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Autumn 1988

Heritage Newsletter



Ulster Architectural Heritage Society

The Ulster Architectural Heritage Society exists to promote the appreciation and enjoyment of good architecture of all periods — from the prehistoric to the contemporary — in the nine counties of Ulster, to encourage the preservation and restoration of buildings of merit or importance; and to increase public awareness of the beauty, history and character of local neighbourhoods. This newsletter outlines some of the major activities of the Society during 1987.

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Staff:
Mrs Elizabeth Cavanagh (Secretary)

Our front cover drawing of the entrance to the Ormeau Baths is by Colin Maxwell.

The back cover shows 79 Main Street, Moira after restoration by Hearth.

Photographs and drawings are by members of Committee except where stated: contributions are by Ian Gailey, Karen Latimer, Marcus Patten, Dawson Stelfox and Primrose Wilson.

Editorial

The Society continues to operate on a very broad front, being concerned not only with the preservation of important old buildings, but also commenting where appropriate on the design of new buildings in both town and country. It also believes in taking an active role in the protection of our past, and Hearth and its revolving fund have been responsible for the restoration of fifteen houses during 1987 — a modest but significant contribution to maintaining our stock of Georgian and Victorian buildings.

As always, many of the Society's campaigns are of a long-running nature and do not neatly fall within the calendar year which this Newsletter attempts to cover. The Belfast Urban Area Plan continued to occupy much Committee time, and the future of the Belfast Gasworks and the Ormeau Avenue Baths have been the subject of many meetings, and they are reported on elsewhere in the Newsletter. By no means all of our concerns however can be covered in a summary of this nature, and the Society's representations to the planners in respect of the Dungannon Area Plan and the Banbridge Area Plan, for example, are not discussed here. Concern for buildings such as Malone Place Belfast, Eglantine House, and Gilford Mill results in considerable correspondence, but where no specific outcome has resulted there is not room to report on them. One major issue arising early in 1988 has been the proposed demolition of Donegall Square Methodist Church. This will be covered in our next issue.

Readers of local business news will not have failed to note the rapid rise in the value of commercial property in Belfast over recent years. In many ways this is of course welcome news, indicating a revival of business confidence and a return to 'normality', but ironically it also heralds a new pressure on historic buildings in the city, with the Head Post Office and Robb's building being notable casualties. Buildings which survived countless terrorist attacks in their vicinity without major damage are now falling helpless victims of the new property boom.

At our AGM in 1987, John Lewis-Crosby tendered his resignation as Chairman, having served in that post since 1980 and after many more years' very active involvement with the Society and its associated organisations. His enthusiasm and wide knowledge of the province's buildings will be sadly missed, but John continues to serve the Society through his Chairmanship of Heritage Repairs. Mrs Primrose Wilson, a very active life-member of the Society, and a member of Committee since 1984, took over as Chairman, and has completed a very vigorous first year in the post. Our President, Charles Brett, has been made an honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Demolition Control

Many people do not realise that whereas planning permission must be sought for a new building, the demolition of an existing one, which is not classed as a 'development', does not require permission, so that buildings can disappear without any prior warning. Listed buildings of course do require permission for demolition or alteration — although recent cases at Croagh Patrick near Donaghadee, Sunningdale Park, Belfast and of a shopfront in Ballycastle raise doubts about the effectiveness of controls — and in February 1988 control of demolition in conservation areas, which had been in the pipeline for some time, was implemented.

Unfortunately the fines for illegal demolition and alteration, unless implemented on a running basis (that is, so much per week until made good), are a small cost for developers to pay compared to the potential profit from clearing and developing many sites. There are, however, other teeth that could be brought into play: at present, the Department of the Environment can, if it sees fit, compulsorily purchase a listed building which it considers its owner to be neglecting — and such orders are made from time to time by local authorities across the water. What is really needed however is power to serve repairs notices as a preliminary to compulsory purchase, and it is understood that further legislation is under consideration. It is hard to strike a balance between preservation of a building for the public good and impinging on an individual's rights to control his property, but where neglect is deliberate and the owner refuses to sell a listed building to a sympathetic owner, compulsion is surely justified.

Taking the Waters

In October 1987, Belfast City Council Leisure Services Committee announced its intention to close the Ormeau Avenue Public Baths, a listed building designed by Robert Watt and dating from 1888. Formally laid out and built in a robust red-brick classical style, the Baths were built to provide not only pools for swimming, but also a public warm baths facility in an age when many working class homes had neither hot water nor baths. Although the Baths had been extended and partly refurbished in the 1950s, one pool had developed structural cracks and been closed in the 1970s, and with uncertainty over the future of the building, little maintenance had been carried out in recent years.

The proposal to close the building was met by a storm of protest, and a number of swimming clubs using the Baths formed an Action Group to save it. The Society shared their view that

the building could be upgraded on a viable basis, and commissioned a study into the feasibility of this from Consarc Partnership using Urban Development Grant.

The Feasibility Study recommended that the building should remain in public ownership, and pointed out that it could provide much-needed facilities in a convenient location. Although Belfast has a good number of leisure centres, most concentrate on a rather narrow 'sports' market, and there is a need for a Health and Fitness Centre; the Baths' location is close to the City Centre and readily available to those working in the city. The character of the building, which has many original features, would lend prestige and interest to the new centre, and with a rapidly returning population in that area there will be a need for leisure facilities in any case.

