HISTORIC BUILDINGS COUNCIL

for Northern Ireland

2016-2020

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TWENTIETH REPORT

MMXX

Members 2016-2020

(Top row) John Anderson, Ciaran Andrews, Joseph Birt, Liam Campbell;
(middle row) Rosie Ford-Hutcinson, Erl Johnston, .Bronagh Lynch, Charlie McMurray;
(bottom row) Marcus Patton, Tanja Poppelreuter, Peter Tracey.
Other members not shown are Johanna Higgins and Paul Kendrick.

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

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Functions of the Historic Buildings Council

The Historic Buildings Council is established under Article 198 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Its function is

> to keep under review, and from time to time report to the Department on, the general state of preservation of listed buildings; and
>
> to advise the Department on such matters relating to the preservation of buildings of special architectural or historic interest as the Department may refer to it.

The Council's nature is defined under Schedule 5 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011:

It shall consist of a Chair appointed by the Minister and such number of other members so appointed as the Minister may determine. Members are appointed for a term of three years but are eligible for re-appointment. The Council may appoint sub-committees which may include persons who are not members of the Council, and the Council may regulate its own quorum. It must prepare and submit to the Department a report on its activities and the Department shall lay a copy of every such report before the Assembly.

The Council is required to be consulted

1. under article 80 (3) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 on the compiling or amendment of the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest;

2. under Article 84 (3) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, before the Department issues any certificate stating that it does not intend to list a building;

3. under Article 104 (5) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 on the making, varying or cancelling the designation of a conservation area.

Chairman's Report

The Historic Buildings Council provides both a sympathetic sounding-board for government to outline and debate changes in legislation and guidance, and an implacable obstacle to moves by government and others that may lead to a weakening of protection of historic buildings. Its members are unpaid and many hold passionate views about the treatment of historic buildings.

The changes arising from the devolution of planning powers to local councils are discussed later, but one aspect may be noted at the outset. In the 1972 legislation, the HBC was set up to advise the Minister for the Environment, and since the DoE looked after planning and conservation areas as well as historic buildings, there was a seamless connection between the Council and the different aspects of planning. Planning officials often attended meetings and could feed comments from HBC directly to the planning officials dealing with cases.

Now the HBC advises the Minister for the Department of Communities, which has responsibility for listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest and is a statutory consultee regarding planning applications, but decision making in relation to planning matters has devolved most of day to day planning to the district councils. The Department for Infrastructure oversees planning decisions and has the authority to call in an application should it go against consultation advice. To make matters worse, the three-week period between registering a planning application and reaching a decision on it makes it impossible for a body like HBC which normally meets monthly to discuss and issue views on applications.

The three-week window is of course impossibly short for the planners to carry out proper consultation and decision-making on an application, so in practice there is a much longer period of PADs or Pre-Application Discussions, which enable the planners to review plans and raise queries on them. Unfortunately this period is regarded as confidential, and for the first few years of the system planners generally refused to release plans to HBC until the public consultation opened. As a result HBC sometimes found itself being given useful presentations and then learning that a recommendation had been made to the respective council the same week or even on the same day. It appears that this particular anomaly has now been overcome and the Council looks forward to being involved at an earlier stages of future discussions.

This report covers a period of considerable frustration for the Historic Buildings Council, with the reorganisation of local government having resulted in changes to planning processes that are more opaque and ongoing cuts in government finance, exacerbated by the absence of Stormont ministers for three years.

If a trace of bitterness is apparent in what follows, it is not from a lack of enthusiasm for historic buildings but from frustration that nearly fifty years after Northern Ireland finally got legislation to protect historic buildings the system still seems to fail in that objective. The cost of repairs goes up and VAT has been added to it, while the amount and availability of grants to help owners look after their buildings goes down.

Planning permission still gets granted (though perhaps less frequently) for demolition or destructive alterations, and fines for illegal demolition remain pitifully modest. Delisting is less common, but probably only because new listing is also less common. (Over the life of this Council, something over 150 listings were recommended (albeit 22 of them were for post boxes and 14 for historic street signs) and there were 39 de-listings). The Programme for Government barely mentions historic buildings, and anyhow responsibility for planning has been passed to the local councils.

Although there were relatively few listings during the period of this Council, we were able to discuss the process of listing with the HED architects more than would normally be the case. Normally the HBC is presented only with the buildings that are proposed for listing, but with the Birches ward near Lough Neagh which was under consideration we asked to see the buildings that had been "scoped" for listing but after survey not recommended. In most cases

we could see why the decision had been made not to recommend listing, but we had some useful debates around the process and were able to appreciate how intensive survey of an area draws attention to local characteristics that can add significance to individual buildings. The detailed historical background that is researched along with the physical surveys adds greatly to the appreciation of buildings, and it is good to see that the first criteria for listing ("historic or architectural") is being given more weight.

Most local councils do not have a dedicated conservation officer. The interpretation of planning legislation too is largely devolved, with the old guidance like PPS 6 being replaced by each council's interpretation of however much of it it suits them to retain in their own plans. This Historic Buildings Council has commented on some of the district plans, but with thirteen of them being prepared and going through successive stages of consultation it is impossible for a Council of busy amateurs to comment usefully on all of them. Why were the councils not given a standard document and asked to declare where they wished to depart from it, instead of asking each one to invent the wheel, with varying degrees of success?

Developers continue to submit applications for buildings that are far taller, boxier and more tin-eared to their environment than they need to be. The Council has listened patiently to developers and their architects assure us that the design will be sustainable and echo their context and fulfil an urgent need for more student apartments, more hotels, more office blocks or whatever.

But in a time when climate change is ever clearer than before and the need to save energy more obvious than ever, two obvious ways of reducing our carbon footprint are continuously ignored - instead of adapting existing buildings, the emphasis is still on demolition and new construction, while worship of the car continues in new roads, road widening and parking provisions. The mantra of "sustainable development" is invoked to justify buildings that would sometimes be efficient to run, but will never be sustainable on a whole-life basis because they will probably be demolished long before the energy costs of removing their predecessors to landfill, making their new steel and glass and concrete, and transporting their materials to the site have been balanced out.

If old buildings were as inefficient as they are often accused of being, the rush to replace them would be more understandable. But quite apart from being already in existence, with their building energy costs already met, they often perform much better than they are given credit for. Modern energy measurement takes no account of thermal mass, which is common to all solid-walled buildings, ensuring more equable temperatures across day and night. And insulating solid-walled buildings leads either to destruction of their external appearance or to extensive internal alterations that remove the benefit of their thermal mass.

In general the public is fairly passive about historic buildings - people certainly like old buildings, but they tend to assume that they can have no influence over their future, or that somebody else will comment on a planning application they dislike. This may be through a feeling of general powerlessness about the economic world, or from bitter experience of having complaints overruled and no comeback through third-party appeal in the way that exists in much of Europe.

Just over a year ago however a disastrous fire broke out at the Bank Buildings in the centre of Belfast, and there was a remarkable outpouring of concern at the possible loss of a building people had walked past daily or weekly for many years, sometimes shopped in and often checked the time on. The future of the building hung in the balance for some weeks, but fortunately the owners, insurers, planners and councillors made difficult decisions and the building is now being restored. The debate about history, economy, structure and health & safety was lengthy and passionate, but at the end of the day it demonstrated that historic buildings matter - to people, to tourism, to businesses, to the identity of cities - and that their protection is a matter of passionate importance.

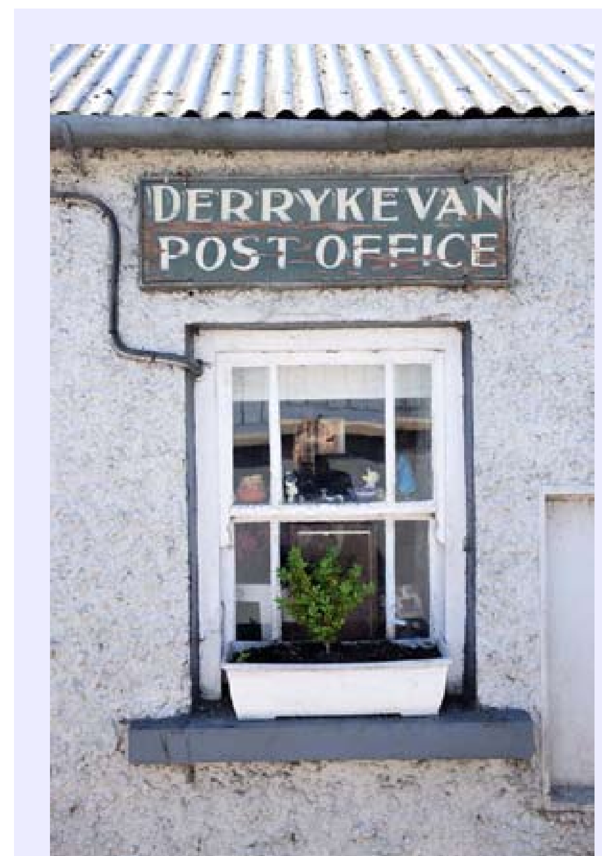
This report is being assembled during a time when the entire country is in lockdown due to the Covid-19 contagion. Our historic buildings have seen plagues before - outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1919 and until recently tuberculosis. Cities learned to live with those problems by improving hygiene and sanitation or by vaccination. Hopefully a vaccine will be developed before long to deal with this virus, but until then the way we live will change, and the economic cost of the lockdown will have lasting effects.

