

Newsletter – April / May 2005

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1975 – 2005

SAVE is now 30 years old but thanks to Adam our secretary and a host of new recruits as youthful as ever. SAVE has made its mark by concentrating its energies and resources on key issues. First on historic buildings and areas threatened imminently with destruction. Second on those simply left to decay, which are often crying out for new owners and new uses. Third, we have always tried to be practical. Not just to object, but to set out positive solutions. In the last, extreme, resort we have taken on and raised the money to restore buildings manifestly on death row – Barlaston Hall, All Soul's Haley, Hill, Halifax, 6 Palace Street Caernarfon, and now Castle House in Bridgwater.

We have sought to inject a new fighting spirit into conservation, a willingness to stand up for interesting and unusual buildings which developers and local politicians may simply have ridiculed. With photographs and research into their history we have set out to explain why they are of interest and to open people's eyes to qualities they may not have perceived before. We began with railway architecture, continued with 'Satanic Mills', and Nonconformity in the Fall of Zion, and have since worked our way through farm buildings, public baths, inns and pubs, hospitals and military buildings and most recently law courts. We have also put the spotlight on remarkable places whose interest has been overlooked or gone virtually unrecognised – most recently the wind tunnels of the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough. Before that came the pioneering series of northern towns.

SAVE has also taken up the major policy issues. Our hard-fought campaign over Mentmore provoked a Parliamentary committee on the National Land Fund and led to its reconstitution as the National Heritage Memorial Fund – under independent trustees as we suggested. And from this sprung the Heritage Lottery Fund. When listing slowed to a virtual halt in the late 70s our carefully documented exposes prompted Michael Heseltine to kick-start the listing process more than doubling the total number of listed buildings.

Even so, deplorably, this was a task never completed and today 16th, 17th and 18th century buildings are still unlisted or underlisted in parts of England, most notably in Babergh District in Suffolk, which includes the towns and villages of Hadleigh, Lavenham, Long Melford, Nayland and Sudbury. The lists for Oxford and Cambridge have not been revised in 30 years.

For all the success we have had in raising awareness and the huge numbers of people passionately interested in the rescue and repair of historic buildings, Government has rarely shown less interest or support. Major historic buildings continue to be shut down, sometimes virtually abandoned, or thrust on the market without a thought to the most appropriate solution. The Ministry of Defence responded positively and constructively to SAVE's barbs in Deserted Bastions and the Royal William Victualling Yard is now being transformed in exactly the manner we proposed. By contrast the Department of Health sits scandalously on a vast property portfolio, leaving much of it to rot, while ministers vacillate about its future. At Severalls near Colchester, we have found a developer who has worked up a scheme with us, preserving all the worthwhile buildings on the site for residential and educational use. Yet the Secretary of State and his officials have simply brushed off our approaches.

Think too, that over 30 years SAVE has achieved what it has with a handful of staff, never more three and sometimes only one. Often we have been desperately short of funds. Now with the support of a growing number of friends and benefactors our finances are gradually improving, opening up exciting ways in which we can develop our work –through better publications, more practical schemes for saving individual buildings, an expanding website and above all fast concerted action on more endangered buildings. Recently Adam has put major effort, with impressive success, into submissions to Parliamentary

Committees. Ela has greatly increased the coverage of our buildings at risk website and now Dale has joined us to organise events and explore further sponsorship.

This autumn, the V & A has offered the temporary exhibition gallery beside the new Architecture Gallery for a SAVE 30 year retrospective. It will chronicle success, loss and current and future challenges. We hope you will come and bring your friends.

Marcus Binney
President

The General Market, Smithfield, London

Over a year after our last request for the “spot-listing” of the General Market buildings at Smithfield, we have finally had an answer from the Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell. Much to our delight, she has used her initiative as Minister to over-rule English Heritage and list one of the threatened buildings, the Red House, at Smithfield. Her grounds for doing so are that it is probably the earliest surviving powered cold store, dating from 1898. Previously ice was imported from Sweden and Norway. Much credit is due to SAVE Friend Ev Cook for her valuable research in to the history of the buildings and discovering the real story of the Red House.

The Red House only represents about an eighth of the area which Thornfield Properties are seeking to demolish and redevelop and one might imagine that its listing would not stop them from seeking listed building consent for its demolition, or perhaps its retention and the redevelopment of the rest of the site. However, the listing arrived with a letter from the Secretary of State to John Prescott, suggesting that he “call in” the application for scrutiny at a Public Inquiry. It is remarkable that such a letter was written and made public. Furthermore, the Secretary of State made it clear that other buildings on the site are of great importance to the character of the conservation area in which they sit. A rather strong case for their preservation is being built, and the input of very many architectural historians, from James Stevens Curl to Jenny Freeman to Lord Briggs, all of whom wrote to the Minister at SAVE’s request, has no doubt played an important role in this. We extend our thanks to them and the legion of people and organisations that wrote in support of listing.

However, the developer has been very aggressive, at one point threatening the Secretary of State with a judicial review of her failure to make a decision on the listing of the buildings on the grounds that they were losing potential profit. Our legal advisors tell us that the case would have been thrown out had it gone ahead. Most recently Thornfield have applied for a Certificate of Immunity from Listing for the parts of the General Market buildings not covered by the listing.

Thornfield do not own the General Market buildings, rather they have an option on them from the Corporation of London. The listing should force them to reconsider their proposals for demolition. If however, they prove to be in for the long haul and a public inquiry, they can be certain that we’ll be there too, armed with viable alternative plans for the reuse of the buildings and unlimited energy.

The sad casualty of the exercise so far, with the great emphasis placed on finding new evidence on the historic interest, is beauty, which has been rather overlooked by the Secretary of State’s advisors.



The Red House, now listed Grade II

Winchester

Meanwhile, Thornfield are planning a development in Winchester, which will see a massive building constructed on the site of a rather nasty 1960s development. While this demolition of the 1960s buildings represents no loss to Winchester, the scale of what is proposed does. If built, the development will be the same height as the parapets of the cathedral. The ambient height in Winchester's city centre is between two and half and four storeys, with the wonderful cathedral dominating the dell around which Winchester is built. The construction of a grossly out of scale building will only serve to disrupt the splendid townscape that has survived thus far. In the face of local opposition, Thornfield have yet to back down on their plans.

Out of Government (and Parliament):

Pathfinder

The Government's policy of building the economic success of the North on an increased variety in housing (through the demolition of up to 400,000 pre-1919 terraced homes over the next 15 years) is the elephant in the room at the moment. Admittedly, the point on economic success is only one of the many reasons given for the insane plan to tear down swathes of historic buildings and entire historic areas, but gives a good flavour of what we are up against. The current rate of demolition will result in 168,000 terraced homes being destroyed, and there are calls from academics and central Government for this to be speeded up. Coincidentally these are the people most isolated from those most likely to be affected by the demolition plans.

SAVE has been pushing, both publicly and privately for the Pathfinder / Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI) to be radically altered away from clearance, instead looking at alternatives based around refurbishment, innovative adaptation, community need, and the wider effects on the townscape and sense of place.