Early in 1988, the Leisure Services Committee voted to close the baths, but its future is still undecided. It will almost certainly be sold, but the Society has urged the Council to impose stringent conditions on the sale to ensure sympathetic restoration and re-use of the building.



Ormeau Avenue Baths

Belfast Urban Area Plan

Our last Heritage Newsletter described the consultation going into the production of the plan for Belfast up to the year 2001, and in particular the excellent Conservation report commissioned by the DoE from Queen's University Department of Architecture and Planning.

During the last year, the Draft Plan has been published, and in the spring of 1988 a Public Inquiry was held to take statements from interested parties into the more controversial aspects of the Plan. The Society has continued to comment on many points raised by it, and was represented at the Inquiry, which was a rather flat affair, with the Department's planners merely noting, rather than discussing, points raised. The Society's comments have touched on most sections of the Plan but it has been particularly concerned with conservation aspects such as the treatment of listed buildings and conservation area proposals.

The Draft Plan, it has to be said, represents a considerable advance over previous plans for the city from our point of view, since conservation is treated as a positive area of planning in itself, and eight areas of central Belfast are identified for designation as conservation areas during the plan period. These are Donegall Square and Place, the 'Linen Area' around Bedford Street, a section of College Square and Great Victoria Street, the Cathedral area, Corporation Square, the Mount, Merville Garden Village and McMaster Street. The Society has argued that many more areas should be designated, suggesting the Holy Land and Malone Park as areas omitted in both the Draft Plan and the Queen's Report. We are concerned that no time scale for the designations has been laid down, and the implication that conservation areas cost money seems both short-sighted and old-fashioned — the Queen's Report spelt out the economic benefits of conservation very clearly, and the slight level of additional investment required to designate areas more rapidly would be amply recompensed in commercial, industrial and tourism benefits.

It would appear that one factor which has slowed down designation here in comparison with England has been the involvement of the Historic Buildings Branch of the DoE in conservation areas; while the Branch's expertise has obviously been beneficial, its approach does tend to exclude areas which have been altered in character or which are not of the highest quality. This overlooks one of the main purposes of conservation areas, which is to upgrade the setting of good buildings and to integrate good and appropriate modern building into areas of character. Setting too high a standard means that nothing gets designated and still more is lost, and we would encourage the channelling of conservation area funds through, for example, an enhanced level of Urban Development Grant, and the day-

to-day control of the areas through a Conservation Officer or Team in the planning office or Belfast Development Office. The more people and organisations can be involved in conservation, the more effective it will be.

One controversial aspect of the plan is the suggestion for 'Areas of Townscape Character', which would appear to be effectively sub-conservation areas, where policies would be prepared to protect character, but there would be neither grant-aid nor very effective teeth to ensure that policies were followed. The Society is not happy with this compromise, and would rather see more effort put into conservation areas, with an upgrading of development control policies generally.

In all its submissions, the Society has tended to concentrate on general policies, believing that detailed comment on local issues was best left to local groups. How influential we will have been in altering the plan remains to be seen, but we hope we have helped to raise the profile of conservation issues, and to demonstrate that conservation is more than just an aesthetic matter.

Waringstown House

Waringstown House was described by Dr Maurice Craig as 'the most substantial building known by me to be of rammed earth'. It was built in 1667 and is an early example of an unfortified Irish country house. The U.A.H.S. listing of the area stressed the importance of the building and the amenity value of the grounds and planting associated with it.

An application, in February 1987 for outline planning permission for 25 houses to be built on the estate adjacent to the house was viewed with concern by the Society. (Just a few miles away, in Moira, the damage which can be done to the setting of an important building, by siting a cluster of new houses nearby, is all too obvious). After a good deal of public outcry the application was withdrawn. However, a year later a further application was made for 12 dwellings on the same site. The decision as to whether planning permission will be granted has not been announced yet.

While appreciating that the density of housing is halved on the second application, the Society feels it is inappropriate that building should take place in this section of the grounds. However, if permission is granted, we have requested that it will be on condition that an accurate tree survey is carried out and a proper landscaping plan is executed, particularly on the lawn.

Hearth

Hearth is the housing association managed jointly by the Society and the National Trust; with the aid of financial assistance from the Department of the Environment it restores historic buildings to provide houses for rental. At the end of 1987, Hearth was managing 55 houses and flats in Belfast, Seaford, Glenarm, Comber and Annahilt.

28-50 High Street Comber is a terrace of vernacular style houses built in rendered rubble stonework on the steep hill going out of Comber towards Ballygowan. Thought originally to have been built about 1820 for workers at the Comber Distillery, they were latterly owned by the nearby Andrews Mill. They were well maintained, but lacked amenities and were classed as unfit, and were included in the vesting of a redevelopment area around the High Street by the Housing Executive. The buildings were listed, but threatened with demolition in the course of the redevelopment, and Hearth negotiated finance to enable their restoration and improvement.

