

NEWSLETTER - April 2001

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Buildings at Risk

The Online Register is now entering its third year. We will continue to add new buildings to the register and to update existing ones as and when we get new information. There are still some major gaps in our information, such as Merseyside and Tyne and Wear. However, as more local authorities carry out BaR surveys and make the information available to SAVE, these gaps should continue to be filled.

We also welcome any information friends can give us about buildings which concern them. From the amount of information we now have it is possible to identify areas for potential reports, which could be written using the register as a key source material.

We have had substantial press coverage of the BaR project, which has undoubtedly help with sales of the catalogue and the online register. Articles have been published in broadsheet newspapers such as The Guardian, The Telegraph and The Times, as well as in The Express and in magazines such as Period Living and Traditional Homes. These have highlighted some of the more interesting and attractive buildings such as the Bluecoat Brewery in Ware, but rest assured, there are plenty more interesting and exciting buildings still on the register such as the Coach House at Denne Hill in Kent, Titanic Mill at Linthwaite, the Old Gasworks at Sudbury, and as discussed below, Apethorpe Hall, Northants.

This press coverage is essential to the project's success - the more people we can get interested in SAVE's BaR activities, the more buildings we can help secure a future for.

Apethorpe Hall



Those of you familiar with our "Buildings At Risk" list will already know of Apethorpe Hall. This splendid building, dating from circa 1500 first came to SAVE's attention in 1982, when it was vacated by the school which had previously occupied it. The building has remained vacant ever since, and although its fine exterior is mainly in relatively good condition, recently the roof has begun to deteriorate seriously in places, threatening the superb interior. In 1996, Northamptonshire District Council served an urgent works notice. Two more have since been served, and measures have been taken to prevent vandals entering the building, following a break-in, in which a statue was stolen.

A compulsory purchase order served by the Council over a year ago has yet to come to anything, as the absent owner has employed various stalling tactics, promising to carry out repairs, and subsequently failing so to do. A repairs notice drawn up three years ago put the price of repairs at £1.8m, but the figure is now more likely to be double this. Several potential buyers, vetted by the Council, have attempted to buy the Hall, but all to no avail. This is not because of the scale of work needed, but because of the owner.

Despite this, the Council remains hopeful. English Heritage is presently drawing up a full schedule of repairs, and could then move to a compulsory purchase order if necessary. It has very recently listed several of the garden structures, indicating its concern for the whole park, not just the Hall. The Council is hoping that once the present owner either sells up or is forced to sell, the main courtyard will be open to the public, and the other courtyard developed into a private residential area of 1 to 3 units.

Tall buildings in London

London's newly self-declared doyen of architectural taste, more frequently known as Mayor Ken Livingstone, has already declared his love of tall buildings. Fortunately, however, his latest attempts to introduce high rise office developments into the historic fabric of London have been dealt a blow by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The Department has finally reacted to the repeated requests of English Heritage, SAVE and others to call in the planning application for the Heron Bishopsgate tower, which is planned to be built in a cluster with the proposed Swiss Re "gherkin" tower and the NatWest tower.

This concept of tall buildings is one that London's Mayor finds very attractive. Favoured sites are major transport nodes. Although this principally means railway termini, practically any tube station might be regarded as such, and this could lead to the peppercorning of towers all over London, and a consequent free-for-all for property developers. What is needed from the Mayor is a definite policy, not arbitrary choices.

The threat posed to the historic skyline and fabric of London by these tower blocks is immense. Although views of St. Paul's are already offered a degree of protection, clusters of 200 metre-plus towers will detract from other aspects of the historic skyline which remain unprotected. Foremost among these is the Royal Parks, which have suffered since the 1960s from the construction of high rise buildings around them, and remain unprotected.

Furthermore, towers rip through the existing fabric, and alter the way in which people use the area. One only has to look across the channel to Paris to see the effect which the 1970s' Montparnasse tower (incidentally, at a major railway terminus) had on the arrondissement, tearing the heart out of the local community, and creating a series of bland, unused and unloved plazas in the surrounding area.

Do we really want to see this happening all over London? SAVE thinks not. There is a case for tall buildings within the existing clusters in the City and Docklands, but in the absence of any proper guidelines and policy, London will suffer severely. We await the Mayor's overdue Spatial Development Strategy. No decisions should be made which might pre-empt this. To repeat the assertion made in our previous newsletter, the longer the issue of building policy is left open, the more proposals will slip through the planning system.

Paddington Station

In our last newsletter, we discussed Railtrack's plans for the redevelopment of Paddington Station, involving the demolition of the Grade I listed Span 4 and the construction of a 40 storey tower block, designed by Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners. We wrote to Westminster City Council, objecting to the scheme on the basis that the thinking behind Railtrack's decision to demolish Span 4 was flawed.