Literally in the last few weeks we have heard of proposals from the Westminster government that would effectively wipe away much of the 1947 Planning Act which provides our planning process. Historic buildings are to remain protected, but their setting may be put under severe threat. This is something that our successors in the next Historic Buildings Council will no doubt want to address.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation of the contributions made by my colleagues on this Council, and thanks for the support of Geoff Sloan and Anne Menary and their colleagues in the Historic Environment Division. There must have been times when servicing a body that has little patience with budgets and protocol, and idealistic targets for building protection, was difficult to prioritise, but we are grateful for their understanding, and also to Iain Greenway who has always been aware that the role of the HBC is not just to rubber-stamp the work of the Department but to query it and to seek to raise the standards for looking after the built heritage of Northern Ireland.

Marcus Patton
August 2020

Marcus Patton has served on the Historic Buildings Council for four terms, two as a member and after a short break two more as Chairman. He recently retired after nearly forty years as Director of the building preservation trust Hearth.



HED

Derrykevan Post Office near Portadown is an example of the rural vernacular buildings that are brought to the HBC from time to time, and this one was recommended for listing in 2018.

Since intact thatched buildings are now so rare, a number of "thatch under tin" buildings are brought to the Council and are listed when the roof structure, scraws and thatch are intact under the corrugated tin. In this case not only was the thatch complete and the mud walls unaltered, but the cottage also had a fascinating interior. Although the cottage dates from before 1835, and has a hearth-lobby plan, its particular interest lies in the Derrykevan post office which had been estabished there about 1907 and was left intact when it closed in about 2000.

Although the setting of the cottage has been lost, the social history contained in its counters, pigeon holes and stock made it a very popular listing.

THE BANK BUILDINGS

Public outcry after disastrous fire

Marcus Patton

One of the most dramatic incidents concerning historic buildings during our term was the near-destruction of the listed Bank Buildings in the centre of Belfast on 28 August 2018. It received widespread coverage in the media and was the focus of an outpouring of public interest.

One of the best-known buildings by WH Lynn, it was built between 1885 and 1900, when the spectacular wide-arched frontage was completed, and while its interior had been largely gutted in successive renovations and repairs, the exterior remained basically intact. Seeing it with flames licking through the windows and behind the clock at the top of the facade raised great public concern, and it was obvious that the public recognised the contribution historic buildings make to our towns and cities.

For some days the fate of the building hung in the balance while engineers assessed the condition of stonework and Building Control cordoned off an area around it in case of possible collapse. However at no stage did Primark, the owners of the building, ask for its demolition, and they have supported its restoration throughout.

The most critical period came when shopkeepers within the cordon complained that they couldn't access their buildings, and others outside the cordon complained that footfall in the city centre had fallen dramatically because of the blockage of Royal Avenue and neighbouring streets. They took no account of the fact that even if the building had been demolished there would have been disruption for a period, followed by a gap site for years while plans were made for a replacement building, then further disruption during its construction. To its credit Belfast City Council took a positive role in balancing the needs of traders against the long-term need to restore such a prominent building.

As I wrote in an article in the *Belfast Telegraph* shortly after the fire, if the gaunt skeleton of the fire-damaged building was blocking a key street and

Review

Why it's in all our interests to save Bank Buildings and other architecture of note

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

... while developers continue to land-bank

looking like a spectre at the feast, a much greater area of the city centre is empty and decaying nearby - the "UnDead", buildings that are not being restored and lie vacant under the embrace of developers.

It has been impossible to comment meaningfully on an application as large as the Royal Exchange development, or, as it is now known, Tribeca, which is a sizeable area of Belfast city centre around Donegall Street and North Street but it has been a concern for twenty years, as developers bought up more and more properties and sought to invoke government support to acquire further land to enable a comprehensive development - in a conservation area and including a number of important listed buildings.

The Council has called for restoration of the listed buildings in the scheme before any approval on the remainder is granted. The restoration of the Bank Buildings is not a quick job, but at least it is under way: the charred stonework is hidden behind yellow shipping containers but it will surely not be long before we see the familiar building once more at the head of Castle Place.

When known as Royal Exchange the development focused on attracting a department store or large supermarket as the anchor tenant, and the (after fire damage) derelict North Street Arcade was sacrificed to accommodate what was increasingly becoming seen as a white elephant.

In 2017 the Council considered revised proposals that were to include a 27-storey building in close proximity to one of the most important churches in the city centre, the fine Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church.

In 2019 further revisions were drawn up, adding to the maze of historical permissions and amendments, this time with a new developer and in due course a new marketing name, "Tribeca". This puzzled most natives of Belfast till it was found that the name refers to the most exclusive and historic quarter of New York. The comparison was both resented and ridiculed as being inappropriate for a scheme that would involve the demolition or gutting of many buildings in the area. While slightly more historic fabric is retained in the current proposal, much of it involves facade retentions with additional storeys added on top, and there are still tower blocks. When it was suggested that a start be made on the restoration of the listed buildings in the area, which are shown as being kept, the developers implied that it would be necessary to find tenants for the new buildings first.

At this rate there will be little left of the listed buildings when their turn comes. The scheme was technically "started", to ensure planning permissions were locked into place, by removing the roof, chimneys and lanterns from one such listed building in Lower Garfield Street, which now sits open to the skies and with its walls supported by a cage of scaffolding.

It has long been apparent that the developers behind many schemes do not have the capital available to build them, but seek planning approvals in order to add value to the land they hold and sell it on at a profit to the next bidder. Investment vehicles of this kind add no value to any city; far from it, land banking leaves entire areas empty and derelict and is a blight on a city. Despite this, such schemes continue to fascinate Councils. The planners should refuse to give additional permissions in such cases until developers can provide guarantees, backed by bond, and time bound to agreed completion dates.

Marcus Patton

Marcus Patton

Lower Garfield Street - a listed building in Tribeca made roofless two years ago.

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THE ACHILLES HEEL OF LISTING

Listing is a very black-and-white process for dealing with situations that in real life have shades of grey.

A building is either listed or not - it cannot be partly listed, or slightly listed. Being worthy of listing is no protection if a building is not actually listed, and even being proposed for listing is no protection until the statutory procedures have been completed.

Under the legislation putting local councils in the driving seat of listed building consent, councils are invited to draw up "local lists" of buildings and monuments (including natural features) which they think are important. This feeds into the local development plans and should help to raise the profile of some buildings and landmarks that are not sufficiently appreciated. But - the local list carries no teeth. If the items on the local list are not statutorily listed there is nothing in law to prevent them being demolished or swept away. Understandably, councils have seen little point in drawing up a list of buildings of local historic importance, which may only point up buildings developers should demolish while they can.

Marcus Patton

When a building is considered for listing it is looked at by the survey team on the ground, considered by the HED architects, recommended to the HBC and the local council, and finally listed (or not). When it reaches the HBC it will come with a proposal to list, and normally the recommendation will be agreed by the members. At the same time the recommendation goes to the district council, who may choose to object.

So it can be just a matter of routine that a listing proposal goes through the statutory procedures to become listed. Unfortunately, although the procedure is largely confidential up to this point, once the item is in a council's agenda it is in the public arena. Not only that, but the building owner is informed at the same time so that he can object to the listing.

At this point, many building owners who have gone along with the survey process, or even contributed to the Department's history of the building, get cold feet, and wonder about the irrevocable step being taken. They may be perfectly happy with the building the way it is, but suddenly they realise that half-formed idea of revamping the kitchen or replacing that draughty window in the back return with a plastic one will no longer be possible - or not without a lot of bureaucracy. However with no serious grounds for objecting to the listing (eg, that mediaeval wing was put on last year) the listing usually goes ahead.

But in a few cases it doesn't. In our last report we mentioned the case of the Great Victoria Street Baptist Church, which was bulldozed as soon as listing appeared to be a possibility. More blatantly, in November 2016 three buildings in North Street, Belfast, (*left*) which had been agreed for listing by the HBC the previous month, were demolished without warning. The buildings were vacant and partly derelict, and HBC was told that the owners were unknown, but the owners must have heard about the proposal when the Council were consulted, and certainly no aggrieved owner objected to the demolition. In fact the site was quickly cleared and it is adjacent to other cleared sites in the same block, suggesting a commercial reason for the demolition.

Demolition at this stage of the listing process is not illegal, unless it is in a conservation area, and the Department has no comeback against such actions. It is a loophole which Cadw in Wales has closed with new legislation, but it remains a problem in the rest of the UK. We very much hope that it will be addressed in future legislation here, but in the meantime the only action that can be taken is to serve a building preservation notice (BPN). This can be served by a local council where it believes a building is under threat, and provides a six month window to complete the listing process. In theory it could be served each time a building is proposed for listing, but technically this would be an abuse of the system since of course most proposals are not contested.