The twelve houses ranged from large two-storey houses at the bottom of the hill to tiny single-storey ones at the top, presumably reflecting the status of the occupants, and the arrangement of doors and windows along the terrace is delightfully informal, with many of the doorcases very low. By combining the smaller units, a total of nine houses was proposed in the restoration, and planning permission was duly granted; however at this point the Roads Service intervened with



High Street, Comber

proposals to raise the level of the road and footpath beside the houses to a point where the houses would have been uninhabitable, and restoration was delayed for a year before Roads Service agreed the road could be improved while the houses were still kept. Work started in 1986, and the houses were opened by Mr Richard Needham in the summer of 1987.

The houses were re-roofed, re-rendered and whitewashed, and new returns were added to provide kitchens behind the houses; the old pattern of doors and windows was felt to be important, and the three doors no longer in use have been retained on the facade, becoming windows inside the houses. The Housing Executive has designed an attractive courtyard of new houses behind the terrace, and this unusual group remains on the street frontage.

As that contract was nearing completion, another started at the former Sharland Charity Almshouses at Annahilt near Hillsborough. The Charity no longer had any beneficiaries, and was wound up several years ago on the understanding that Hearth would take over its building and continue to provide housing on a fair-rental basis. The Almshouses must be amongst the most modest in the province, looking to the casual observer more like a row of farm buildings than a charitable institution: it is a single-storey row of whitewashed rendered buildings, with a simple central pediment and cast-iron latticed casement windows. Set on a crossroads between Hillsborough and Ballynahinch, it was built about 1840 and consisted originally of nine tiny houses — in the course of restoration these have been combined to form three houses, still of no great size. A curious feature of the houses is that they turn their backs to the road, being entered from an enclosed courtyard off a side road.



Annahilt Almshouses

Also during 1987, the revolving fund arm of Hearth, known as the Historic Environmental and Architectural Rehabilitation Trust, undertook its first sizeable scheme in the restoration of three derelict houses in the Moira conservation area. Almost certainly dating back to the original expansion of Moira in the mid-18th century, nos 77-81 Main Street had been vacant for between ten and twenty years, and Hearth had been negotiating to buy them for some years. The largest house, no. 77, is a stucco-fronted house with a carriage arch running under it; nos. 79 and 81 were covered with pebbledash which was stripped back to reveal rubble stonework at no. 79 (which was repointed and left exposed) and brickwork at no. 81 which was covered again, this time with a smooth render.

Internally all the houses suffered from dry rot, and no. 79 was virtually inaccessible with hardly any sound timber, a rear wall condemned as structurally unsound, and ground floor walls to be underpinned before anything else was done. In the event, the contractor proved extremely resourceful and managed to rebuild the lower portion of the stone rear wall of that house without disturbing the sound upper portion! No. 79 was the least altered of the houses, and much internal decorative timber was salvaged for re-use, with ornamental strings replaced on new staircases for example. All the houses retain massive wooden-pegged timber roof trusses that give some indication of the age of the property.

The three houses were completed and sold towards the end of 1987, and they generated considerable interest so that the Trust has been able to repay its loans, and with the help of grants will make a profit on what was seen initially as a fairly expensive and probably risky undertaking. It has demonstrated that an important adjacent terrace of mostly derelict listed buildings is capable of economic restoration, and as that terrace has now changed hands it is hoped that restoration will take place in due course.



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Buildings in the Countryside

The Society is concerned about the spread of urban-generated rural housing. At present approximately 2,500 single dwellings in the countryside receive planning approval annually; this exceeds the figure for the whole of the rest of the United Kingdom. Under the current policy applicants seeking permission for single dwellings do not have to demonstrate a need to live in the countryside, unless the chosen site is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a green belt or policy area.

"Location, Siting and Design" was the title of the booklet launched by the DoE for N.I. Town and Country Planning Service in November 1987; it contained a statement on standards to be applied for all future rural development. Emphasis is placed on location, siting and design to ensure that a building blends with, rather than dominates, its environment. Features such as 'external chimney breasts and stacks of an exaggerated scale, ornate balconies and large horizontal picture windows' are considered to be unsuitable. Development which is likely to cause traffic, or public health, hazard is to be resisted, while ribbon development along the roadside is considered to be an unacceptable form of settlement pattern and 'skyline development will not normally be permitted'. The Department's statement gives a welcome assurance when it says that 'new buildings in AONBs will be required to respect and reflect the traditional architectural styles and settlement patterns of the locality'. However, it should be pointed out that even within AONBs new farm buildings do not require planning consent.

The Society is concerned that good vernacular buildings, which are not listed, are disappearing from the countryside. There exists at present a positive disincentive for people to renovate, for while new building is zero-rated for VAT purposes, renovations attract a 15% rate. In fact such buildings are often valued purely as replacement buildings to obtain planning permission. In special rural areas the Department's statement does suggest, however, that buildings possessing 'exceptional and distinctive architectural qualities' may be considered more suitable for renovation than replacement.

During the year two competitions were organised by the DoE to promote awareness of appropriate location, siting and design of rural dwellings. The first, for architects and students of architecture, was to design a house for the countryside. The second was for members of the general public who were asked to nominate a house which, in their opinion, was in harmony with the countryside. In both cases a considerable degree of interest was generated in the competitions. So that members of the public may see the winning entries a Rural Design Roadshow

is to be launched later in the year which will travel to the main towns.

