contact:

Catherine Townsend (Buildings at Risk Officer), SAVE Britain's Heritage, 70 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6EJ

Tel: 020 7253 3500. Email: [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org). [www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)