The ODPM Committee has been the highest arena in which we have done this so far, giving evidence to this august committee on how the policy is failing both the historic environment and the people that live in it and hold it together. Evidence was also given to them by the likes of Lord Rooker, Minister for Regeneration CHK who came up with the quite splendid line of:

"I have been a strong supporter of SAVE Britain's Heritage, make no bones about it, for many, many years, I think they do a good job"

Would that he was the Culture Secretary. Would that he listened to our words on Pathfinder.

The only national newspaper to have picked up the story and run with it is the Daily Telegraph. Some may see a certain irony in their criticism of a policy that is meant to undo the damage of deindustrialisation, but its coverage has been fair, hard-hitting and very welcome indeed. The scale of the disaster is starting to

become apparent to the wider public, and we will keep on pushing: we plan to release a comprehensive report on Pathfinder in the coming weeks.

The ODPM Committee's report on the inquiry was encouraging – given that it was their initial inquiry that set the (demolition) ball rolling, it represents something of a volte-face (and a very welcome one too) for its outgoing chair, Andrew Bennett MP, to say “The Government's Pathfinder programmes ... must not turn into a clearance programme with wholesale demolition of neighbourhoods”. The report called for flexibility in the Pathfinders, better evidence, plans based on proper consultation, and for areas which are suffering to be properly managed by local authorities. This is commendable, but whether Government sits up and listens is another matter.

Pathfinder: Stoke on Trent, East Lancashire and Merseyside

As a part of the research for our proposed report SAVE visited Stoke-on-Trent and East Lancashire, having visited Liverpool before Christmas. Each of the areas has its own particular problems, and it was immediately apparent that demolition might only really be an option in a small minority of cases, such as in parts of Burnley wood, where some streets are completely abandoned and the buildings neglected and heavily vandalised: SAVE trips are rarely to places where the condition of the buildings lifts the soul, but this was on a whole other level. In **Liverpool** too there are areas of mass abandonment, but this is different – there is a housing market chomping at the bit to take on these buildings, but the local authorities and registered social landlords who own the buildings refuse to let the market operate. In the majority of places visited in Liverpool, the quality of the buildings is such that they should be conservation areas, yet it is the duty of the very authorities, which are intent on demolition to designate them. Surely this is an opportunity for the Secretary of State to use the powers available through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act to declare conservation areas.



The 450 houses in the **Anfield** clearance area seem to have been chosen for demolition on the basis of council and registered social landlord ownership, without thinking that the massive redevelopment of the nearby football stadium and construction of a new one on Stanley Park (in itself very controversial) will provide a huge investment in the area, and the buildings of the Anfield clearance area, if a market actually operated, would be the first to benefit.

Stoke-on-Trent was in many ways the most surprising place to visit, as its six towns retain a wonderful industrial landscape, both familiar and alien at the same time, with the countryside and towns intermingling, and within the towns complete settlements based around old (and now mostly redundant) industrial works. The potential of the place is remarkable, with these old industrial sites potentially providing employment spaces. There is no shortage of brownfield sites on which to build expensive new houses (if this is really the solution) and the need to demolish complete historic areas such as **Northwood** simply isn't there. Stoke-on-Trent requires an entirely different solution to Pathfinder, incubating new economic activity to support the revival of the urban fabric.

Houses scheduled for clearance in Bootle, Merseyside

In **East Lancashire**, in light of the ruckus at Nelson and the crushing defeat of the local authority's demolition plans, the emphasis seems to be on smaller clearance areas and the occasional terrace rather

than the mass demolitions of Liverpool or Sandwell. This in itself can be very harmful and seemingly pointless – as we previously highlighted, what is the point in clearing away a sustainable community like that in **Darwen** (based around 1860s buildings), on the basis of series of half-truths. One of the many areas that is cause for concern is **Brierfield**, where an almost perfect industrial village (which should be a conservation area, but won't be as the local authority is intent on demolition) faces the loss of a couple of rows of terraced houses to make way for a different kind of housing to provide variety in the housing market. The houses are in good condition and are two minutes walk from the shops, with expensive cars parked outside.

John Prescott's talk of creating sustainable communities is in this context absolute rubbish.

ODPM Committee inquiry into the role and effectiveness of CABE

As well as presenting evidence in person to the ODPM Committee on Pathfinders, SAVE's Secretary also gave oral evidence to the Committee on CABE. We had voiced strong concerns about the effect of CABE's comments on various planning applications where the historic environment had either been ignored or even attacked by this increasingly respected body. Most of the cases have previously been discussed in the SAVE Newsletter, such as Span 4 at Paddington Station, The Governor's Garden at Berwick-upon-Tweed and Kingston Mills in Bradford-on-Avon. These cases made us very concerned that the thin line between judging new design for the public benefit and promoting schemes for the private benefit was being crossed. This was SAVE's first appearance before a Parliamentary Committee in several years and was suitably butterflies-in-tummy inspiring.

The Committee's recently produced report took an even handed approach to the situation, recognising the good work and achievements of CABE since its foundation, but importantly it called for much greater transparency in its decision making process. Of the nineteen points of the Committee's conclusions, the following are most worth reporting on:

- *CABE should, as a matter of course, publish its pre-planning advice letters unless there are overwhelming arguments to keep them confidential*
- *The Design Review Panel should be open to the public unless there are exceptional reasons*
- *CABE's lack of consideration of the context of schemes, particularly those involving historic buildings, can mean that its comments have less validity. It should demonstrate that it has considered the impact of new buildings on their surroundings.*
- *CABE's recent initiative to set out its policies on historic buildings.... should be developed and form the basis for all its decisions. Its should demonstrate that it is adhering to them and on occasions when its views contradict them, offer a full explanation*
- *CABE should work within the statutory designations set down by other public agencies. Its role is not to assess the value of the historic environment but to ensure that new schemes enhance it*
- *CABE should ensure that members with expertise in the historic environment and conservation are present at all meetings of the Design Review Panel*

There is hope yet that CABE might see the historic environment as an asset not a millstone. However, Government's response to the report was to bury its head in the sand. While it is happy for there to be endless reviews of English Heritage, its plaything gets away scot-free. The response might just as well have been written by CABE. We intend to write to the Department under the Freedom of Information Act asking to see CABE's response to the criticisms, and then to compare this to Government's response.

English Heritage

While CABE received this strong criticism from the Parliamentarians and a pat on the back from Government, English Heritage's 21st birthday present from the Minister was a kick in the teeth.

Its funding was cut. Again.

This tightening of the purse strings will no doubt result in more job losses at the organisation and lower morale, leaving the organisation increasingly beleaguered when it needs to be up and fighting hard. EH has

tried hard to please Ministers by undertaking several reorganisations in recent years, firstly to put itself on a regional basis and most recently to make it more “customer focussed”. Becoming more developer friendly in order to please the political masters is a gamble that hasn’t yet paid off. Of course EH cannot know if the tactic will succeed if it doesn’t play, and it has little to lose in terms of its relationship with Government by not trying. Perhaps there is much in the presentation, and if it can now boast to be a slicker, more effective machine in the modern political world, some improvement in its funding situation may happen at some point in the future. On the other hand it might not.