The Society believes that, by holding these competitions, and one planned later this year on new housing, the Department is at least showing its awareness of the problem of quality of design in the countryside. Though this is clearly important, the problem of quantity remains. At a recent conference on Buildings in the Countryside Frank McDonald, Environmental Correspondent of the Irish Times, pointed out that every new rural dwelling is a nail in the coffin of an Irish town. It is alarming to think that, by failing to address the problem of quantity now, a legacy of spoilt countryside and empty towns will remain for future generations.

University News

Although the Queen's University conservation area was designated during 1987, question marks remain over a number of prominent buildings in the area which Queen's has been required to put on the market or seek planning permission for their redevelopment. The proposal to develop the grounds of Riddel Hall has not been determined as we go to press, but Derryvolgie House has been reprieved.

Probably the most controversial of these cases has been the Elmwood Hall, for which planning permission has now been granted for conversion to a banking hall, although it is not certain whether this will be pursued. The demolition of Elmwood House has been refused. The Society has been only one of many objectors to the change of use for the hall, since almost any other use than concert hall will tend to alter the very fine interior.

Queen's has applied for office use for many of the houses in Mount Charles, and in pursuance of that proposes to provide car parking in place of the small private garden at the bottom of the street, which is an unusual and attractive feature; the Society has argued for retention of the trees here. Another case was the proposed demolition of unlisted buildings in Rugby Road, which is covered elsewhere in the Newsletter.

On the positive side, the Society made representations to the University concerning the condition of gate pillars at Lennoxvale and Holyrood which were courteously attended to; at Lennoxvale a new cast-iron pillar was erected.

Waiting for Godot

The once flourishing town of Bangor, a lively seaside resort well into the 1950s, has been undergoing an identity crisis in recent years. At the end of 1983 the Society fought to save the former Grand Hotel from demolition, and the next year demolition of early houses on Seacliff Road was successfully averted. During 1987 there was a threat to fill in the Long Hole on Seacliff Road to create car parking; and the Society objected to proposals to demolish a considerable number of buildings along Bridge Street and the bottom of High Street in the town, as well as to clumsy infill proposals, again at Seacliff Road.

Until recently it was possible to see Bangor's seafront as almost entirely Victorian and Edwardian in character, with a few later amenities of a seaside character thrown in. The demolition of Barry's left a gaping hole (still unfilled), the ongoing breakwater construction is slicing into Bangor Bay, and the proposed Marina and associated developments will effectively put an end to any remaining historical character on the main part of Bangor's seafront. To demolish rather than restore the admittedly mostly fairly derelict properties on Bridge Street, the former Stag's Head pub and ornate stucco buildings at 6-12 High Street is surely a short-sighted policy. Public opinion in the town has been vociferously opposed to the proposal, yet behind closed doors the Council continues to do deals with developers, as it did in building an ice rink over yet another part of the diminishing open space at Castle Park.

North Down Council is putting all its eggs into making a success of the proposed marina, and developers are eagerly goading it on; yet there is no certainty that the marina will produce any local jobs, or bring any wealth to the town — on the contrary, infilling the Bay with car and boat parking, security fences to protect the boats and yet more tacky carry-outs to service the new facility, is likely to put off many of the real tourists they could have attracted by imaginative conservation. Meanwhile, the remaining seafront buildings deteriorate by the year, as no one is prepared to invest money in them till the marina is built and occupied, by which time it will probably be too late to save them.

With prudent neighbourliness, the building conforms externally to the surrounding streetscape. Window frames are bronzed anodised aluminium with bronze tinted double glazing . . . External cladding is in smooth red Tyrone clay facings and roof finish is in Trocal PVC sheet . . . (From a report in *Specify* on the new Lisburn Fire Authority building, whose surroundings are largely stucco or rough brick buildings with double hung sash windows and natural slate roofs).

A Successful Tackle

Early in 1987, Queen's University proposed the demolition of a block of unlisted buildings on Rugby Road, College Park and College Park East. The Society had earlier argued that these should be included in the conservation area for Queen's, but they were excluded because of long-term university plans for the redevelopment of the site, and the planning application was duly lodged last May.

A very articulate residents' group was set up to oppose the plan for a new block of offices and shops on the site, and the UAHS List on the area was a significant part of the ammunition with which they successfully averted the threat. There was great concern that buildings of good quality (notably nos. 7 and 9 Rugby Road, built in 1875 as Caledonia Terrace and known more recently as La Grande Palace Mystérieuse) should be lost and replaced with more of the bland system design the university has so often perpetrated, and the comments to the press of Mr Gass, the University Bursar, did not reassure one: "If you look at a map you can see the new building perfectly complements a large quadrangular piece of property. It fits in snugly with the physics, applied maths and computer buildings!"

In the event, the combination of considerable public pressure together with the realisation that the buildings would probably fetch more as individual properties than as a demolished block, led to the university withdrawing their application, and the houses are expected to be marketed shortly.



Caledonia Terrace

Gasworks

By the end of 1988, almost all the town gas consumers in the province will have had to switch to bottle gas or other sources of energy, as the government determined that the province's gas industry should no longer be subsidised, and that a gas pipeline from the Republic of Ireland or Scotland was not a viable option.