Although hidden under a mass of scaffolding, the trainshed survives substantially intact, and despite Railtrack's claims to the contrary, SAVE believes that it is possible to accommodate the extra platform capacity required without demolition. The other point on which Railtrack base their argument for the demolition of the building is the need to improve taxi facilities in order to better accommodate Heathrow Express passengers. Although this need does exist, the new proposals would involve the taxi drop off / pick up zone being further from the Heathrow Express platforms and check-in desks, above platform level - a better solution would be a taxi drop off / pick up point at the south eastern entrance to the station, similar to that which serves the Eurostar at the Gare du Nord in Paris.

Since Railtrack's proposals were sprung on Westminster Council, the Council have re-written the planning brief for the whole Paddington area. Contained within this is the suggestion that a workable solution could be found for Paddington station without having to demolish Span 4. Furthermore, the conditions that it lays down for demolition are very strict. We will continue to press for the preservation and repair of Span 4 - there is still the opportunity for Railtrack to develop the land alongside this.

The Baltic Exchange

Planning Permission has been granted to demolish what remains of the bomb damaged former Baltic Exchange in the City of London and replace it with a 42 storey tower block, nicknamed the Gerkin, designed by the Richard Rogers Partnership for Swiss Re. At the time of writing our last newsletter we were poised to take John Prescott to the high court over the former Baltic Exchange. However, at the very

last moment, as was widely reported at the time, SAVE was forced to withdraw its action.

We have discussed the case and it's implications at some length on the website (there is a link from the home page). If you do not have internet access and would like a print out of this, please give us a call at the SAVE office, we'd be more than happy to put one in the post to you.

As you will remember, the interior of the Exchange was dismantled prior to demolition, with the condition that it would be re-erected. It would now appear that although the parts are all in storage, there is no site for them to be re-erected on, and nor is there the money with which to do this.

This is potentially a disastrous precedent, with immediate consequences for other buildings and structures that concern SAVE, such as the St. Pancras Gas Holders. These are due to be dismantled as a part of the work needed to complete phase II of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. However, as yet no site has been earmarked for their re-erection, and no funds have been promised for this.

The Lucas Hospital, Wokingham



The future of these Grade I listed almshouses, built in 1666 and since run for the shelter of the "poor men" of the area is in the balance. They are particularly handsome, with windows that have never been altered to sashes, an attached chapel, quarters for a warden and a barn with a stable / bothy for each of the "brothers" who lived there. Many of the fittings and fixtures, although simple, are original, and the building survives in its largely pastoral setting.

There has been a long running campaign organised by locals to prevent the Almshouses from suffering from development in the large walled garden. Through their combined efforts with SAVE and English Heritage, the prospect of this has now been almost entirely eliminated, following the withdrawal of an application to renew planning permission by the Honourable Company of Drapers, who presently run the Henry Lucas Charity.

The Drapers have now signalled their intent to sell the almshouses without the planning permission for enabling development. The Charity Commission have approved the sale.

It is now essential to find a sympathetic buyer, and SAVE have been in contact with both the National Trust and the Landmark Trust.

This case raises some wider issues for the future - there are 46 Grade I listed, 113 Grade II*, and 680 Grade II listed almshouses in the country, and as this case shows, they are in a vulnerable position. What state are they in? What does this future hold for them? This is an area we intend to explore.

Leeds General Infirmary.

More hospital developments. The Leeds General Infirmary has submitted outline plans for the redevelopment of the Hospital. This involves constructing a new building on the north-east of the site and taking the site's southern block, including the Grade I listed George Gilbert Scott infirmary, out of service in order to sell it off for demolition redevelopment.

There are two main areas of concern. What will happen to the Grade I Listed George Gilbert Scott infirmary? It has been earmarked for residential conversion, and although there have been many extremely successful hospital conversions in the past, it is extremely important that a new owner and new use are identified before it is allowed to become vacant, and that the building is treated with the utmost sensitivity.

Another concern is that in the proposed scheme, the unlisted Brotherton wing will be demolished to make way for a new commercial building. This is an important element within the conservation area, not least because it bounds Millennium Gardens (formerly the Mandela Gardens) and was quite obviously built to compliment the Grade II* listed Civic Hall, built in 1937 by Vincent Harris. The Brotherton wing is a calmly dignified Portland stone building with attractive rounded sun rooms (or solariums) at the south end. Initial ideas for its replacement show a building of a similar size and scale but with far less sympathy for the Civic Hall. The architects claim that the floor to floor height of the Brotherton wing render it unsuitable for modern commercial use. However, SAVE is demanding the revision of the plans. We will be watching this case closely over the next few weeks and months.