A simpler measure might be not notifying the building owner, as it is not actually a legislative requirement. The owner is informed because of a concern that there is no appeal against listing and that the owner should therefore be given his chance to object before it happens. While this democratic idea is worthy and in most cases not a risk, it does lead to the loss of some good buildings, and it could be argued that although there is no appeal against listing (as is the case with many other things in life), there is effectively an appeal process in planning legislation. Should the owner want to make alterations to his building, he can apply for permission, and unless the historic character of the building is affected, it will be granted. If permission is refused, the owner has a further appeal process by going to the Planning Appeals Commission.

The Historic Buildings Council would argue strongly that additional legislation is needed to remove this Achilles heel; but that in the meantime suggest the formal notice to the owner of an impending listing - seen by some as an invitation to alter or demolish now while the chance remains - is withdrawn from the process.

HED

Although listing is generally confined to buildings (as opposed to monuments, which cannot be habitable), there are still a few anomalies, and letter boxes, phone boxes, street signs and parliamentary boundary markers can be listed.

This Council agreed to the listing of the well-preserved Edward VII pillar box *above*, with its elegant scrolled monogram; and it also listed a group of the distinctive Belfast street signs with their white on black ceramic lettering, and, in the case *below,* a fluted cast iron column.

HED

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MUD WALLS

Past Uses, Perceptions and Future Values

In my job at Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership I have spent many nights near Ardboe in a little house known locally as Coyle's Cottage. It was built in the early 1700s. Although now some 1km from the lough, the previous owner, Ned Coyle (now deceased) claimed it was originally on the loughshore accounting for the various lowerings of the lough over the years. The cottage however has changed little over the years. It measures internally 5.95m in length, 4.15m in breadth and 1.8m for the wall head. Sampson writing about the houses in County Derry in 1802 tells us that where stone was not available, such as the boggy areas, that exist especially around the southern shores of Lough Neagh, mud with straw or rushes, called provincially 'cat and clay' (Sampson, GV, *Statistical Survey of the County of Londonderry with Observations on the Means of Improvement*, Dublin, 1802, 298) was used.

Evans puts it wonderfully: "The use of local building materials meant that they fitted into landscapes of which they were literally a part, their clay or stone walls gathered from the earth on the spot, their timbers dug from the bogs, their thatch harvested from the fields." (Evans, EE, *Irish Folk Ways*, London, 1957, 40)

These vernacular treasures are often deeply hidden, as tin often covers thatch, and in this case cement render covers mud.

Staff of the Historic Environment Division have recently completed a survey of some of these buildings in the Birches ward of south Lough Neagh and uncovered a wealth of heritage.

THE PAST

Tempered earth is a more technical name for what is often locally just known as mud. There is some debate as to the date of origin of these in Ireland with the early Christian period being most cited but Evans and O Danachair suggest that the concept was introduced by the Anglo-Normans. (Evans, EE, *Sod and Turf Houses in Ireland*, Studies in Folk Life: Essays in Honour of Iorwerth C Pete, London, 1969, 79-90, 80-81) There seems to be general agreement that tempering the mud for building involved mixing the earth with water in a pit and trampling with animal or human feet (like mud or baked turf of the lough shore area), adding straw, rushes or other fibres for binding and leaving for some time to sour (Gailey, A 56-57). Gailey's research indicates that the houses were of walls approx. 55-62cm in width built in layers 45-60cm deep and covered with straw of other organic material for binding. The layer was then allowed to dry to become load-bearing before adding the next layer. O Gruagain mentions the oral tradition of the Carrickmore area of using mud since the early 1700s.

In the Carrickmore area wet blue clay was dug, rushes were trampled through the clay and the mixture was left to 'sour' for approximately one year. Wall foundations were generally of stone upon which the mixture of clay and rushes was placed in layers. Each layer was approximately 0.5m in depth which was left to dry before the next layer was applied. Sometimes shutters were used to contain the wet mud and prevent slippage. The triangular upper parts of the gable were built of stones, mud bricks, sods or mud while the internal gable tops were often topped with sods and turf. (O Gruagain, OP, *House and Hearth* An Tearmann, III 1982, 14-17, 16)

Before building work started, the site would be marked out by placing large flat stones at the corners, each with a smaller stone on top, to be left there overnight. If they were still in place on the following day, it was a taken as a sign that the prospective dwelling was not being built across a path used by the "good people", or *slua si* of Irish mythology.

Making a clay house began by mixing the marly sub-soil excavated from the earth. Chopped straw was added to the mix as it was turned over and sprinkled with water, then it was left to "sour" for a few days until it was sufficiently firm to use as a building material: the test was whether it could stand 18 inches wide and a foot deep without bulging.

By then the stone foundations, usually nine inches deep and rising another nine inches above ground level, would have been laid before the mud walls were raised using a graip or sprong - a long-handled implement with four flat metal prongs at the end - to manipulate the clay, patting it down to improve its adhesive properties.

> *Mud walls were built up with a fork in layers twelve to eighteen inches deep of a mixture of damp clay and cut rushes which had been left to sour. A stone foundation layer sunk into the ground was usually built first, and sometimes the gable ends, especially if the flue was to be included, were built entirely of stone. They were afterwards trimmed with a sharp spade to a thickness which averages about twenty inches but may be as much as thirty. They have to be of massive construction for stability, and the doors which were cut out subsequently were kept narrow. Similarly the window openings were narrow and placed high in the walls, coming directly under the thatch, so that they resemble eyes glinting below shaggy eyebrows. Thick coats of limewash renewed annually gave protection from the weather and it was essential that the thatch should overhang the eaves...*

Evans makes particular reference to "an interesting variant of the mud house which occurs around Lough Neagh, where the main weight of the roof is carried on three massive purlins the ends of which can be seen projecting outside the upright gables. I suspect that these houses were built to take tall looms, for the use of the purlins means that there are no couple-ties crossing the room, but the distinction between the purlin and the couple-rafter roof may be fundamental. The purlin-roof may go back to the log house with which it is associated, for example, in Scandinavia …. "local distinctiveness and evidence of Vikings !!!"

And at the end of it all, though made from clay, the builder would have a house that was "neat, cleanly and commodious", as the Irish Farmers Journal noted in 1814.

The late Dr. Alan Gailey (1935-2013) in his research indicates that many older folk considered the mud walled houses to be warmer than modern constructions, and having spent many a night in Coyle's cottage I can attest to that from my experiences at the hearth there.

Earth building methods are arguably the oldest known to man; the technique varies from region to region as each has been tailored to the type of soil available locally. Mixes were either applied in situ or dried in the shape of bricks and blocks, from the common clay brick to CEBs (compressed earth blocks, essentially rammed earth bricks). Earth when used as a building material is fireproof, contributes to the regulation of the indoor environment (temperature and humidity levels), and when correctly specified and built, is sufficiently strong for buildings up to ten stories high. It is estimated that, even today, earth buildings house some 30 per cent of the world's population. Rammed earth is stronger than cob and less prone to shrinkage as the mix is compacted and requires less water, shrinkage and subsequent cracks being caused by water evaporation.

Yet mud and turf have a long history of being demonised in colonial writing though this dates back to Anglo-Norman times.

> *The inhabitants of Ireland do not have affinity with castles as a means of defence; instead they make the woods their stronghold and the bogs their stinking trenches. (Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) 1185)*

> *Ireland is a wasteland in need of improvement that is flat, empty and inscribable full of wolf and woodkerne. (Edmund Spenser 1595, A View of Ireland)*

In 1685 William King - later to become Archbishop of Dublin – published *Of the Bogs and Loughs of Ireland* in *Philosophical Transactions*, in which he calls Irish bogs 'infamous' and equates extensive bogland with barbarity. The bogs offered an advantage to resistant natives, who, King believed, deliberately built near them: the bogs 'are a shelter and a refuge to tories [dispossessed natives turned outlaws], and thieves, who can hardly live without them. They take advantage then to them to have the country unpassable, and the fewer strangers came near them, they lived the easyer. The bogs are very inconvenient to us'.

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The census of 1841 estimated that nearly half of the families of the rural population of Ireland, then some 84% of the total, were living in one room cabins. Evans writing in 1957 refers to the bog-strewn areas where stone is not readily available and transport of materials is difficult, the clay walled house remains typical. But he cautions as to how we should view them. At its best the mud-walled house could be both durable and comfortable and many observers warn us not to assume the poverty of their builders. As Arthur Young remarks, : 'Before we can attribute such deficiencies to absolute poverty we must take into account the customs and inclinations of the people'.

Whilst the eighteenth and nineteenth century period of "Improvement" – during which many of these structures were destroyed, repurposed, or left to decay – has received extensive attention by historians, there exists little serious study of the human and environmental dimensions. Through analysis of the material aspects of landscape resource use and analysis of the historical perceptions of such use, we emphasize the national significance of this undervalued aspect of our built and cultural heritage, increasingly at risk of being lost completely, highlighting the prior ubiquity of mudwall structures.

The reasons why such a drastic decline in the use of both turf and mud wall took place in Ireland over a period covering three centuries from the mid-1700s have typically been seen as part of the narrative of improvement. Agricultural revolution is seen to be followed by industrial advancement, the emergence of a more all-encompassing economy and increasing availability of cheaper imported building materials following the advent of extensive railway networks. This meant that local context, climatic conditions, and the lifestyles of the rural population were no longer the underlying rationale for building methods or, indeed, materials utilized. Ulster's landscape today is a product of these developments with stone-built buildings and clachan settlements typically viewed as romantic remnants of past times. The reality, however, is that the many stone farmhouses, with their homogenized appearances across the regions of Ireland, are generally part of a relatively modern eighteenth and nineteenth century aesthetic that severed links to traditional vernacular buildings and the methods of their erection.