As a result, gasworks in many towns are being demolished, sometimes with few regrets and even producing useful development opportunities, but in other cases there should be pause for thought. Fred Hamond, who has recently joined the UAHS Committee, has been involved in carrying out a detailed record of the gasworks as they have closed down, for the Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch of the DoE, and as the survey progressed it became obvious that there were two particular gasworks which should not be demolished wholesale: the Belfast gasworks obviously, with its prominent listed frontage, and that at Carrickfergus.

Carrickfergus appears to have a remarkably intact Victorian gasworks, with almost all its original manufacturing coal-gas plant disused for twenty years but not dismantled. Elsewhere in the province, oil-reforming plant had replaced the old machinery in the 1960s, and Carrickfergus is a survival unique in Ireland, and matched only at plants in Scotland and Norfolk, both of which are now preserved.

The Carrickfergus Gas Company was set up in 1855 on its present site between Irish Quarter West and Irish Quarter South, and was producing just under 50 million cubic feet by 1960; manufacture ceased on the site in 1964. The proposed listing of the gasworks has given breathing space to put together a preservation package for the gasworks, but much work has to be done in organising long term finance and indeed in carrying out necessary short term work to preserve the buildings and contents from weather and vandalism. The Society has been involved in discussions on the future of both the Carrickfergus and Belfast Gasworks, and in particular has offered Heritage Repairs as a body which could assist with restoration at both sites. The Ulster Museum is keen to set up a Museum of Industrial Archaeology at the Belfast gasworks, and if the Carrickfergus Gasworks Trust gets off the ground, perhaps retort houses, tar tanks, condensers, exhausts, boosters and rotary scrubbers will be on display in a few years time.

A New Grand Central

As a consequence of the EHSSB centralising its offices in Linenhall Street, splendid premises on the corner of University Street and Botanic Avenue fell vacant. Originally built as Fitzroy House, nos. 65-67 University Street forms the end of a particularly vigorous terrace of High Victorian houses with a marvellous roofline of mansards and iron cresting. Fitzroy House itself has a largely unaltered interior, complete with most of its ornate fireplaces, heavy panelled doors and ornate plasterwork. Unfortunately the building is also notorious for dramatic evidence of settlement at no. 67, where the facade has dropped approximately six inches along a fifteen foot frontage. (This is due to a local geological fault, which has produced other settlement in nearby property).

Considering the building to be at risk when the EHSSB vacated it, the Society made strenuous attempts to have it listed on account of its townscape importance and internal quality. At least one bidder for the property intended to demolish it, but fortunately it has been purchased for conversion into a luxury hotel — the new Grand Central, no less — and it is to be hoped that the new owners will recognise the high quality of their purchase. They have seen the demand for a good hotel in the university area, and this building has the potential to be restored as a very fine hotel indeed.



65-67 University Street

The Northern Building Record

In England, Scotland and Wales, members of the public can consult extensive photographic and documentary archives on the buildings of their area, funded by the DoE as a corollary to the Public Records Offices. In the South, a privately funded archive was established during the seventies, and it now receives government grant. In the North, although the Archaeological Survey records buildings and structures dating from before about 1800, there is no real public archive buildings of later date.

In 1985 the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast, with assistance from the DoE, and the Irish Architectural Archive in Dublin, assisted by the Esmé Mitchell Trust and Baring Foundation, funded two research fellowships to demonstrate the usefulness and feasibility of such a Record in Northern Ireland, but during 1988 this study, which has built up a modest but useful collection of photographs and surveys during its existence, will be brought to a close. Its archives will be absorbed for the time being in the Archaeological Survey, but it is hoped that funding for permanent staff, resources and convenient public access will be forthcoming in due course. The UAHS continues to lobby for this facility, which it feels to be both necessary from an archival point of view, and extremely useful to architectural historians here.

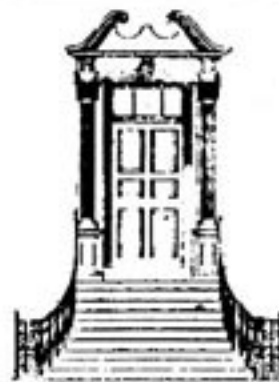
"What They Said"

It is a great place for a swim — the best and the warmest pool in Belfast. Sometimes the water is so hot it is like swimming with another coat on! (Barney Campbell, swimmer).

The boiler is a bit cranky and if it is on for a while the temperature can creep up to the nineties. It is not intentional, it's just that 'Sadie', that's what I call her, likes to get a good head of steam up sometimes.' (Michael Barrett, boilerman at the Ormeau Baths — both quoted in the Belfast Telegraph, January 1988).

In relation to the green belt, it is not going too far to say that certain housebuilders are like hotel thieves, trying every door, as it were, until they find one unlocked.

Nicholas Ridley (talks about) the importance of planning not being something which stops people doing things. Well, in our crowded little island, that is one of its prime functions, especially in an age when an area the size of Berkshire is being eaten up by development every four years at current rates of building. (Paul Finch writing in Building Design, November 1987).