However, this leaves it in something of a predicament. It has effectively dumbed down its advice through the use standard letters, decreasing its dependence on the solid scholarship that makes its advice so useful and respected in the first place. It also has to take on responsibility for listing, amongst other things, as a part of Government’s Heritage Review. Heavens knows where the funding will come from.

In taking on listing, the duty to list buildings of listable quality will remain with the Minister but owner will now be formally told of applications to list their buildings. Past history suggests that owners who are less than enthusiastic at the prospect of listing will act to vandalise the buildings before the listing Inspectors arrive. Some form of temporary protection is urgently needed. The question is – will Government bother?

“Better Places to Live”

“Sometimes there is a perfectly coherent case for preservation in terms of aesthetics and architectural history, but there is an equally persuasive argument against it, in terms of social gain or an opportunity for an innovative new design” Tessa Jowell, “Better Places to Live: Government, Identity and the Value of the Historic and Built Environment - An Essay on the Historic and Built Environment

While leaning on the guillotine, wondering when to let the blade drop on to English Heritage’s neck, the Minister has penned a personal essay explaining what it is that appeals to her about historic buildings. This is in principle welcome, but in spite of over 20 pages of her wordsmithery, your Secretary (and indeed the rest of the SAVE office) was left generally mystified. The following is an attempt to make head and tail of it all.

It could be interpreted as a brave attempt to move the debate on heritage back to heritage for heritage’s sake, but it is something of an ill-fated venture, especially as the Minister gives heritage a rather rum deal by pointing out that splendid new design can justify the demolition of old buildings (No.1 Poultry anyone?). The way in which she values the historic built environment in the essay gives heart to those who see it in terms of architecture. However the “undesigned”, the vernacular, the inoffensive that form part of the group or help mould the historic landscape or townscape are destined for that cursed oxymoron of preservation by record: almost acceptable if you are an archaeologist, useless if you are a layperson who appreciates your surroundings: it doesn’t preserve the way you react to the building in the street, nor the enriching effect it has on your everyday life, in spite of the Minister’s suggestion that we are now able to create almost perfect virtual models of historic buildings. What could be more accessible to the public than a building standing on a public street?

She suggests that the choice of what is listed is determined arbitrarily by politicians and bureaucrats. This is an insult to the fine scholarship and research of generations of architectural historians who attempt to understand and interpret the built environment for the benefit of all. The politicians who determine what is listed (that’ll be her) do so as they have a legal duty to protect those buildings that meet the criteria, based on historic and architectural merit, through listing. Is the Minister suggesting that these criteria are arbitrary (and thus the every building listed has been done so on a random basis)? In stating that “when we consider changes to the environment in which we live, decision making cannot be left to the elite ‘who understand things’ ”, one questions if she is really calling for the logical opposite of this: an unformed decision making process.

The Minister’s love of new architecture creeps in to the essay and accordingly we are informed that our obligation to future generations is not to preserve what we have for the future, but to allow architects and *buildings* “to show us what they can do... in settings and on sites where all can appreciate them” (the buildings or the architects?). Apparently the “tension between old and new is at the heart of creative

activity in all fields, but never more so than in our built environment". This appears divisive, stirring up the pointless debate of the previous generation between those who work in a modernist idiom and those who build on the foundations and experience of the past, neither of which are necessarily mutually exclusive.

The private owners, who are responsible for most of our historic buildings, are neglected by the Minister in this essay – not even a nod acknowledging their role in having kept buildings great and small alive and in use for hundreds of years. Instead we are bombarded with messages about the strong potential of heritage to promote higher aspiration, and how the National Trust, English Heritage and the Historic Houses Association need to be doing more towards this.

As professionals we are on the receiving end of a salvo for making people feel excluded by using jargon. SAVE holds that the terms we use, such as "Conservation Area" are to a degree self explanatory, and that "spandrel" is an easier term to use than "the bit on the wall outside of an arch". Government is in no position to lecture on jargon (Jowell tells us, for example, that "We all need to feel that our cultural perspectives are respected and that our plural identities can find expression").

It seems that the Minister is not content with shooting herself in the foot and is taking aim at everyone else's toes too. In doing so, beauty and history are the innocent bystanders, gunned down unnecessarily

Fortunately the Minister asks for responses to her essay. SAVE will be providing one.

Buildings at Risk

It has been a busy few months for the Buildings at Risk project, gathering information for our latest catalogue, **Damned Beautiful**. We continue to hear about neglected historic buildings, and this year there are some very sad stories.

One that particularly tugged at our heartstrings is that of **Kelly House**, Devon, an absolutely gorgeous country house dating from the 16th century with a handsome west front added in the 18th. It (or rather the site) has been in the same family since the Norman Conquest, but as in so many cases finances have dwindled, and the upkeep of a house and gardens of this size has become impossible. The owner would love to be able to do something with it, and we at SAVE feel that it is important that the house stay in the family. At Grade I listed, there should be some help for Kelly House.



Kelly House, Devon

As well as Kelly, there are buildings ranging from cottages to a sixties car park. As usual, a few are for sale but most need a big rescue operation and a lot of persistence.

We have also visited a number of buildings at risk in the last six months. Trips to the West Country, Nottinghamshire and Northumberland have enabled us to really get to know the buildings we are working with, and we have also met a number of the Conservation Officers working on the front line. Regine Jaszynski, previously Buildings at Risk Officer at SAVE and now working for Nottinghamshire County Council, kindly spent a day taking Ela Palmer around some of the worst cases in the area, as did Andrew Slaney of Bassetlaw District Council. Nottinghamshire is working extremely hard to tackle its BaR problem, and a number of buildings from the area are highlighted in Damned Beautiful.



Owen Luder's unlisted Gateshead car park

Roger Duce, the recently appointed Conservation Officer at West Devon District Council, also gave up an afternoon to take Ela and Dale Ingram on a fascinating, if slightly muddy, tour of neglected buildings, including Kelly House. West Devon District covers some wonderful countryside, and we were horrified to see some neglected farmhouses that would make idyllic homes.

Ela's whistle-stop tour of the North took in Newcastle, Cumbria, as well as a swathe of Northumberland, and was guided by John and Evelyn Cook, Friends of SAVE who have campaigned tirelessly for threatened buildings in that area. Sights included the **Get Carter car park** in Gateshead, and the **Pithead Baths**, a long-standing fixture on our register, both hugely difficult and controversial cases.

We are extremely grateful to them, and all the other Conservation Officers who have helped us with the register over the last year. We also hope that these field trips will continue, as the better we know the buildings, the more we are able to help them!

The trips certainly threw up some cases that we will be working on in the coming months, and many have been included in Damned Beautiful. £12 for mere mortals, the catalogue will cost £9.60 for Friends of SAVE.