The instincts of many present-day heritage organizations appear to remain focused on evocative buildings. Consequently, such organizations may overlook 'lowly' constructions unless in dramatic or romanticized settings. However, it is in vernacular buildings within mainland rural settings that the experiences of the vast majority of Ulster's past population are found. Perceptions of materials used also change; stone, which was deemed a necessary means of improving the building stock by the later eighteenth century, was often used earlier as a vernacular material.

During the Emergency (1939-45), Dublin architect Frank Gibney suggested that people should be encouraged to build with clay because of its widespread availability. He also argued that clay-built houses, in terms of their design, construction and insulation properties, were "superior to many of our modern, standardised thin-walled cottages". The only impediment to reviving the ancient art that he could see was "a psychological one, for public opinion may appear hesitant in considering an idea associated with `mud cabins', peasantry and poverty". And indeed, the prejudice against this most vernacular of Irish building types was so entrenched that his plea fell on deaf ears.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the pervasive nature of this prejudice; it is part of our cultural baggage. As long ago as 1878, the *Irish Builder* lamented that mud cabins were "still, alas!, too plentiful" and sought to have these "barbarous relics" replaced by "a better class of human dwellings in stone, brick and concrete materials".

THE PRESENT

According to Hugo Houben, a French architect based in Grenoble, building with earth is also the most efficient way to produce housing in the developing world. The material is widely available, it is economical to use and also has the advantage of being both culturally and climatically suitable; it is the essence of "sustainable development".

Britain has tens of thousands of mud-walled, or cob, buildings - mostly in the southwest of England. "After cob was dismissed earlier this century in favour of mass-produced bricks and concrete, this most green of building methods is coming back into favour", the London Times reported, in a 1995 article on the Devon Earth Building Society.

Historic England lists five reasons "Why You Should Love Them":

1. Mud or earth building is one of the oldest methods of construction in the world.

2. They are energy efficient, carbon neutral and good for wildlife.

   The only energy you need to make a mud wall is a hearty breakfast for the labourers who are building them. The mud was usually dug from the ground close to the building site, so it was and remains a very sustainable material. If, as was often the case, the walls were covered with a protective layer of lime wash, they absorb carbon dioxide, rendering them carbon neutral. Also, because the walls are usually thick and strong, they are great at insulating the buildings they were used for, keeping buildings warm in winter and cool in summer.

3. They were a tax avoidance scheme

   The Brick Tax was introduced in 1784 to help pay for the costs of fighting the revolutionary war in the Thirteen Colonies. The tax was, unsurprisingly, unpopular, and there were many ways in which people tried to avoid paying. Building walls using the clay lump blocks avoided firing the clay to make normal bricks, and therefore was not subject to the tax .

4. Mud walls are quick and dirty.

5. There are still a lot of places where buildings and walls using this traditional method of construction can be found.

It is important to emphasize that historic earth-built vernacular structures could be made entirely permanent when appropriately maintained with regular new thatch and lime harl. Therefore, the propagation of negative perceptions of vernacular mudwall dwellings must be partly explained by disparities in the quality of build and suitability of external finish. It may thus be assumed that many mudwall buildings of 'lower' status were left unrendered upon completion, leaving them unprotected from water infiltration and wind erosion and so liable to be lost. A further qualification is that the relative ratios of cost and maintenance, rather than longevity of a building's life-cycle, can determine perceptions of permanence. Thus, the notion follows that true permanence is determined by high initial and low maintenance costs, whilst semi-permanence is defined through low building cost with a need for frequent repair. This defines the essential nature of historic earth-built structures and a disconnection to such regimes within modern Western society likely influences the perception of vernacular tradition.

THE FUTURE

We need to look at new uses for the existing buildings due to their unique nature – uses such as a bothy etc could be appropriate.

We need to look at planning laws to see how these can be adapted and we need further research at our universities and other institutions as to how we can look at these building processes anew in this time of dramatic climate change and sustainability challenges.

We have to look at how the past informed many negative attitudes to this type of vernacular building and how we can turn these around to provide a positive future value for us all.

Dr Liam Campbell is the Built and Cultural Heritage Officer at the Lough Neagh Partnership and has a particular interest in vernacular buildings.

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GRANT AID and MONITORING

From the start of historic buildings legislation in Northern Ireland grants were made available to owners. The amount of funding available and the percentages offered on building works have fluctuated over the years, but at present they are at an historically low point, partly because of austerity imposed by Westminster and partly because the civil servants at Stormont have not been able to initiate additional spending in the absence of Ministers. The impact of Covid-19 is likely to make the situation worse.

Why should government provide grants to the owners of historic buildings? After all, in many cases they have chosen to live in old buildings, and were presumably aware of their potential for draughts and cold winters - and apart from that they are privileged to live or work in some of the most attractive, largest, smallest, quirkiest, most historic buildings we have.

In England a listed building commands a premium value because of its rarity and the demand for such buildings, so there is some justification for restricting grants to the higher grades of building. Sadly, the opposite has always been the case here, and grant aid is to some extent an incentive to take on buildings that are seen as difficult and restrictive.

More importantly, looking after a historic building has an extra cost compared to maintaining a more recent building. For a start, the building is older, and its fabric has seen more wear and tear; but more crucially, repairs need to be carried out in keeping with the building, often using similar materials or levels of craftsmanship that are not always easy or cheap to find. This conservation deficit is fairly easy to calculate and is the main basis for grant aid.

There is a perception that grant aid is a bonus given to the owner to enhance the value of his building. However a more realistic view is that the grant is given to the building, in order to ensure that it is kept in good repair in the public interest. For this reason the recipients of grant have in the past included councils and banks, and wealthy individuals as well as those much less well-off.

Historic buildings grant is not a bribe: it does not pay for improvements or changes, only for maintenance of the historic fabric and ensuring that alterations are carried out in character. The level of grant has varied, but has never been such as to encourage unnecessary work. When it was at its highest around 2015 buildings that had long remained derelict began to be brought into use, and it was an indication that increasing the grant would encourage people to tackle more difficult or risky restorations. Conversely when grant has been low the numbers of buildings at risk have tended to increase.

There is another reason. Government cannot maintain listed buildings on its own, and it needs the owners as partners in the project. Many of course are very willing partners, proud of their buildings and relishing the experience of living in them. But there are as many others who resent the listing and can't see why they should be denied plastic windows and ribbon pointing. They are aware of the stick rather than the carrot.

The influence of government accountants has sadly made it difficult to spend even the presently very tiny amount of grant aid adequately, because of an insistence on works being completed within the financial year. By the time a budget has been announced and a grant programme identified and advertised three months will already have been lost. Then applicants have to define their project and get tenders in, and half the year will have gone. Builders have to get ready to undertake the work, and then find they are up against Christmas and bad weather. Unsurprisingly there is a panic to get work completed and final accounts submitted before the year is out.

Grants used to work on a rolling three-year programme, and by adjusting payment times to suit expenditure it was possible to carry out substantial schemes along with smaller ones, getting the work done without pressure and ensuring a full spend within each financial year. It is important that the present one-year budget is abandoned in favour of a longer time-scale.

In the early days of listing there was often quite a

good rapport between listed building owners and the department's architects since the owners learnt about their buildings in the listing process, and then were able to access grants on a regular basis for even quite small repairs. As the number of listed buildings grew and as grants became more restricted, that personal link was lost.

One way of restoring it would be to initiate more monitoring of buildings, with architects calling regularly at houses and giving people the chance to discuss potentially damaging works before they become firm plans. Such monitoring is made possible when small grants encourage owners to initiate contact, and the visit is not seen as a policing exercise.

So more funding for historic buildings grants has the potential to bring buildings back from disrepair; provides an opportunity to involve building owners more positively in maintenance; and will often pre-empt damaging proposals from becoming planning applications that have to be fought. The budget for historic buildings grants has never been large, and it should be recognised that it is not a grant for individual owners so much as an investment in the survival of our built heritage.

The Historic Buildings Council was pleased to be invited by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society to contribute to its Heritage Angels events in 2017 and following years.

The bulk of the awards recognise excellence in craftsmanship or historical research, and of course outstanding restoration projects, but the HBC was particularly keen to recognise the many historic building owners who haven't carried out spectactular restorations - because they have just maintained their buildings carefully and over many years.

Although less glamorous, this dogged work year in year out ensures the survival of as much original fabric as possible. It is particularly obvious in the survival of interiors, which can be altered dramaticaly each time a house changes hands.

Bathrooms and kitchens rarely survive more than forty years with new owners or new generations of the same family wanting to put their mark on them.

We made awards to a wide variety of buildings from cottages to libraries and traditional shops.

BUILDINGS AT RISK

In 1968, Sir Charles Brett, founder and first chairman of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, appealed to Northern Ireland government to call for the long overdue introduction of listing legislation to Northern Ireland. He asked for better protection for historic buildings, to "Preserve what is worth preserving, improve what is worth improving" and "build anew in such a way as to add to, not detract from the character and individuality of a region which has hitherto been too shy about its charms".