Gordon Brown's 2001 Budget

Within the 2001 budget proposals, there seem to be one or two little gems for the conservation world, disguised as regeneration incentives, as well as an update on the Chancellor's proposed cut in Value Added Tax on repairs to "listed buildings used as places of worship".

The first of these welcome concessions is a cut the level of VAT payable on residential conversions from 17.5% to 5%. This should make the prospect of converting former industrial buildings and other non-residential buildings into residential accommodation more attractive to both individuals property developers.

Secondly, he has proposed provision for a 100% capital allowance to renovate empty flats over shops. This should encourage owners to bring these underused and undervalued spaces back to life, although it will do nothing to encourage mixed use in new developments.

The proposed cut in VAT on repairs to "listed buildings used as places of worship" has been replaced with a grant to help repairs, which should consist about two thirds of the VAT bill in the repairs. The advantage of this grant over a simple cut in VAT is that it would have taken between three and five years for Brussels to clear the proposed cut, whereas the grant will hopefully be more immediate. However, while welcoming this measure, we have to wait for the small print to come through, as the phrase "listed buildings used as places of worship" has yet to be clarified: does it include needy redundant churches and religious buildings, or solely those with congregations?

All Change at SAVE

SAVE has a new secretary in the form of Adam Wilkinson, who took over from the illustrious Richard Pollard at the beginning of March. Deborah Churchill, our assistant secretary and compiler of the marvellous Buildings at Risk register has also decided to move to pastures new at the end of March, and is due to be replaced by Alice Yates. We owe both Richard and Deborah a great debt of gratitude for the work that they have done here at SAVE, and look forward to continuing their superb work with as much aplomb and enthusiasm as they have shown. We wish them luck in their future work.

Give us your time! SAVE still needs a part time office volunteer

This is an essential role to keep the office running, taking care of day to day aspects of office life, and as a natural consequence becoming deeply involved in the essential work that we do. The job would involve handling membership matters, book and internet orders, responding to general enquiries, and lending a hand with press campaigns and mailings. Although we are helped out by a number of occasional volunteers, a more permanent presence would greatly help our cause.

The hours would be flexible, but equivalent to about 2 days per week. All reasonable travel expenses would be refunded. The office is only a minute's walk from Farringdon Tube Station, and a couple more from Barbican Tube Station.

If you are interested and live in the London area, please do not hesitate to contact Adam Wilkinson at the SAVE office (020 7253 3500).

Maintain our Heritage

This initiative is founded upon the idea of Ruskin, Morris *et al* that routine maintenance ("staving off decay by daily care") is the best way of looking after old buildings.

With strong support from SAVE the scheme has now progressed to the stage whereby the pilot scheme in Bath and North East Somerset is nearing its launch. It is hoped that this will lead to further pilots in other parts of the country.

The emphasis placed on the need to effectively maintain our historic buildings in English Heritage's "Power of Place" publication has led to discussions with Cadw and English Heritage on how Maintain can work with them to further the programme.

If you wish to contact Maintain, either for information, or to offer assistance, you can do so via their website.
www.maintainourheritage.co.uk

Funding for Rural BaR

The 'Them-and-Us' divide between urban and rural communities has rarely been stronger than it is today. We have been thinking for sometime about a potential report on the lack of funding available to rural buildings at risk. English Heritage can only grant aid Grade I and II* buildings but Grade II listed buildings in towns and cities have been able to benefit from Conservation Area Partnership Schemes, the Townscape Heritage Initiatives and other regeneration money. Urban regeneration is of course vitally important but virtually no money exists for isolated rural buildings and this must be redressed.

Rural vernacular buildings are important for a number of reasons: they document social and economic history and reflect local skills and materials. Above all they are an intrinsic part of our landscape and contribute to it so much more honestly than the off-the-peg sheds we so often see sprouting up today.

Obviously the rural community has more pressing concerns at the moment with the current Foot and Mouth crisis and because of the virulence of this disease there couldn't be a worse possible time to embark on a series of fact finding missions across the country. However, this is subject which we will keep on the back burner for a potential future report.

A Future for Farm Buildings, a SAVE report from 1988 gives an interesting introduction to the importance of farm buildings as well as focusing on best practice for conversions. It is available from SAVE for £5.