CASES

St Joseph's, Christchurch

The outcome of some public inquiries is always puzzling, and often reflects the level of detail into which the inquiry delves on seemingly obscure points. In this case it involved points such as the degree to which setbacks are or are not a part of the character of an area, and precisely what distance a setback has to be in order to be seen to be making a positive or negative contribution to that character. This, to an extent, has to be the fault of the legions of lawyers employed, who inevitably end up clinging on to the smallest details to make their points. The essential contribution of a building to the built environment can become obscured by these arguments, the wood not being seen for the trees. Thus Christchurch will lose its handsome Roman Catholic presbytery, while the church to which it is attached will be retained. The Inspector judged the demolition of the presbytery to make way for a car park and the rebuilding of its old garden wall and railings to constitute an enhancement to the character of the conservation area. So, half a victory for SAVE and the local authority and local amenity societies, and naturally, half a loss. Whether this will weaken the effectiveness of conservation area protection in Christchurch is yet to be seen, but any loss of faith in the legislation on the local authority's part would unfortunately be understandable.

Good Hope, Wimbledon, London

Once again, proposals for the radical extension of this remarkable and rare Cape Dutch house and its very early motor home have been thrown out by the local planning authority, much to our relief.

Good Hope is loosely based on Groot Schuur, Cecil's Rhodes' house in Westbrook, near Cape Town, South Africa, by Herbert Baker, which dates from 1900. Groot Schuur remains an official residence of the President of South Africa. Good Hope was built by Spencer Carey Curtis (who had lived in South Africa) for Petrus Cornelius van der Poel Hiddingh, a member of a very prominent Cape family. Curtis was articulated to Henry Wilson, an arts and crafts architect who later became president of the Art Workers' Guild



The south side of Good Hope, which would have been extended

The Cape Dutch style is extremely rare in this country and we would be delighted to hear from Friends of any examples they know of on top of Good Hope (as above); Shorne Hill, Netley Marsh (Ernest Willmott, 1908); Wickhurst, Sandwich Bay (Biddolph Pinchard, 1908); Port Lympne, Shepway (Herbert Baker, 1912)

As if all of this were not enough to drive arts and crafts lovers into a dizzy froth, the conservation area in which Good Hope sits contains a stunning series of houses, many of which are rightly listed (and many unrightly not listed, most notably No 1 Highbury Road, a delightful Voseyesque concoction). For those interested in having a look at this fascinating suburban development, the North Wimbledon Conservation Area is bounded by High Street, Parkside, Belvedere Road and Burghley Road.

Middlesex Wharf, Hackney, London

Another loss. The Lea valley in London is becoming a developers' paradise, and the Olympic bid is turning their focus more and more in that direction. Numerous old industrial sites with buildings both good and bad are being flattened to make way for new residential development. We previously highlighted the threat to Middlesex Wharf, with its completely unexpected Belfast truss roofed warehouses, more usually found in early aircraft hangars. We were alerted to the plight of these probably rather too late in the day, after permission for demolition had been granted, and the inevitable has happened in spite of local opposition. To prevent this becoming the pattern, the potential of these sites in terms of their history and contribution to local character must first be assessed, as while individually they may not amount to much, collectively they help paint a fascinating story of East London's industrial past, while also creating the character of the area on the western edge of the valley.

Littlewoods Headquarters, Liverpool

Finally some good news from Liverpool, land of exploding pubs (the unlisted Georgian United Powers pub on Tithebarn in the city centre was detonated for a production starring Ballikissangel's Stephen Tompkinson and Heartbeat's Nick Berry), new tall buildings and disgraced fourth graces.



The United Powers pub being detonated for TV

The handsome 1938 Littlewoods headquarters, probably by Gerald de Coursy Fraser, is a major art-deco landmark on the way in to Liverpool city centre from the west. It came to SAVE's attention two years ago and after initial pressure from ourselves and a concerted effort by local campaigners, it is not to be demolished after all, rather it is to be converted to residential accommodation. The survival and reuse of this great landmark is happy outcome and we can only hope that the local authority will start to apply this retain and reuse attitude to the thousands of threatened houses in its Pathfinder areas, as well as other buildings at risk.

The Florence Institute, Liverpool

In an act of typical late Victorian civic-mindedness, former mayor Bernard Hall founded the Florence Institute for Boys in 1889 in the tough docks area of the Dingle, as a permanent tribute to his daughter, who died at the age of 22. Probably designed by H.W. Keef, it is a very fine building with delicate use of terracotta, and originally it had splendid interiors, from the great hall to the top lit gym to the library. The original intention of the Florence Institute was to provide a club for the education and recreation the working boys and young men of the area. It now lies derelict and forlorn, but in spite of this it retains a dignity possessed by few modern buildings and clearly has great potential.

This potential has been recognised by the "Friends of the Florrie", which aims to protect and reuse the building in the same spirit as Alderman Hall, to work with all the agencies and stakeholders to redevelop the Florrie into a multi-ethnic community centre for all ages and abilities. SAVE has written to express its strongest support for the efforts to bring this handsome and important landmark back to life. We pointed out that the enthusiasm and ability of voluntary groups frequently gives the impetus for the repair and rehabilitation of historic buildings in a way that commercial enterprise simply cannot, and that the results of such great efforts are far more than just the restoration of historic fabric, pulling together the community, providing an all too rare focus for local pride, and lifting the quality of life in the area. Sparks such as this light the fire of regeneration, with community and heritage at the heart.



The Florence Institute in its heyday

Tall Buildings

It turns out that the Public Inquiry in to the Heron Tower, and the Inspector's findings that it was acceptable, really has ushered in the next generation of tall buildings. It is ironic then that the very same Inspector found against the Vauxhall Tower in London earlier this month, only to have John Prescott overrule him. Other very tall buildings in Central London to have either been granted consent or which look to be on the way to gaining consent over the last 12 months include Richard Rogers massive tower at 122 Leadenhall and the Minerva Tower at Aldgate. There is talk of Heron adding a couple of extra storeys to their proposals. As for the rest of the country, Birmingham is to get the 187m tall Arena Centre, Liverpool a brace of towers by developer Beetham, the tallest of which will be 125m tall, and in the pipeline is a 166m tower for Brunswick Quay by Ian Simpson. Manchester is to get a 188m tower by Woods Bagot Architects along with Ian Simpson's Crown Building, and possibly something tall at Chapel Wharf; and even poor old Sheffield is to get a 19 storey building on Broad Street.

Hafodunos, Llangernwy

The burning of Hafodunos Hall is possibly the worst news we have heard in the last six months. The fire was started by a couple of young men with little better to do. Their crass ignorance and wanton act of vandalism has resulted in the near loss of a high Victorian work of art. Listed at Grade I, Hafodunos has been on our radar for many years, with a series of owners promising much and doing little other than letting it rot. The house and park were subject to a planning application for the construction of ninety holiday chalets in the grounds. Naturally the house was also uninsured and there was no adequate supply of water nearby for the fire brigade.

We reacted swiftly, dispatching all-round conservation hero, engineer Brian Morton, to inspect the ruins. An initial walk through and a more thorough inspection revealed the gutted shell of the main house (the servants' quarters survived) to be in fair condition but in need of propping up and roofing over with a temporary scaffold. Cadw have offered grant aid toward his fees. The local authority, Conwy County Borough Council, does not have an outstanding record with major buildings at risk – Gwrych Castle is also on their patch. Together with the Victorian Society we are pushing the local authority to act to secure the building before it is too late. A visit by the Welsh Culture Minister has helped keep up the pressure: the planning application for the chalets has been withdrawn and the Council is apparently working with the owner on a new scheme.