Although Northern Ireland has come a long way since 1968 as we have now listed buildings, conservation areas, the Built Heritage at Risk register, the Historic Buildings Council and the Historic Environment Division, there is still work to do. There are iconic buildings standing neglected and unused which deserve attention. Many of these are recognised as Buildings at Risk under current developer ownership. In this report I will examine the state of several of these. Some buildings have been bought by developers and land banked and some have been "flipped" (the practise of acquiring a building and then selling it on for a profit within a relatively short period of time). Some may be included in major planning applications which are being put forward as the saviour of the area's economic future. The one thing they have in common is that their future is very unsure. The present lack of government grant aid to help with the costs of restoration does not help their dilapidation.

The Reform of Public Administration in 2015 gave local authorities a more significant role in preservation of the historic environment as they can issue Urgent Repair Notices and Building Preservation Notices. These are sometimes seen as ineffective because of lack of resources and staff expertise and commitment. Most legislation for the protection of historic buildings now lies with the eleven Northern Ireland councils although the Historic Environment Division still has the power to purchase a listed building. This is through a Compulsory Purchase Order, but in order to do this the department needs a partner willing to take on the building. This partner must be a voluntary organisation with access to funds. The only Compulsory Purchase Order issued so far in Northern Ireland was for Sion Mills Stable Block restored by Hearth (*see below*).

One of the most prominent neglected buildings is the grade B1 listed Assembly Rooms, formerly the Exchange building, at the junction of Waring Street and Donegall Street. Said by some to be the oldest public building in the city, it was once the centre of Georgian Belfast situated in the area known as the Four Corners so called as all milestones were measured from this spot. A single storey building, it was originally built by Lord Donegall from Sir Robert Taylor's designs as a celebration of his son's birth in 1769. In 1776 a second storey was added. It was used as an exchange and assembly rooms. It was there that Edward Bunting held the Harp Festival to celebrate the fall of the Bastille. It was also there in 1798 that Henry

Sion Mills Stables before and restoration

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Joy McCracken was tried and sentenced to hang after the failed United Irish Rebellion.

In 1820, after the Assembly Rooms were moved to the Commercial Building at the top of Waring Street, the building was used as business premises. In 1845 it was remodelled by Charles Lanyon for the Belfast Banking Co. The plans were based on the 1831 plans of the Pall Mall Club by Sir Charles Barry. In 1895 Lanyon's pupil WH Lynn extensively remodelled the interior, leaving none of the Georgian design visible. It was also extended in 1919 by Tulloch and Fitzsimmons and finally in 1956-59 by GP & RH Bell. The building was listed in 1975, a few years after winning an award for "Best Kept Large Building in the City of Belfast" in 1969.

The last occupants of the building were the Northern Bank (formerly the Belfast Banking Company). The bank was closed in 2000. The building has been empty ever since although it has had temporary use as a music venue and art exhibition space. At present it suffers from general decay, vandalism and graffiti. The general neglect of the Waring Street, North Street and Garfield Street has contributed to its decline.

The former Assembly Rooms are part of the Cathedral Quarter development plan, previously known as the Royal Exchange. This masterplan originated from the Department for Social Development in 2005. This has led to the 'land banking' of a number of Belfast's important historic buildings including the Assembly Rooms, the Rosemary Street Masonic Hall and North Street Arcade. Government departments and subsequently the City Council have initiated and facilitated the process and continue to turn a blind eye as the buildings are allowed to fall into dereliction in the hands of their new owners. Proposals are in place in this scheme to turn the former Assembly Rooms building (*see below*) into a boutique hotel.

The importance of this building to the social history of Belfast cannot be over emphasised. It must find a sympathetic and sustainable use.

The B+ listed Crumlin Road Courthouse is yet another Building at Risk. The county court house built in 1850, is one of Lanyon's finest buildings described by Charles Brett as "portico and pediment reasonably classical, but much of the detailing vaguely Italian Renaissance. The subtlety of the original façade was totally destroyed by Young and Mackenzie's remodelling of 1905."

This grand neo-classical building has a rendered and brightly painted façade. A large hexastyle Corinthian portico dominates the front elevation and is surmounted by a "Justice" figure now lacking its scales. Internally the central hall and two court rooms are considered the most important spaces.

Assembly Rooms Belfast currently in a poor state of repair and on the Heritage at Risk register.

The Courthouse (*see below*) along with the Gaol, which was also designed by Charles Lanyon, are situated opposite one another and have a connecting underground tunnel. The two buildings make an imposing group. The Gaol has been recently restored and is now a visitor attraction.

The Courthouse has not been so lucky. It closed as a courthouse in 1998 after 150 years of continuous use. Since then it has suffered several arson attacks which have seriously damaged much of its roof structure and interior.

In 2003 it was sold by Belfast City Council to Ewarts for the sum of £1 with plans to turn it into a tourist attraction and hotel. These plans were approved in 2004 but in the meantime Ewarts sold the building to Barry Gilligan's Big Picture Developments for £35,000. Mr Gilligan had worked for Ewarts. Big Picture Developments, working with Consarc, submitted new plans for a hotel and conference centre which were approved in 2007. In March and August 2009, after the building was damaged by fire, the project was declared unviable due to lack of grant funding and damage to the building.

The Department of Social Development then conducted an options appraisal on the building and one of the preferred options from the report was that the building be taken into statutory ownership. This did not happen.

In 2017 Signature Living acquired the building. They proposed investing £25 million to redevelop it into a hotel and spa. The main courtroom would be restored as the centrepiece of the development. These plans were approved in 2018. [The building remains empty and has had further arson attacks].

This is an important building to preserve given its connection with the gaol and role in the administration of justice in Belfast.

Heritage buildings under threat are not restricted to a single buildings. 4-36 Perry Street, Dungannon is presently due for demolition even though the street is in Northland conservation area. Dungannon was granted to Arthur Chichester after 1608 and the town was really developed after 1692 by the Knox family. Northland Place, which was once one of the grandest terraces in N Ireland, was completed in 1760 and Perry Street connects the Market Square with Northland Place and consists of terraces and shops.

Most of the buildings still display their original detailing even though they are scarred by inappropriate alterations. Some of these houses in the terrace have the notable feature of singular dormer windows with "glazed cheeks". The street now has many empty and vandalised buildings.

Crumlin Road Court House falling into further decay while currently held in development limbo.

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In 2011 Perry Street (see *below*) became the first "virtual Street" in N Ireland when government funded the street to be "transformed" by boarding up the windows and doors with vinyl inserts. Since then no remedial action has taken place allowing the buildings to fall into a state of further disrepair. The street was sold in 2017 for £230,000 to Castlehill regeneration group formed by members of Dungannon's Orange Lodge who wish to oversee its demolition and redevelopment. Perry Street is part of the Northland Conservation Area.

In a guide to developers the Northland conservation area website states that consideration should be given to the retention and restoration of the terrace before redevelopment is entertained. This is clearly not the case in the plans which were passed by Mid Ulster District Council. Redevelopment has not yet taken place; meanwhile the existing buildings are decaying behind their vinyl cover up.

Another listed building at risk but this time in a rural setting is Cairndhu, situated on the Antrim coast road near Larne. Originally known as Seaview, the building was constructed in the 1830s for the Stewart family. In 1880 the house was sold to the Clark family who changed the name to Cairndhu. At this time Cairndhu was a small house and the land included Ballygally Head with its enormous basaltic pillars, similar to the Giant's Causeway.

In 1896 the Clarks altered and enlarged the house by adding a north wing which almost doubled the size of the house and then in 1906, the addition of a south wing. The architect was Samuel P. Close who was well known for his work in the area. The family continued to live at Cairndhu until 1918 when it was sold to Sir Thomas Dixon.

At the outbreak of World War 11 Sir Thomas Dixon handed the estate over to be used as a War Hospital Supply Depot. In 1947 Sir Thomas celebrated his 79th birthday by announcing that his 60 room family home with 100 acres of land was being gifted to the Ministry of Health and Local Government for use as a convalescent home and hospital. Cairndhu Hospital operated until 1986 when the Department of Health and Social Services took the controversial step of closing it and it was subsequently sold to Larne Borough Council. In 1995 the council sold it to the developer Lord Rana who planned to turn it into a hotel.

Since then it has changed hands several times. It was bought from Lord Rana by McKenzie (NI) and then apparently in 2018 by a firm of architects who have plans to restore the house and retain and restore the stable block with a view to opening it as an 80 bed retirement home. They conducted a public consultation in May 2018 but there has been no work at the site as yet. Meanwhile most of the three floors have collapsed, the grand staircase and fireplaces removed, and the house is open to the elements.

The house and its associated buildings have been the subject of much public concern. The one-and-a-half storey gate lodge was the first building to be featured

Vinyl insertions on Perry Street, with reference to 'glazed cheek' dormers still present.

as a Building at Risk, while the main building was also highlighted soon after as a Building at Risk described as in being in urgent need of repair. Both the main house and the stable block to the rear have been the subject of two Urgent Works Notices. This is the first time that this power was utilised by the DOE (NI). Follow up to these Urgent Works Notices is not evident.