Seaside Resorts - Hastings

A recent report from the English Tourism Council (ETC) "*Sea Changes - Creating worlds Class resorts in England*" has warned that seaside resorts are in danger of falling into terminal decline. A recent SAVE visit to Hastings showed how much there still is to do despite the heroic efforts of local Civic Society who transformed one of their redundant churches into a concert hall.

Hastings has been a resort since 1775, and its continued popularity lasted well into the 20th century. Today an air of decay hangs over the town: the huge and derelict Queen's Hotel, built in 1858-62 by F H Fowler and empty for the past 13 years is a striking symptom of this. Underused, empty or under-maintained buildings, and seasonal businesses boarded up for the winter, give Hastings the feel of a ghost town.

Since the advent of cheap package holidays, the popularity of English seaside resorts has declined and the ETC has suggested that each resort needs to "establish its own distinctive brand in the minds of visitors and deliver a quality product". This is deemed necessary as unlike resorts on the continent we simply do not have the sunny weather to draw the crowds, and this re-branding is beginning to happen. For example, Blackpool, still the most popular resort in Britain with over 7 million visitors a year, is preparing to set itself up as England's Las Vegas; and St. Ives (which has been popular with artists since the early 20th century) has benefited from the presence of Tate St. Ives since 1993.

In spite of the filthy weather on our visit there is no question that Hastings has some beautiful buildings: The gracious Wellington Square, built c.1820, has suffered from lack of maintenance to some buildings and the insensitive removal of balconies but remains a great asset to the town; Pelham Crescent, 1824-28 by Joseph Kay, is again down at heel but lovely, overlooking the sea front. Attractive weatherboarded seasonal buildings along the seafront, the tightly packed buildings of the old town connected by impossibly narrow passage ways and steps, and the unique net shops all add to the feel of the place.

The Hastings Regeneration Partnership has £1.75M in SRB funds to promote regeneration concentrated around the railway station and seafront and a development brief is being drawn up by BDP. This is an ideal opportunity for some conservation-led regeneration schemes.

Following this visit, SAVE is considering the possibility of a brief report on seaside towns.

The Net Shops

At the far eastern end of Hastings an unusual cluster of buildings - tall, slender, black weatherboarded and of varying heights immediately catch your attention.

These are the Net Shops. The earliest reference to these buildings is in 1588, but the current layout dates from 1830 when the council laid down detailed regulations regarding the layout and form of these buildings. They were used by Hastings fishermen, who would go on long voyages to the North Sea in search of herring, and down the channel for mackerel, to store their unused nets. These net shops have been restored by funding from English Heritage, the European Union and English Heritage.

www.savebritainsheritage.org

The website continues to be very popular with over 24,000 people visiting it since the beginning of this year. We will continue to expand and develop the site, which has become an excellent resource, and would welcome suggestions about what Friends would like to see on it.

Jubilee Appeal

Thank you to everyone who so generously donated to our Jubilee appeal. We have raised over £6000 so far which will be put towards supporting our key work over the next three years. The appeal is still open and, as always, all donations will be gratefully received.

Sleeping Beauties

This year's catalogue of buildings at risk has recently been published. It contains the a wide range of buildings From across England an Wales, all in need of new owners or new uses.

This year some great buildings are featured including a quintessentially English manor house in Worcestershire, a lovely Victorian brewery with permission for residential conversion in Hertfordshire and a tiny thatched cottage in Lincolnshire. The report is available to Friends for the reduced price of £8 All been selected from our Online Register of buildings at risk. Friends can subscribe for £10.

SAVE in court again? The Norfolk and Norwich Hospital.

Permission has been granted by Norwich City Council for the demolition of the majority of the Grade II listed Boardman and Wyatt hospital at Norwich, which dates from 1879. Bizaarly enough, listed building consent has not been required by the Council, and SAVE is determined to correct this.

The hospital was designed as an H plan building, with the wards in the main wings which form the uprights of the H. These 'Pavilion Wings' are due for demolition, as the Council does not consider them covered by the listing. This decision flies in the face of both legislation and planning policy guidance, which we believe the Council has interpreted incorrectly. For reasons unknown and unclear to us, they are sticking to their guns, and refusing to request an application for listed building consent from the developer, Persimmon Homes.

Not only is this bad practice on the Council's part, but it has wider implications for listed buildings across England. The list description does not specifically mention the Pavilion Wings, and as is explicitly stated in legislation, the list descriptions are only meant to serve as a guide, rather than representing the specific extent of the listing. If Norwich City Council do not recognise the Pavilion Wings as listed, they are effectively saying that alterations to and even demolition of parts of listed buildings not mentioned in the list description do not require listed building consent. This would be a terrible precedent to set, and we intend to ensure that Norwich City Council act within the dictates of the law.