Jordans, Buckinghamshire

Another dreadful loss is the burning of the Grade I listed Jordans, the oldest Quaker Meeting House in the country. Although in Quaker thought the building is little other than a place to meet, in practice Jordans is of huge significance to the Quaker community and wider. The building dates from 1688, immediately after the Toleration Act, and was built by William Penn (1644-1718), who was also responsible for founding of Pennsylvania in the USA (and the planning of Philadelphia – the earliest planned city in the USA). He is buried with wife in burial ground at Jordans. The building is part of a wider group including Old Jordans

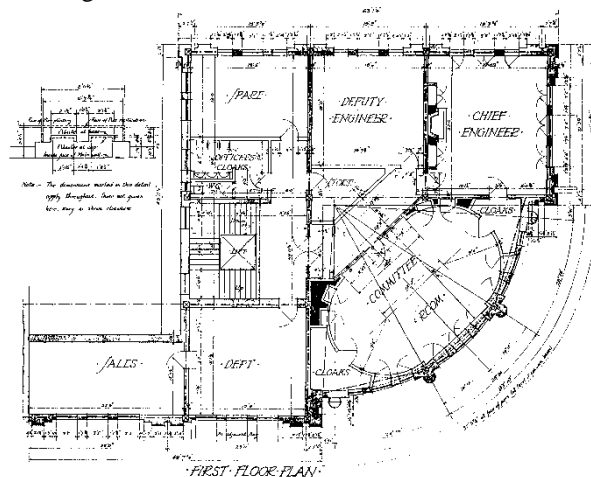
farm, and in spite of being located in prime London commuter belt, it remains a very quiet corner of Buckinghamshire.

The community is determined to rebuild: the fire started in the caretakers flat and swept through the building at roof level – which then collapsed on the furniture within – which had been remarkably intact. Rebuilding will be a substantial challenge, but one with which we wish them every success.

Churchill House, Bath

The grand name rather disguises the function of this handsome, contextual neoclassical building, built 1924-1932 to the designs of W.A. Williams. It was originally built to serve as the offices of the Bath Electricity Works Company, and incorporates an “electric light station” of 1897 and a turbine hall of 1903 (it stands beside the river). It stands on a corner site, which it turns with the giant tuscan order and simple but effective detailing, and it forms a group with other buildings in the area that employ the giant order, such as Anchor House (also by Williams), the Grade I listed railway station by Brunel, and the Grade II listed Forum cinema.

It is currently subject to an approved set of plans to demolish it and make way for a bus station. On the bright side the plans also see the demolition of the awful Southgate shopping centre, an inward looking shopping mall with no respect for the scale and materials that create the charm of Bath. However, this is not sufficient recompense for the loss of a good reusable building, and we have joined local campaigners in requesting its listing. We do not argue that it is a groundbreaking twentieth century building, rather that it is a building of architectural interest, reflecting the place it was built and the tastes of provincial England, not those of the metropolitan elite which now seem to be the main criteria for listing twentieth century buildings.



A plan of Churchill house at first floor level

North Warehouse, Sharpness, Gloucestershire

The ongoing revival of the canal network in the UK is one of the great feats of conservation, and given the scale and extent of the works done to enable this, it is refreshing that the cases we deal with so rarely involve the waterways. However, at Sharpness dock in Gloucestershire a proposal emerged to demolish the North Warehouse.

The North Warehouse is important as the only surviving historic warehouse at Sharpness Docks, which joined the River Severn, with its massive tidal range, to the widest and deepest canal in the world at its completion in 1827. The warehouse was built in 1878 in response to the construction of the New Docks in 1871-4 and was used as a granary. It remains virtually complete. Seven storeys high and twenty-eight bays wide, it is a massive brick structure, yet this mass is broken up and articulated by wooden gantried loading units that give it a lively rhythm. It is Grade II listed.

The justification put forward for demolition was purely commercial, the building being seen to be in the way of the commercial development of the docks. Time and time again it has been shown that this sort of building can be easily converted to new uses, a fine example of this being at the other end of the canal at Gloucester. Planning permission was refused by Stroud District Council, and the applicants were preparing to appeal. We wrote to the Planning Inspectorate suggesting the appeal should be thrown out, and contacted British Waterways expressing our strongest concern at the proposals, especially given its record – as it would have the ultimate say over the fate of the building. The appeal was withdrawn.



North Warehouse, Sharpness Docks (© NMR)

Old Reading Room at Allonby, Cumbria

"The Beauties of England and Wales" of 1802 describes Allonby as '*A neat and well built town resorted to in the summer season*'. It retains a certain beauty and charm, and it was no doubt with this in mind that the Old Reading Room was designed.

Alfred Waterhouse is held in the highest regard for his contribution to the architecture on the 19th Century, such as the Natural History Museum. One would have thought therefore that his early buildings would be worth protecting. Apparently not, however. The Reading Rooms at Allonby (possibly 1862) – or what now remains – is a good, small, early example of his work. It stands in a magnificent setting, between the town and the Solway, raised on vaults above the level of the highest of tides. It is in both a conservation area and an area of outstanding natural beauty.

An attempt to spot list the building failed, permission was granted for partial demolition and conversion to residential use, and then in the January gales part of the roof blew off, taking the gable end with it. The building is now in a dangerous state, but the local authority officers are hoping to get their councillors to agree to pressing for the repairs to be done. With any luck, the repairs will be done and the owner presented with the bill, or he will sell up to someone with a vision for the reuse of the building as a whole.



The old reading room at Allonby, without its roof

Bristol North Pool

A local campaign for a threatened historic building is usually an essential ingredient in any successful attempt at preventing dereliction and demolition. Doug Reid and his merry band have been nothing if not tenacious in their efforts to prevent the closure of these Edwardian baths that provide a well used and much loved local amenity, contributing to the sustainability of the area. Doug took the decision to stand in the election as a one issue party in what is a very finely balanced seat indeed. To date the local MP and other politicians have tried to brush aside the campaign for the baths. We suspect that this will change given Doug's tenacity his aim was to keep his deposit rather than become the elected member for the area. His campaign has not gone unnoticed, and as he puts it, he'll fight until every last drop of water has left the pool.

Govanhill Baths, Glasgow

Govanhill is a relatively intact late Victorian tenement development, with red sandstone tenements defining the character of the area. The public baths and washhouse on Calder Street date from 1912-17 by the Office of Public Works (A.B. McDonald). They are B listed. It is a classical composition, nine bays long with a basement, piano nobile and attic, in red sandstone. The 4th and 6th bays are taken up with Roman Doric pedimented doorways. Its interiors are lavish, with two top lit pools and arched concrete ribs overhead

As 2000 turned to 2001, Glasgow City Council informed the Govanhill community in south Glasgow that its beloved baths were to close on 31st March. In spite of strong demand locally for the use of the pool and a very strong desire on the part of the community to see this local amenity remain open and in use, the council had not carried out any local consultation. The strength of opposition was such that community members occupied the pool for five months after its closure, until a decree was obtained from the Sheriff for their removal. This was done with 250 police, horsed and helicopter surveillance. Overkill?