Nikki McVeigh, Chief Executive, Ulster Architectural Heritage summarises the issue as follows: “Of the 11% of Northern Ireland’s 500 plus Heritage at Risk Buildings, many are long term ‘banked’ in property developer ownership. Often these listed buildings are situated in urban centres, and are usually focal buildings, key to our understanding of the history and unique character of our cities, towns and individual streets. These buildings are statutorily protected by being “listed” in the public interest, and at public expense. However, the public interest is neither served nor protected by the ongoing and worsening deficit of adequate, coherent planning, enforcement and control measures that are essential to ensure the survival of Northern Ireland’s unique and irreplaceable built heritage assets”.

Northern Ireland needs to deal with the protection, reuse and regeneration of historic buildings in our countryside, towns and cities in a more controlled and guided manner through sustainable development, with the needs of our people and communities at its core.

I would like to thank Ms Nikki McVeigh and Dr Connie Gerrow for their help with my research for this report.

Rosie Ford-Hutchinson formerly worked with the BBC and is on the committees of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and the Follies Trust.

Cairndhu is in a critical state of repair while its future is still undecided.

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Illegal demolitions

...and one that was legal.

Not every developer applies for listed building consent before demolishing a building, presumably on the basis that it is easier to act first and seek forgiveness afterwards. Sadly that course of action often seems to work, with enforcement being slow and often abandoned for lack of evidence or because action was considered to be “not expedient”.

Two such demolitions occurred during the life of this Council in the autumn of 2016. In the case of a building in Church Street Rostrevor the outcome of the enforcement is not yet determined. The other case concerned a prominent building in the Bryansford conservation area.

The Bryansford developer pleaded guilty in 2018 and was fined £10,000 and £4,000 costs. It is a small enough fine, but the real deterrent is that he will have to reinstate the building. Too often a demolition is followed with a small fine and a vacant site on which to do what the developer wishes, but if the result of demolition is only an obligation to reinstate what was demolished, developers will soon learn to leave listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas well alone.

Early in 2017 the HBC learnt that a building in Bladon Park known as the Pavilion (*see below*) had been demolished. It was not listed, but had been identified by the planners as being significant to the conservation area, so they had refused permission for its demolition. The developer went to appeal and was granted permission, so the building was tumbled.

The Council wrote to the Planning Appeals Commission, since its Commissioner had found that the building made a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, but had then decided that renovation and refurbishment were not economically viable and was apparently satisfied that “the proposed development would make a greater contribution to the character of and appearance of the Conservation Area than the existing building does.” The PAC maintained that that was a “planning judgement” that she was entitled and qualified to make.

Since the judgements on the Athletic Stores had established that a building contributing to the character of a Conservation Area should not be demolished, this seemed an arbitrary and probably incorrect decision. Policy BH14 states that demolition consent should normally only be granted where a building “makes no material contribution to the character or appearance of the area”, which was not the case here. Moreover, since a conservation area is designated primarily for historic reasons, it is hard to see how any new building could enhance it more than a contemporary one.

In this case the planners’ position had been weakened by an existing permission for major changes to the building which would have removed much of its character. Sadly incremental changes which may seem relatively acceptable at the time can lead to serious loss of character in due course, or as in this case outright demolition.

Marcus Patton

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

A HA'P'ORTH OF TAR:
The Maintenance of Historic Buildings

The development of my professional values, and perhaps my personal ones too, began under the tutelage of a retired military gentleman from foreign shores. I learned many useful habits under his instruction, perhaps the best of which was "When you see a problem, stop and fix it immediately". This adage has served me well, and would serve equally well the owners of many historic buildings in Northern Ireland - their charges gently mouldering away before our eyes whilst we stand aghast at the unfolding decay.

Our historic buildings here are, generally speaking, the product of a well developed understanding of the local climate and the mechanisms necessary to survive it. Traditional material choices and construction details have been subject to centuries of practical and responsive development. This has always worked hand-in-hand with an acceptance that maintenance and renewal is a key and inevitable component of longevity. Gutters and downpipes must be cleared and their joints kept well sealed, flashings must be renewed, slipped slates put back in place, re-pointing undertaken periodically, etc. The belief in a 'maintenance-free' existence is a modern invention, and like many modern inventions it only works within a constrained and contrived setting, if at all.

Retains effectiveness - Forever! What could possibly go wrong with that?

The principal reason why building owners fail in their duty to maintain is obvious and simple - it costs money to do so and with a bit of luck you can get away with it for a while, or maybe even a long while. That you won't get away with it forever does not seem to affect the thinking. Perhaps the plan is that, by the time the building is all-but ruined, the value will have been extracted from it and it can be passed on to the next owner or tossed onto the scrap-heap.

Another reason is of course plain old ignorance, with owners simply not realising that maintenance is required - or not having the skills or knowledge required to undertake or direct it. Lack of resources must also be considered as a root-cause, with owners not having the ability to finance the repairs they know are necessary. These two reasons are perhaps understandable in a private residential context, but where ownership is commercial or public we should, and do, expect better.

One question we must of course ask ourselves is "Is there actually a problem with the maintenance of historic buildings in Northern Ireland?" It would be a natural criticism, and indeed perhaps a valid one, that architects and others with an eye for heritage might have elevated or even unrealistic expectations of building owners. What is needed and useful is a 'reasonable' standard of what should be expected.

The legal profession, realising that it's sometimes hard to agree on what a reasonable person might expect or do in any given situation, long ago co-opted the assistance of 'The Man on the Clapham Omnibus'. His services to the legal profession are doubtless as onerous as they were when he first entered service in 1903 (probably more so now than ever) and Clapham is a fair stretch from Belfast, so we must employ the help of a suitable alternate who is not so heavily called upon, and has the time to look at a few old buildings with us. The 'Tourist on the Translink Bus' might serve admirably in making an objective assessment on how well maintained the historic buildings in Belfast appear to be. Our tourist has no preconceptions, no agenda, just curiosity, a sharp eye and a questioning nature.

A start in the City Centre will afford the opportunity to be captivated by Blackwood and Jury's Mayfair Buildings (HB26/50/096, first listed in June 1979 and now at Grade B1), completed in 1906 in an Art Nouveau style. Such an initial pleasure to behold for our tourist, but his or her eye will eventually note with displeasure, even amazement, the evidence of serviceable downpipes having been absent for many years - its fine brickwork and stone detailing having been ravaged by the rainwater so elegantly collected by its roof.

Can you spot the functional downpipes in this photograph of a Grade B1 listed building in the Belfast City Centre Conservation Area? (Clue - there aren't any)

The owner of this building, having been stirred to action, has recently installed domestic grade uPVC hoppers and downpipes. A valiant (though delayed) effort to arrest the building's decay - though hardly in keeping or appropriate given the listing status.

Still in the city centre, our tourist may stumble upon the former RUC Barracks in Queen Street (HB26/50/027, first listed in June 1979 and now at Grade B1), completed in 1878 to the designs of Thomas

In Belfast, gardening in the city centre is a pastime available to all, regardless of their location, circumstances, or indeed the listed status of their building (B1 in this case)

Jackson. A building with an illustrious history, having been originally built as the Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, and by one of the city's leading architects. Stumbling upon it might of course be easier said than done now, its neglect now concealed behind a 20ft high modesty screen. As he or she passes by our tourist's eye will therefore not be offended by the full sighting of a fine building deteriorating needlessly, but will note with wry amusement that, in Belfast, gardening is as popular in the city centre as it is in the suburbs - even if one can only grow Buddhleia in/through a window.

Turning southwards in the hope of more consistently optimistic and uplifting sights in the area around Queen's University, an encounter with No.16 Upper Crescent will dispel any thoughts our tourist has that this is not a common problem. With its majesty still present in ghostly form, this fine Regency styled building (HB26/27/028, completed in 1846, first listed in September 1979 and now at Grade B1) is possibly by Sir Charles Lanyon, one of the province's best

If it stood in Pall Mall in London this fine building might be worth many millions. Alas, in Belfast, it seemed to have no value whatsoever until recently.

known and lauded architects. It stands (still) but more through habit and determined obstinacy than due to the administrations of its recent owners.

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Our tourist could continue his journey of neglected buildings quite handily without ever leaving Belfast city centre, but he might save himself some time (and shoe-leather) by dropping in to the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society on College Square North. There he would be able to acquire a copy of the 'Heritage at Risk Register NI'. Cataloguing hundreds of at-risk buildings across Northern Ireland it paints a sometimes bleak picture of avoidable decay. It does however offer hope, thanks to the practice of retaining saved buildings on the register to detail their sometimes miraculous, but always welcome, rescue and re-use.

Powers to address neglect of listed buildings do in fact exist and can be exercised by councils with the will and determination to do so. Since 1st April 2015 councils may, under section 161 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011, serve an Urgent Works Notice to preserve a Listed Building or a building in a Conservation Area. Nine of the eleven Council areas in Northern Ireland, responding to a Freedom of Information request, reported than none of them had issued an Urgent Works Notice since 2015. Asked also if they had issued warning letters to owners that an UWN might be issued should issues affecting a listed building or building in a Conservation Area not be addressed, five of the nine respondents indicated that this had been the case on one or more occasions.