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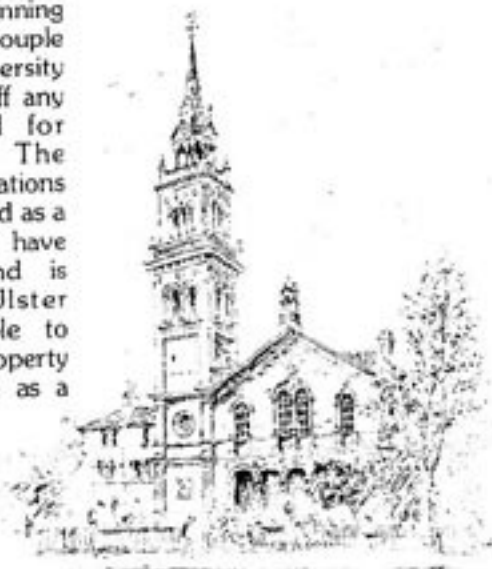
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Having thus arranged consent to demolish, the owners seem to have lost interest in investing in the province, and have simply put the property on the market to realise their assets. Ceara House was vacated, and is now lying vandalised — and still, as we go to press, for sale. It will almost certainly now be demolished, and lessons must be learnt for the future. The PAC expects HMBB to provide evidence of the financial viability of alternatives to demolition, and if it cannot provide these itself, it must seek ways of commissioning figures from consultants, as the Society did in a very modest way in this case. Above all, it must be made clear that where the consent to demolish is conditional on a replacement building being approved, as it was here, the owner has an obligation to maintain the listed building in the meantime, and to prevent vandalism of the kind that has taken place here, since restoration must be considered as being still a possible outcome.

Stop Press

The Elmwood Hall has been the subject of various planning applications over the last couple years, since Queen's University has been obliged to sell off any property not required for educational purposes. The Society objected to applications for use as a banking hall and as a bookshop, which would have spoiled the interior, and is delighted that the Ulster Orchestra has been able to negotiate a lease on the property which will ensure its use as a concert hall will remain.



Elmwood

Investing in the Province

In our last Newsletter we reported on an application to demolish Ceara House, an 1854 Thomas Jackson villa in Windsor Avenue, Belfast; on its subsequent listing and the refusal of permission to demolish; and of the Planning Appeal at which the owners argued that restoration was uneconomic, and at which the Society, represented by Consarc Partnership, demonstrated how it could be viable. In June 1987, the Inspector found in favour of the owners, and demolition of the listed building was permitted, subject to approval of a new development and removal to store of certain architectural features.

Although Ceara is not a highly significant building, it was a good quality early Victorian villa in sound condition, converted into viable and attractive flats, all but one of which were occupied, and with an interesting history. It was listed on account of both its exterior quality and of internal features, which had not been damaged generally in the conversion to flats. The owners, an English charitable trust, represented very persistently by Robert McCartney QC, maintained that in demolishing the building they would be erecting in its place 'a worthy rival' consisting of 12 apartments, and that in doing so they would be investing in the province and providing employment as well as improving the environment. Mr McCartney suggested that the area was 'coming down with Jacksons' and that Ceara was nothing special. Consarc argued that the building was substantially sound and the adjacent garages could be demolished for provision of additional dwelling units if required; and that grant-aid would be available for restoration but not for new-build, which could tip the financial balance.

The Inspector's report made some disturbing comments. While accepting that listing created a 'general presumption' against consent for demolition he does not seem to have given this presumption much weight in balancing the cost of new build (£245,000) against restoration (£220,000) and possible rental returns. Most peculiarly, he considered that the Department's reason for refusing consent ('that the subject building is of special architectural or historic interest and is worthy of retention') was 'scarcely a reason for refusal', since Ceara would not have warranted listing unless it was of special interest. Ignoring the external qualities of the building, which it had been considered would not in themselves have warranted listing, he concentrated on the interior features, which had tipped the balance in favour of it, and decided that they did not warrant the preservation of the building. He quoted the Ministerial Statement of August 1981 which declared that listing would be preserved for 'the exceptional, not just the good', and decided that Ceara was merely 'good'.

Activities

The year got off to a rousing start with a lecture 'No Stone Unturned' given by Brian Boyd in the Ulster Museum on the evening of 15 January. In this lecture Brian described in hilarious fashion his experiences in writing and presenting his most successful TV series, 'A Heritage from Stone'. The Annual General Meeting was held for the first time in the Assembly Room, Lisburn Museum, on 25th February. The guest speaker was Anne Davey Orr editor of the magazine *Ulster Architect*, which has done much to make people aware of what is good in contemporary architecture in the Province. On 19 March Marcus Patton gave a talk in the Ulster Museum, '101 Ways to Frame a View' in which he set out to consider the importance of windows in architecture, and he had numerous slides depicting interesting examples.

'A Pale beyond the Pale' was the title of the outing held on 29 April when members of the Society were guided by Garry Corbett around a number of the later Medieval tower houses in the Barony of Lecale. Commencing at Kilclief Castle, we moved to Audley's Castle and thence to Ardglass to see the range of fortified buildings in that town. 'Bellaghy Bawn and Dawson's Bridge', visited on 23 May, was a day of contrasts from the crumbling Bawn which is just about to undergo restoration, to the splendour of Moyola Park. The weather was glorious and after Lord Moyola had described the history of the building of the house, members were free to wander and sit in the grounds. The day turned out to be one of the more memorable occasions in the UAHS calendar.