Since closure, a survey has revealed that 70% of the building's regular users now no longer swim at all.

The community have set up Govanhill Baths Community Trust to restore the building to its former splendour whilst incorporating impressive modern amenities including a Healthy Living Centre, centres of excellence for arthritis and asthma, a hydrotherapy pool, a rooftop garden, and crucially space for youth activities. Once again, it is down to the local community to take action in the face of a threat from the powers that be. It makes the efforts of the authorities to empower communities seem rather ill-placed.

CrossRail

The most recent plans for the £13billion east-west railway connection below London are a mixed bag as far as the historic environment is concerned. Particularly affected are the buildings at the east end of Oxford Street and around Farringdon, where many will have to be demolished to make way for the works and new stations. In any major infrastructure project in the UK something somewhere is going to suffer and so it should be normal practice to ensure that the effects are minimised and properly justified. However, the

buildings that would be bulldozed to make way for CrossRail are in many cases of historic and architectural value and play important roles in conservation areas. Frequently they are sited next to or near to buildings of no interest. Surely these should take the hits instead. As yet, little justification has been provided for the demolition of these buildings. We have asked the CrossRail team to present this to us.

The positive outcome for historic buildings, however, is that **Span 4 of Paddington Station** cannot be demolished during the construction works, which are scheduled to go on until 2013, and the increased capacity at the station that will result from CrossRail negates many of the rail arguments for the demolition of Span 4. We live in hope.

Stansted Expansion

A lack of candour and a lack of proper consultation were the conclusions of the High Court on Government's Aviation White Paper. The proposals contained within this would result in massive damage to the historic environment around Stansted airport, and it is to the immense credit of Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) that their challenge to the White Paper garnered this verdict. It was also the first time that a White Paper has been challenged through a judicial review in the Courts. In forcing the Government back to the drawing board in assessing the most appropriate location for extra runways to serve London and the south-east, however, the challenge has perversely lengthened the period of uncertainty for the local community. Nonetheless, this is a milestone in this particular fight against the bulldozers

Courts: Middlesex Guildhall

The splendid Edwardian Guildhall in Parliament Square, London, has been chosen as the location for the new Supreme Court. This is extremely unfortunate for a number of heritage based reasons. The building is listed at Grade II* and has superb interiors, fittings and fixtures which are especially vulnerable to major changes that will inevitably follow should the Supreme Court actually come in to existence. It has only recently undergone extensive, sensitive refurbishment to bring it up to modern standards in terms of information technology. We are concerned that the changes needed for the Supreme Court will result in radical alterations to the building and the loss of some of its very fine fixtures and fittings, in particular some of the excellent carpentry. We are urging English Heritage to take a strong line on the building to ensure that any alterations do not disturb its wonderful interiors.

Schools

The billions of pounds being pumped into the education sector are set to have a lasting impact beyond teaching. Local education authorities have in their hands large sums of money with which to improve the fabric of their schools. This is of course very welcome, but as ever it is a double edged sword for the built heritage. Schools sit at the centre of communities and frequently include good historic buildings, both listed and unlisted.

Schools were subject to one of the soon to be dropped thematic listing surveys whereby rather than being judge against the general quality of buildings within the listing grades, they were judged against one another. Whatever the merits of thematic listing as a means of rapidly covering a building type (except with the airfields survey which has maddeningly been stuck on Ministers' desks for years) it is no real substitution for proper area based surveys, and there are many school buildings still in need of protection.

It has been left to the LEAs to decide whether the school buildings across their area are in need of refurbishment, alteration or replacement. The vehicle by which this is to be done is the ubiquitous public finance initiative, the benefits and disbenefits of which have been widely discussed. In simple terms the buildings are generally dealt with in one contract which does not allow the necessary flexibility to deal with the range of buildings types, from Victorian Board Schools through to 1970s prefabs.

Consequently, both the Lancashire and Devon LEAs plan to replace all the secondary schools in their areas. What the options are for the historic buildings in their stock remains unclear. What is clear however, is that there is a great number of examples of how school buildings can be reused, from residential to community to commercial. This should always be the first port of call, not demolition. However, given that many historic schools are well located at the heart of their communities, there will be pressure to build the new schools in their places. This is where conflict will arise. English Heritage needs to working with the LEAs

early on in the process, before PFI bids are made, to identify areas for concern and buildings worthy of retention, both listed and unlisted.

The K6 Phone Box

One of our Friends has drawn to our attention the plight of the K6 phone box, the classic Giles Gilbert Scott update of his K2 design to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George the Fifth in 1935. They are becoming an increasingly rare part of the local street scene. It is often the historic details such as these that help reinforce the beauty and sense of place, yet it is also these details that are most easily forgotten and neglected, and this is certainly the case with the K6. BT appears to have a policy of removing them over modern designs and has recently started taking the doors off some of them in London. Mr. Wanstall has personally saved about fifty of them through listing and asks other Friends to keep an eye on their local historic phone boxes and report any faults with them to BT on 151. He also points out that they are rather good value at 30p for a fifteen minute call.

Railway footbridges



Often charming and familiar parts of the railway heritage, built in scale and harmony with their surrounding buildings, historic railway footbridges are steadily disappearing. Lattice ironwork, delicate capitals and fine ironwork are out. Instead, a range of massive and clumsy structures, rudely bolted together, are in. These are being constructed with the entirely positive and laudable aim of making stations more accessible to the less mobile members of society, but we have yet to see one example of station operators attempting to adapt the historic structures, which are being done away with wholesale, such as at Moreton in Marsh. We will investigate this further and would be interested to hear from Friends of other losses.

Politicians and Heritage

There are many good Parliamentarians who take on board the concerns of the heritage world and are at the very least sympathetic to the cause. However, nobody as yet has worked out which are and which really do not care. Thus it falls to SAVE to take the opportunity of the formation of the new Parliament to work this out.

We would be grateful if Friends could write to their local MPs asking what their position on historic buildings and the built environment is – and report the results back to the SAVE office. This will help us when campaigning for buildings in their constituencies, rather than flying blind: the local MP can frequently be a strong ally.

Save Europe's Heritage: Moscow

SAVE's sister organisation, Save Europe's Heritage, had a preliminary trip Moscow to assess the current situation faced by the historic environment in this wonderful city. The initial findings are deeply disturbing although not entirely unexpected – the post communist era has resulted in little investment in the maintenance of old buildings; the rules of the planning system are swayed by financial interests; buildings awaiting legal protection are frequently demolished; the historic skyline with its seven sisters is increasingly eroded; and reproduction in facsimile is preferred over restoration. We will be compiling a report on the situation, which should be complete in time for the next newsletter.

Heritage Link

A few useful points from Heritage Link, the sector's umbrella body. First is the statement agreed upon at the AGM in December 2004. The statement points out how heritage contributes to many government policies. 'The nation's heritage' it states 'is central to economic and social regeneration, liveability, local quality of life and community cohesion. It should be at the heart and not the periphery of public policy and political priorities as a positive force for change'. It sets out 7 priorities that the sector wants to see the next government address:

1. Publish a policy statement putting heritage centre stage in the development of cultural policy in its lead Department – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
2. Introduce "heritage proofing" in policy development and decisions over land use planning, new development, regeneration, and transport infrastructure, and require the Ministers in each Department to report annually on progress.
3. Announce a strong heritage stream will be part of the National Lottery post 2009.
4. Increase dedicated grants for heritage and require a Conservation Officer in every local authority.
5. Introduce new fiscal measures which support maintenance and repair.
6. Introduce entitlement for every child to experience heritage education out of the classroom.
7. Provide formal consultation and establish a stakeholder group examining the objectives and options for the future of the statutory heritage agencies.