As with many things the statutory framework in Northern Ireland is missing some provisions that exist in mainland UK. Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 allows for a local planning authority to serve notice on the owner of a building or land where the amenity of the neighbourhood is being adversely affected. This power has reportedly been used to good effect where listed buildings and unlisted buildings in a conservation area were deemed to be within the scope of the Act.

That the meting out of punishments to neglectful owners is not a widespread activity in Northern Ireland is, on balance, probably a good thing. It's surely much better to encourage responsible behaviour and reward what positive steps are being taken.

The Department for Communities Historic Environment Fund contains a funding stream for repair, though the timetable for applying and completing work has been highlighted as an issue. It is however an encouraging scheme as is the ongoing 'Heritage Angels' award programme.

To conclude, if such a thing is possible when talking about an activity that must continue *ad infinitum*. Maintenance of heritage buildings may not win (many) prestigious awards, but it does pay for itself in the long run. It is to be hoped that, in a world where the value of these buildings is being boosted by an acknowledgement that retrofitting is a key component in addressing climate change, the barriers to necessary maintenance will be lowered.

Erl Johnston is a conservation architect, currently working with Alastair Coey Architects.

Crumlin Road Courthouse. A Grade B+ listed building, it is considered to be of significant architectural and historical interest. A contentious building? Yes, but one where the manifest difficulties of deciding what to do with it have been multiply compounded by a lack of maintenance.

HED

One of the most unusual buildings listed this session was Rathlin West lighthouse (*above*). Instead of the conveional pillar surmounted by a light, the lighthouse is quite a classical six-storey building and the light is "upside-down", set below the house so as to be more visible from the sea than if it had been built at the top of Rathlin's cliffs.

The Commissioners of Irish Lights is one of those bodies that precedes the establishment of Northern Ireland, and it is responsible for the maintenance of lighthouses throughout Ireland North and South.

The HBC has had a number of meetings with the Irish Lights staff to consider how they could make the transition from manned lighthouses to automatic ones that only need checking once or twice a year.

This may sound simple, but for a start the buildings no longer have continuous maintenance, and new uses must be found for the keepers' cottages for example. Much work on this has been done on this by transferring cottages to the Irish Landmark Trust. More complex was the issue of removing some 400kg of mercury from the bearings of the old Fresnell lenses and thir replacement with modern LED lights.

Members of the Council were grateful to the Irish Lights for facilitatng a visit to Mew Island (*below*) one of the most difficult cases as it is on a small island that is also a bird sanctuary. .

Marcus Patton

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

LONG LIVE THE MODERN!

Belfast architecture of the 1930s is fascinating. The city has retained examples of a range of stylistic expressions in buildings such as the Bank of Ireland, the Strand Cinema and houses which are representatives of distinct styles such as Art Deco, Streamline Moderne and Functionalism.

During the 1930s several modern architectural styles developed but modern architecture was by no means supported by all and traditional expressions such as 'Wrenaissance' or Neo-Georgian prevailed alongside modern ones. Many architects, such as Anthony Lucy, John MacGeagh or the practice Young & Mackenzie, who embraced modern building methods and aesthetics, started their careers as traditionalists and designed buildings in a range of modern and classic styles. Philip Bell, John McBride Neill and RS Wilshere on the other hand embraced the new architecture and created a range of modern houses, cinemas, and schools. Today, a number of the surviving buildings of the 1930s are listed but unfortunately many are in poor repair and under threat of being demolished.

Gary Quigg Photography

These buildings are not only examples of a variety of modern architectural styles, they have been landmark buildings and as such have defined the cityscape of Belfast throughout the 20th century. They are – as are historic buildings of all eras – significant for a number of reasons. Among the arguments, made by proponents of conservation are that once demolished it is impossible to bring them back, that the replacement will be of a different architectural expression and will deplete the unique cityscape of Belfast, and that demolishing and rebuilding swallows resources and is not sustainable.

Examples of the consequences of a demolished landmark are numerous, but the impact is difficult to quantify, which fuels the argument of opponents of conservation who promise economic benefits through new buildings. Studies have shown, however, that the replacement of historic buildings with new ones does not automatically invoke economic growth; on the contrary, it can lead to an alienation of citizens and even to an avoidance of new city quarters. Historic buildings serve as repositories of memories of people's individual past, the past they share with their contemporaries and with members of their communities across generations. Removing these buildings equals removing the relationship to our past and our sense of belonging; it depletes our attachment to the places we occupy and live in. The press responses after the fire at the former Bank Buildings, which was occupied by a large clothes retailer, demonstrated quite clearly the depth of emotional attachment of many to historic buildings.

The promise of economic growth after demolition is as difficult to prove or quantify as are the consequences on communities when presented with new and modern buildings that are devoid of historic meaning and points of reference.

In Belfast, an example of such a nostalgic attachment to a building is the Floral Hall (*centre*). It was built in 1935-6 by David Wright Boyd to invigorate Bellevue Pleasure Gardens as a dance hall and for live shows. Fashionable new dances such as the Tango and Foxtrot inspired the building of numerous such halls at the time and architects often chose a modern architectural expression to match the fashionable function of the building and to appeal to the young audience. As a business venture the Floral Hall struggled since its inauguration, and during the Troubles visitor numbers fell sharply and the building closed in 1972. Its re-opening has been hoped for since its closure and numerous attempts to reinvigorate, find a new use, or redevelop it have failed and today the small building is in a state of perpetual decay. The fact that it has not been demolished, that it is still discussed in blogs and newspapers and that songs have been written about it are strong indicators – almost 50 years after it closed – of the depth of attachment to it that go beyond its significance as a rare Art Deco building and that are reflective to the memories that it sparks.

A landmark building that cannot be overlooked is the Bank of Ireland on Royal Avenue (*below*). It was built in 1928-30 as one of the earliest modernist buildings in Belfast. Its architect, Joseph Vincent Downes (1890/91-1967) was one of the most notable modernist architects in all Ireland. The building methods and the Art Deco style made it innovative and glamorous at the same time. It too was abandoned some years ago. Unfortunately, a side elevation was badly damaged recently when smaller neighbouring buildings were demolished. It can only be hoped that its listed status will eventually lead to a respectful and sensible restoration.

Also during the 1930s reforms in legislation in Northern Ireland supported the building of almost thirty new primary schools that were designed by Reginald S Wilshere. Among them was the now derelict McQuiston Memorial Public Elementary School (see *next page*) in 1934–1936. Following contemporary pedagogy according to which it was important for children's health to exercise, breathe fresh air and be exposed to sunlight, Wilshere's school has large windows and because the site was small, the playground was not omitted but instead placed on the flat roof.

The Floral Hall, the Bank of Ireland and McQuiston Memorial Public Elementary School share the fate of a range of buildings that were initially designed to fulfil a specific function that was reflective of new entertainment industries and technologies. Once these changed the building became obsolete and most were demolished. Belfast retained a broad variety of modernist architecture that is reflective of the aspirations, tastes and changes of that time. The

Gary Quigg Photography

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Gary Quigg Photography

McQuiston Memorial Public Elementary School, south elevation

result is a cityscape that retains an astounding variety of modernist buildings that could be assets rather than eyesores of the city.

An example of a building that is an asset is the department store formerly shared by Woolworth and Burton's on High Street. It was been effectively restored and modernised; a reason for this is that it is still used in its original function. Woolworth's architect – William Priddle (1885-1932) designed it in 1929-30 in Neo-Classical manner with Egyptian and Art Deco motifs. During the 1930s not only Woolworth opened but also Sinclair's and the North Street Arcade and together these buildings marked the beginning of the development of consumer society.

Another example of a building that has survived and still serves its original function is The Strand on Holywood road. It is one of more than forty cinemas built during the 1930s after the invention of synchronised sound. Architects Leslie Haggar Kemp & FE Tasker, Thomas McLean and John (Jack) McBride Neill built picture palaces designed to excite and provide a sense of Hollywood glamour. Apart from the use of modern architectural expression these buildings often utilised eclectic light fittings on the facades and interiors to create an 'architecture of the night.'

Gary Quigg Photography and Andy Spain Photography, Wellington

The King's Hall (*below*) , finally, is an example of a building that recently lost its original use and plans have been made to reuse it. It was built by architects and engineers Archibald Leitch & Partners in 1933-4. Today, the practice is best known for their Ibrox Stadium built in 1927 in Glasgow but the firm has built numerous grand-stands and stadiums across the United Kingdom. The King's Hall was commissioned by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to be an exhibition venue large enough to accommodate 8,000 people. With a span of 151ft, lengths of 299ft and height of 64ft the King's Hall was said to be the largest hall of its kind in the United Kingdom.

Today, the King's Hall and its site is envisioned to be used for a much-needed health care centre with treatment facilities, in-patient and out-patient care among others. It is a motivating and innovative example for how landmark architecture can be retained,

modernised and sustainably re-used. It is an example of a way of thinking about historic architecture that is very much deserving of support.

Tanja Poppelreuter is a lecturer in architectural history at the University of Salford, and the author of Glamour and Gloom*, a study of art deco buildings in Belfast which was published by the UAHS in 2017.*

Gary Quigg Photography

Stewart's Place: saved from the jaws of demolition

Stewart's Place is a short cul-de-sac off the High Street of Holywood, marked by a pair of three-storey houses of c.1840 with curved corners inviting people down the entry.