Saturday 20 June proved to be one of the most novel outings in our annals, when members, led by Mr Clifford Charlton, occupied a coach of the "Portrush Flier" on a Railway Preservation Society of Ireland excursion to Ballymoney and Portrush. There was an opportunity to see the engineering and architectural achievements of the former Belfast & Northern Counties Railway, including the Bleach Green Viaduct, double somersault signals and signal boxes, and Portrush Railway Station and Northern Counties Hotel.

The visit to Ballymena and Gracehill on 25 July was marked by the interest shown by the Borough Council and their resultant hospitality. The morning was devoted to viewing both the old and new in Ballymena. In the afternoon we went to Gracehill Village, and then individuals paid quick visits to Ahoghill, Cullybackey and Portglenone Forest Park. The day was a great success thanks to the meticulous preparation by Brian Gunn-King in this area which is so dear to his heart. Brian Mackey, curator of Lisburn Museum and a UAHS Committee member, led a party round Lambeg and Hilden on 22 August. We visited

a wide range of buildings in the mill villages including Hilden threadworks, and three houses associated with families who pioneered the linen industry, namely Chrome Hill (Wolfendens), Glenmore (Richardsons) and Hilden (Barbours). The day concluded with a sampling of the real ale brewed in the stable buildings at Hilden.

On Saturday 5 September Colin Hatrick led members round Holy Hill, Artigarvan, which has been so lovingly restored by Mr Hamilton Thompson, indeed it was the first time that members were requested to remove their shoes before going round the house. In the afternoon Leckpatrick Parish Church, St James Church, Dunamanagh and Altnacree were visited on the homeward journey. We were fortunate in having a son of Downpatrick in the person of Dan McNeill, another Committee member, to guide us around his town on 17 October. Following a visit to the principal buildings, and lunch in Denvir's Hotel, we were treated to a slide presentation by Dan's father, an acknowledged local historian of the area. Between the two McNeills we were not left wanting of information on the area.

The Christmas Party was held on the evening of Thursday 10 December at the Arts Council building. A quiz devised by Henry McCandless and Marcus Patton tested members' knowledge of local buildings and provided much amusement. We would wish to convey our thanks to both our hosts and our guides for their efforts on our behalf throughout the year.

Heritage Repairs

Since 1986, the small team of building workers the Society employed under the ACE scheme has been operating as a separate company known as Heritage Repairs Ltd, although the directors of the company are generally drawn from the Society's committee. Towards the end of 1987, as members will be aware, it became apparent that the company was in some financial difficulty, but in the early months of 1988 strenuous efforts were made to overcome this, and with the appointment of a new manager it is hoped that the company can now recover its position.

During 1987, the team was chiefly involved at the old Shane's Castle ruins on the shore of Lough Neagh, where the wallhead was consolidated and capped, and general repairs to pointing were carried out. Although the work was not very extensive, it proved a difficult contract to carry out as the site was very exposed — to the dreaded Lough Neagh flies in addition to the more usual vagaries of wind and rain! The work is however now complete, and a new concrete tie beam at the wallhead should prevent further movement of a segment of the ruins that was pulling away from the main structure.

Book Review

Larmour, Paul. **Belfast: An Illustrated Architectural Guide.** Friar's Bush Press, 1987. 120pp. illus. £12.95 Hardback.

Paul Larmour's excellent guide to Belfast's architecture started out life as a small leaflet gleaming in the author's mind's eye. Thanks to his endeavours and the enthusiasm of the admirable Friar's Bush Press, it finally emerged at the end of 1987 as a fully fledged, handsomely illustrated scholarly reference book on the city's architecture.

Belfast is not a city overburdened with books on its architecture but the few it has make excellent reading in their very different ways. Charles Brett's "Buildings of Belfast" recently reprinted by Friar's Bush Press, with pithy updating comments from the author, was a very personal look at the city. Dr. Larmour's approach is more clinical. It is not impossible, however, for the careful and curious reader, to pick out the buildings for which the author would be prepared to prostrate himself before a bulldozer.

The book is the first systematic attempt to list all buildings of note in the city up to the end of the 1930s with carefully researched details of the architects, builders and craftsmen involved. Indeed a selection of significant buildings from the 1940s, 50s and 60s is also included. The gap remains, still, for a book assessing the very recent architecture of the city. Dr. Larmour has very ably succeeded in drawing our attention to the wealth of good late 19th and early twentieth century architecture most of which has fallen outside the scope of other books. Members of the UAHS have not been slow to point out (Marcus Patton, Belfast Telegraph 2nd December 1987) that since statutory listing stops at 1914 more than a quarter of the buildings described in Dr. Larmour's books are not eligible for listing under the normal procedures. It is to be hoped, however, that their future is slightly more secure as a result of having the spotlight focused upon them.

The book provides a great wealth of information in a very readable and well organised way. The main text is arranged chronologically and there are indexes to the architects and engineers, the artists and craftsmen and to the buildings and streets. In addition buildings can be checked by using the numbered map guide. Only the builders seem to have slipped through the otherwise immaculately stitched net. The book is primarily a guide and for that reason the author has not listed sources of information in great detail. They will no doubt be revealed to us over the next few years as Dr. Larmour continues publishing his work on Ulster's architectural history. Perhaps we might even see some plans also.