Secondly is its guidance on Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). These replace the existing system of unitary development plans, local plans and structure plans. The guidance is aimed at helping local groups ensure that heritage concerns are properly represented in the LDF. This guidance is available on www.heritagelink.org.uk

Save Our Parsonages

Government's advice on the use of listed buildings, as outlined in Planning Policy Guidance note 15, is that the original use is frequently the best. With specific regard to parsonages, Save Our Parsonages is doing its best to ensure that this remains the case and that these, the low hanging fruit in any attempt to raise funds for a diocese, are not flogged off – they are a forgotten part of the Church estate which can fulfil a range of roles which smaller replacement vicarages frequently cannot.

Save Our Parsonages is 10 years old this year and is looking to hear from people interested in their work or who know of parsonages in peril, or who wish to help or write up cases. Anthony Jennings, Save Our Parsonages, Flat Z, 12-18 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QA

Maintain our Heritage

In December, Maintain launched "*Putting it off: How lack of maintenance fails our heritage*". This report on Maintain's extensive research programme, funded by the DTI, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund called for a change in approach from passive endorsement to pro-active encouragement, in particular:

- A UK strategy for maintenance
- Statutory duty of care balanced by financial, advisory and technical support
- Review of current enforcement powers
- Best practice: heritage organisations and local authorities to lead by example
- Maintenance focussed grants and fiscal incentives
- Develop buildings at risk as an information source and advisory tool
- Maintenance guidance and information sources
- Assessing costs and value of maintenance
- Motivate owners to undertake maintenance
- Facilitate maintenance
- New maintenance services and products

If you would like a copy of the report or its summary document, please send an A4 stamped SAE (83p) to: Maintain our Heritage, Weymouth House, Beechencliff Road, Bath BA2 4QS

For Friends and Supporters:

Legacies

SAVE has received its first major legacy, from the estate of Mrs Ruth Panter who was formerly Head of Planning at English Heritage. Her extraordinary generosity in leaving SAVE roughly £45,000 means that our usually perilous finances are in somewhat better condition. This bequest came as a great surprise (and huge compliment) to us as Mrs Panter was not even a signed up Friend of SAVE. We encourage Friends and supporters to consider following Mrs Panter's example.

Computers

A huge "thank you" to all those who contributed towards our computer appeal through donations, both monetary and hardware, which mean that the office has one brand-spanking-new computer, one nearly new computer, a laptop and one old chap which chugs on happily when given a gentle boot.

EVENTS

Our thanks to **Dan Cruickshank**, who kindly gave a talk on behalf of SAVE at the Royal Geographical Society shortly before Easter. He took us on a very enjoyable world tour, looking at the threats to the cultural heritage across the globe as he had encountered them, from the minarets at Ghazni to the churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia. The response to this lecture and our previous has very positive and so we will continue to organise lectures on these lines.

Book fair

Put the **17th May 2005** in your diaries as the date for this year's bookfair. Building on the success of previous years, a host of societies and publishers will be selling their wares in the Gallery at 70 Cowcross Street from 12pm through to around 7pm, with the usual refreshments from around 5pm to encourage people to loosen their purse strings. If this were not attraction enough, **Dan Cruickshank** will be there, armed with pen and ready to sign copies of his new book, as will **Geoff Brandwood** whose gorgeous book on historic pubs (surely building on SAVE's 1982 publication "Time Gentlemen Please") has just been published.

First annual SAVE Conference "Action on Buildings at Risk".

23rd May 2005

A forum to pull together local authority staff and significant figures from heritage conservation, including Bob Kindred OBE and Delcia Keate of English Heritage. This event is intended to encourage (literally) conservation officers, planning enforcement people and planners to take action on endangered buildings where the owner(s) have failed to take action. By invitation only. Enquiries to Dale or Ela at the SAVE office.

Visit Barlaston Hall, Staffordshire

2nd July 2005

To mark our 30th anniversary, James and Carol Hall have very kindly agreed to allow SAVE to overrun Barlaston for the day. Full guided tours of the house starting 11am. A buffet lunch will be provided along with a glass of wine and soft drinks. In the afternoon there will be a side trip to the Wedgewood museum, which is walking distance from the house.

The cost is £40 per head (not including museum admission), but the number of places is limited to 30. This will sell fast so book soon! THIS IS A SPECIAL **FRIENDS ONLY** EVENT, so only one pair of tickets per Friend.

Curt DiCamillo: "Secrets and Surprises from the English Country House"

14th July 2005

A talk and drinks reception in The Gallery, at 70 Cowcross Street London EC1. Curt is an engaging and enthusiastic speaker who will regale us with a light-hearted look at some surprising events and discoveries

made at various country piles. **FREE to Friends** (but you must book only one free ticket per Friends membership), and £5 for lesser mortals.

This event is intended to generate new Friends members, so bring a friend to become a Friend. The £5 admission for non-members will be deducted from new Friends applications submitted on the night. Voluntary contributions towards the refreshments will be welcomed! Don't know who Curt DiCamillo is? Surf to www.dicamillocompanion.com for a comprehensive database of British Country Houses.

Historic Parks and Gardens Event 2005

Held at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, 15 November. Free tickets for Friends of SAVE are available if you contact the event organisers Hall-McCartney Ltd on 01462 896688.

HTML Volunteer

We are currently in need of a volunteer fully conversant in the internet language HTML, and who enjoys working with it. The work would involve helping keep the SAVE website up to date, and could largely be done from the comfort of one's own desk rather than having to travel to the SAVE office. Please contact either Adam or Ela in the SAVE office.

Leave Chiswick Alone: John Harris makes a personal plea

We recognize Chiswick House as iconic, of possessing an unparalleled preciousness. So much intellectual thought went into its making, and it has been the focus of so much study and analysis. This opinion was first expressed by the great Rudolf Wittkower as early as the late 1940s. It was not always so. In 1929 the 9th Duke of Devonshire sold the estate of Chiswick House to the Middlesex County Council, which vested it in the Borough of Brentford and Chiswick. As might have been expected then, with interest in Georgian architecture at a low ebb, the ensuing treatment of the Villa was disgraceful, the gardens deteriorating into a public recreation ground, as at the time of writing they frankly still are. Following wartime use, the Villa was up for grabs, and it was then that Geoffrey Houghton Brown, famous for buying, living in and selling country houses, considered taking it on, encouraged by the Ministry of Works architect Adrian Brookholding Jones. No doubt Geoffrey would have demolished the wings, as he did to that other exquisite Palladian villa at Felix Hall, Essex.

This matter of wings is the nub of the acute problem today, for when the Ministry of Works took Chiswick House and its garden buildings into care in 1948, and the following year launched their restoration campaign, they demolished them, under the misguided belief that they were recreating Lord Burlington's lost ideals. Alas, his lordship's ideals had been compromised in 1732 when he himself took the decision to move out of Burlington House, Piccadilly, use Londesborough House, Yorkshire, as his northern seat, and make Chiswick House his main seat in the south. He was compelled to use the old house and the new in tandem, joined by what was then known as The Communication, but is known today as the Link Building, as well as another connection of uncertain plan.

What could never have been contemplated in the 1950s was how the astonishing growth of country house tourism would affect Chiswick. Progressively the focus of public interest would be on country houses, the expansion and variety of alternative uses, and their attraction for corporate and private functions. Those lost Chiswick wings were crucial for the challenges and problems that beset Chiswick today.

The acute problem that has bedevilled Chiswick since 1948 has been the insensitivity to Chiswick's importance of the Borough of Chiswick and Brentford, now the London Borough of Hounslow. In truth they could not have cared a fig, and there exist Borough minutes in the 1930s that prove that they would willingly have pulled Chiswick House down and laid tennis courts over the gardens. The rampant rot found in the wings by the Ministry in 1948 was directly the result of the Borough's neglect.

In the 1950s there were a few gallant souls in the Ministry, later Department of the Environment, now English Heritage, who cherished the ideal of restituting much of William Kent's furnishings and works of art from Chatsworth to Chiswick. It did not help that Lord Eccles, Minister of Works, infamous for authorizing the demolition of the shell of Coleshill House after the fire, rudely demanded from both the

Duke of Devonshire and the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, that all the relevant drawings from Chatsworth and Portland Place be sent to Chiswick. He got a mighty snub. Restitution is possible, but it would require great generosity on the part of the Devonshire Family, and indeed in recent years they have gone some way towards this end. In my personal view Chatsworth would not suffer from the loss. This restitution idea which could be in the form of a loan is the one ideal that should be pursued.

The loss of the wings left the Link Building no longer a link, just tied onto the Summer Parlour. There was no possibility that Link and Parlour might be used for access. The public would have to enter the house, as they still do, through the basement entrance under the portico. From there the only access to the piano – nobile was up narrow spiral stairs. Burlington himself recognized this deficiency when he proposed full stairs rising to where the Bedchamber Closet now is.

No one would deny the access problem as faced by the Department of the Environment. An attempt to solve this was made in 1977, resulting in what has been described by this writer as the ‘Chiswick Travesty’. Inspectors and architects conceived a design to add a monstrous addition to the rear of the Link Building and Summer Parlour to serve as a Function and Interpretation Centre. Lady Birk, then Minister of the Environment, instructed her officials to keep the project secret until revealed at a press conference. Of course, the designs were immediately leaked to Marcus Binney of SAVE. They could not refuse Marcus an invitation, but I was deliberately uninvited. However, I gained access with an RIBA Journal press card. The conference was an ill tempered shambles, described on the front page of The Times as a ‘Bear Garden’. Lady Birk was soon at the centre of a torrent of criticism and had unwisely allowed herself to be cornered. The project was hastily withdrawn and consigned to history. I came to know Lady Birk well, and she confessed that the Chiswick incident was the worst of her ministerial career.

Internally the Villa was improving under the supervision of Julius Bryant. The Blue Velvet Room was restored with specially woven silk in 1991 and the Octagon in 1997. More furnishings and paintings were borrowed or bought. There was a growing intelligent attitude to the entity of Villa and garden, but not then by the London Borough of Hounslow.

To explain my concerns I must now declare an interest as one who was a potential Trustee of the newly constituted Chiswick House Park and Gardens Trust. This Trust is a consequence of the marriage between the Borough of Hounslow and English Heritage. I am deeply sceptical that a Council such as Hounslow can have a change of heart, but let us hope it is true. Their one wish is to lessen the financial burden of maintenance of the gardens. I innocently thought, here was an opportunity to realise that ideal of restitution, and so provide a furnished interior recognizable to the Architect Earl should he favour us with a return. When I attended a dinner in the Villa to launch the Trust, I recognized the agreeable and attractive ambience of the rooms, the paintwork and gilding now fifty years old and of a faded beauty, but I was forcibly struck that these exquisite small scale rooms were not the place for dinners, or for what we call corporate entertainment. Disconcertingly I have discovered that such entertainment is high on English Heritage priorities.

At a second meeting the Phase 1 Proposals for the Regeneration of Chiswick House and Grounds were presented, drawn up by Dannatt, Johnson Architects. As the drawings were dated 28 June 2004, it struck me that the project must have been maturing in the sanctum of Fortress House, Savile Row, for much of that year, if not earlier. I was thunderstruck, for here was a repeat of the ill - fated Birk proposals: the Facility Building and Interpretation Centre with turnstiles, ticketing, shops, lecture rooms, WCs and what have you, embracing the rear of the Summer Parlour. This was to be the access point by stairs and handicapped elevator to the piano – nobile, not the main front of the Villa as is proper. For the average visitor it is nonsensical to experience the villa by means of the North Octagon and Sculpture Gallery. But of course, for corporations and wedding guests, who cares?

Located to the east of the villa on a site due south of the Inigo Jones gateway, was the outline block for the new café. The old nineteen fifties café, beloved by the locals, is now long past its sell by date. In outline too was the site for a marquee for 500 people. It struck me as wrong to build a café so near the Function Building and not somehow combine the two, especially as refreshment and cooking facilities were planned for the Function. I said to the Project Manager, ‘Do you really need the café there? Can you not put it

somewhere else'? The reply was negative, for the café was already subject of a HLF application, and could not be withdrawn. It was admitted that corporate and private functions were on the agenda. An income had to be generated. The rooms at Chiswick are so attractive that once used for corporate entertainment it is inevitable demand will increase, and the profit generated will ensure that there will be no restraint upon that use. I saw this as English Heritage prostituting itself to Mammon, and as far as Hounslow was concerned, I am certain they would be happy for the income to roll in, and roll in it will. Nevertheless, I decided to endure one further meeting.

At this third meeting the problem of disabled and handicapped access was on the agenda. With the Function Building in place, the standard wheel chair cannot pass through Burlington's doors to the North Octagon. The only answer is to destroy the door or provide narrow wheelchairs to change-over. Alas this requires a stock of such chairs to be stored somewhere! The suggestion that a platform lift be made rising from the room to the right of the basement entrance up through the floor of the Bedroom Dressing Room, was too much to even contemplate. I sat there nonplussed. This determined me to withdraw as a potential trustee.

A caring Trusteeship is a good thing, the restoration of the gardens an admirable priority. But I emphasize leave the interiors of the Villa alone. In any case their future restoration is a most delicate matter. Do not contaminate and endanger them with all the shabbiness of corporate entertainment. What is certain is that once English Heritage goes down this road, that is the end of any hope of restituting furniture from Chatsworth. A Function Building, Interpretation Centre, what you will, could be built in the Walled Gardens. I cannot believe that a high tech demountable handicapped lift could not be invented. I do not wish to have any responsibility as a trustee in bringing about the demeaning of one of our greatest buildings.

John Harris, April 2005