The main aim of the book, obviously, is to encourage the reader to get out and about the city and actually look at the buildings whether it be to enjoy "a gem of late Victorian church architecture" in Elmwood Avenue and "an endearing little Gothic Revivalist school" in the Belmont Road or to revile "an ungainly looking stone clad brute" in the centre of town and a church where "the charm of the exterior has been all but destroyed." The armchair building lover, on the other hand, can settle back and enjoy the numerous excellent illustrations including twenty colour plates of, joy of joys, some of the finest interiors in the city. There is much to be gleaned from the text, too, above and beyond the basic descriptions of the buildings. The less well known brother of W H Lynn and the painter Paul Henry pop up as designer of the carved angels on the Custom House and architecture of the Shankill Road Library respectively. The reader can also mull over the deep significance of the inscription at David Bryce's Ormiston house "He that tholes overcomes." Did the author note that with particular feeling? I always thought that he who tholed just went on tholing.

The author and publisher of "Belfast: an illustrated guide" certainly tholed successfully and overcame any problems they had to face. The book is remarkably good value and certainly deserves a place on the shelves of anyone with an interest in Belfast and its buildings.

K.L.

New Wine in Old Bottles

In October 1987 the Society organised a one-day conference on the re-use of old buildings, which was well attended and proved a stimulating day. A synopsis of the papers presented is available from the Secretary, U.A.H.S., 181a Stranmillis Road, Belfast BT9 5DU for £1.00 (incl. p&p).



City Hospital

OBITUARY

Two early 19th century buildings have fallen victims to the leviathan City Hospital — at the end of 1987, Wilmot Terrace on the Lisburn Road, and early in 1988 the old Belfast Workhouse, the one required to make way for nurse's housing, and the other for car parking. Wilmot Terrace was a handsome terrace of dark brick laid in Flemish bond — surely quite capable of conversion to housing — while the Workhouse block of dark basalt with its grim associations was of great historic interest and far more ornamental than the many 'temporary' structures which abound on the City Hospital site.

A small whitewashed cottage on the Stranmillis Road on the edge of the NIE grounds at Danesfort had been in poor condition but tenanted for many years. Unfortunately it was not listed, and when the house fell vacant it was demolished — not an outstanding building, but one which gave character and continuity to its area. In our last issue, we reported on the threatened thatched cottage at Sunningdale Park Belfast; it was demolished by its owner immediately following a heavy rainstorm in August 1987. The owner claimed the roof had collapsed with the rain making the cottage a danger to the public, but as Hearth had been keen to buy the building from him, he was under no obligation to demolish to avoid that responsibility, and we understand the DoE is considering taking action against him for demolition without consent.

Demolition to make way for the Castlecourt development in Royal Avenue continued, with the loss of the old Avenue Cinema building (see Heritage Newsletter No. 3), and a former farmhouse in Garfield Street thought to be of mid-18th century date. It was reported that the timber piles of the old Grand Central and Post Office, some 700 in all, and up to 45 feet long, were still mostly sound and required a 90-ton crane and a massive digger to remove them!

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Police Stations

There are at present a number of planning applications under consideration for new R.U.C. stations which, in some instances, pose a threat to listed buildings. While appreciating the problems of endeavouring to ensure the safety of personnel on the site, which is of paramount importance, the Society is concerned that aesthetic considerations should not be ignored. One problem, which we believe has not been addressed, is that of making large stations and high perimeter walls aesthetically acceptable. In large measure this must be because it was felt that many of the exterior features would be of a temporary nature. It would appear now that they will be with us for some time to come.

We have made the Society's views known to the Police Authority and received assurance that they will be taken into consideration. We are pleased to learn that considerable efforts have been made to retain original features when restoring listed stations.

Congratulations

Although the Society is not generally in favour of the demolition of listed buildings and their replacement with replicas, warm congratulations must go to the Housing Executive for their meticulous reconstruction, in stone, of a terrace of houses in Castle Street, Armagh. Although not true replicas, much of the character of the old houses has been retained in the new building, and it has tremendous townscape value.

Two buildings have been rescued by voluntary groups from almost certain demolition. In Newry, the Clanrye Community Workshop has received an award for its ongoing restoration of the old Abbey Yard buildings, a scheme which is providing training while creating workspace. In Belfast, the Carlisle Memorial Church is slowly coming to new life as workspaces and flats for sculptors and offices for the NI Federation of Housing Associations, who have now taken up residence there.

Major restoration has also been completed at Belfast Castle, for Belfast City Council, and at the Primates Chapel, Armagh, for Armagh District Council. Meanwhile, the Grand Opera House in Belfast was the recipient of a Europa Nostra award, and it continues to be cited as the pump-primer which generated the recent revival in Belfast's economic fortunes.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

The Society depends on an active membership for its effectiveness. Members can help in its work in many ways — by monitoring planning applications, for example, or drawing attention to undesirable development. The Society organises regular outings, expeditions, lectures and social events. members also enjoy the privilege of buying all the Society's publications at a 25% discount. (see overleaf for a full list)

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