In 1988 no.3, the right hand of the pair of houses, was in poor structural condition and the Housing Executive applied for permission to demolish it. Hearth Revolving Fund was able to purchase in in 1992, carried out restoration (see front door, *right*) and sold it to the Christian group that still owns and maintains it. At that time no.1 was in good order, but that was to change.

By 2011, no.1 had been empty for some years and water was working its damage to the structure. The Department served an urgent works notice but deterioration continued. The building was owned by developers who had bought the adjacent Priory Inn, and in June 2016 they applied for Listed Building Consent to demolish the property "due to structural failure".

Local people expressed strong concerns, and were backed up by Hearth, which remains the ground landlord of no.3, quoting its experience on the sister building. The developer's structural report was countered by another commissioned by the objectors which set out a road map to the restoration of the building. At the end of July part of the Stewart's Place elevation collapsed due to rotted lintels, and the developer pushed again for demolition.

This was a test for the new Ards & North Down Borough Council, who closed off the road as a precaution against further collapses but did not give way to pressure for demolition. Having done what it could, the Council wrote to the Minister that September pointing out that it did not have the resources to undertake detailed surveys of buildings in its jurisdiction, but pointing out that it was not appropriate "that certain building owners be legitimised in respect of leaving listed buildings to fester beyond the point of reasonable return, in order to gain advantage to the point that demolition consent cannot be resisted".

Inevitably public opinion which had initially been strongly in favour of keeping the building weakened as the road closure continued. Negotiations continued until with a change of ownership shortly after a new developer accepted restoration of the building as part of the cost of developing the Priory Inn site, and work commenced in 2018 to stabilise no.1 and develop apartments on the site of the Inn.

Not every application for LBC to demolish reaches such a satisfactory conclusion. In this case the precedent of the building preservation trust in the almost identical situation twenty years earlier, the prompt and determined action of the local residents and the calm resolve of the Council in sticking to their role in protecting historic buildings, has ensured the survival of the threatened listed building.

Marcus Patton

*No.1 Stewarts Place immediately before the collapse (*far left*), after the collapse (*near left*) and supported by scaffolding pending its restoration (*below*), with the previously at-risk no.3 to its right.*

Straid: Council serves a BPN

The Co Antrim village of Straid became the centre of a dramatic incident in January 2018. At its meeting the previous month the HBC was asked to consider the listing of Straid Congregational Church, a largely mid-Victorian building but containing the fabric of an earlier meeting house of 1816. As sometimes happens, after the Council had unanimously agreed to the listing, it was told that there was an application to develop the site. In fact the future of the church was a matter of impassioned debate within the village, with the congregation split between wanting to develop the site, and retaining the historical fabric as it was.

Before dawn one morning in January an excavator arrived on a trailer to demolish the church. Instantly it was surrounded by members of the congregation opposed to the demolition and Council officials were called to put a stop to the works. Within hours a Building Preservation Notice was served by Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council and it was protected while the listing process went ahead.

Unfortunately, during the night before the attempted demolition, some members of the congregation had set about wrecking the interior of the church in anticipation of the demolition, and the congregation is now left with no functioning church at all. Ironically, the interior was not protected till the BPN was served, but the exterior was already protected from demolition by the village being an ATC.

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CAN WE CALL OURSELVES CULTURED?

(left) The beautifully proportioned, historically important, and conveniently unlisted, Burntollet Bridge in Co. Derry.

(right) Demolished in an act of mindless Departmental vandalism to facilitate the roadworks.

Claudy Life

THE QUESTION:

In Ulster 'culture' it is probably 'unseemly' to even ask the question as to whether or not 'we' are a 'cultured' people. 'Of course we are cultured, how dare you think to suggest otherwise' cries the Ulster chorus, ranging from devotees of theatre, classical music or Irish Dancing, to those who are steeped in the lore of Rugby or GAA, or indeed, although perhaps untypically, engage with all five cultural interests.

However, niche cultural group interests, no matter whether superficial, widely popular, or all-consuming, or for that matter, all manner of museums, galleries and 'interpretive experiences' cannot, in themselves, characterise a people or region as actually having an individual culture, or as being cultured. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of 'culture' provides a key to addressing the question of what constitutes a cultured society.

'The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.'

This neatly manages to be all embracing in eleven words, with the above-mentioned key being 'regarded collectively'.

The Components of Culture

'Collectively': what might then constitute a specifically Ulster culture? Music certainly, embracing such diverse elements as the works of the Irish Harpers through Hamilton Harty and Van Morrison, to Showbands and childrens' street songs, Troubles era Punks, and the Orange flutes and drummers.. . regarded collectively, certainly uniquely Ulster, although not necessarily always shared, and much the poorer for it. Sport, with its traditional boundaries, for sure.

Language, of course, but with its beauty, idiosyncrasies and humour sullied by interminable political coat trailing and point scoring.

However, it is only through the medium of literature and poetry that the bedrock of Ulster culture is exposed. Sample the works of Hewitt, Longley, Heaney and W.F. Marshall and find inspiration drawn from the landscape itself, the weather, hard toil in field, factory and mill, from the myths and truths of soldiering and rebellion, and from the histories of planters and emigrants and deeply ingrained religion.

Is all of this enough to characterise and define a culture and a cultured people, or is there still a missing element?

The Missing Element

The following is a quote from an academic paper on traditional housing in the Lebanon.

Architectural heritage is considered to be a physical expression of cultural diversity in a long-term perspective, and it plots a nation's history; it shapes the nation's culture and provides continuum, stability and solidarity at the community level.

The fact that this relates to Lebanon, a tiny country with a 2500 year old cultural history and the affliction of many centuries of religious division, serves to highlight the universal appreciation of the fact that architectural heritage is the most tangible, publicly visible, and inherently durable element of culture, and that its appreciation serves as a defining mark of a cultured people.

The origins and characteristics of architectural heritage in Northern Ireland are no different to those of the rest of the world, in that they were shaped by their natural environment and the human activities of their era, just as are celebrated in our local poetry and prose. Also, it shouldn't be forgotten, or for that matter denied, that much of our best architecture pre-dates partition, with some examples merging into the archaeological past.

The Asset

Thus, engineering ingenuity and commercial opportunity built the rural mills where water power was most favourable, built Derry's stitching factories with the coming of the railway, built Belfast industry as a world leader in shipbuilding, ropemaking and textile engineering and as a spin off all of this financed the 'Big Houses', historic export waterfronts and a railway network with its own distinctive architecture, which connected every significant town in Ireland.

Conflict built the medieval castles and town walls, the fortified bawns and tower houses, the military and police barracks and the steel and concrete sangers and border watchtowers of the modern Troubles.

Agricultural labour on tiny plots of often marginal land, of necessity used building materials which were both available close at hand, and free but for the labour of collection or gathering. This was the genesis of the classic Irish rural cabin or cottage, sited for shelter from weather and access to fuel for the ever-present fire in the grate. As farm acreages increased the houses and their barns and byres evolved in step with need, the buildings in their individuality charting generations of rural life.

Local religious observance built the little rural stone churches and the later tin mission halls, with the powerful and influential hierarchies founding the ancient abbeys and the twelve historic cathedrals.

All of this architecture, together with its associated variations of landscape, lake and seashore is the physical charting of our unique culture, contained in a compact 5400 square mile treasure trove. For visitor and local alike, in a globalised world where real authenticity and individuality are increasingly valued, to be able to showcase a unique culture is priceless.

'Stewardship' and the Butcher's Bill

After World War II the damage caused to historic architecture in cities across the UK during the Blitz prompted a movement to protect the surviving stock of buildings through a process of listing. Even before the war, in 1936, Scotland had already started to survey, utilising a model already in use in Amsterdam. In due course, in 1947, listed building legislation was introduced for England and Wales and separately in Scotland. The Northern Ireland Parliament, however, did not see fit to legislate to protect our historic architecture for, unbelievably, another 25 years when, and only after concerted lobbying led by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, listing legislation was finally introduced in 1972. Since then we have had dedicated planning policies, Conservation Areas, Areas of Townscape Character and Local Listing, Landscape Character Assessments and an EU Directive guarding against cumulative loss of historic architecture, all overseen by successive Civil Service divisions and agencies, and now local Councils, applying the legislation and policy and enforcing when necessary... in theory.

The bombing campaign of the Troubles, unlike the Belfast Blitz which did not inspire Stormont to match the move toward listing, did however produce a significant change of attitude... .unfortunately for the worse. Troubles bombs are often blamed for the loss of some of our best buildings, but often unnecessary demolition of very robust historic buildings was the real cause. Creeping into a Northern Ireland still depressed after WW II was the realisation by property speculators that the 'prime sites' released cheaply following these demolitions could be a much better

(above) One of the Department for Infrastructure 'Inca Walls' on the Antrim Coast Road. These inappropriate and ugly rock jigsaws did not require planning permission but replace sections of the traditional stone walling on this genuinely 'world class' historic asset.

earner through using Government compensation payments to erect new 'exciting' modern buildings. It is widely acknowledged that Civil Servants were forbidden to list the Grand Central Hotel and the adjoining General Post Office, two of Belfast's finest historic buildings, so that demolition could proceed in Royal Avenue making way for the dismal Castlecourt.

So began the age of low-quality design and short term ostentatious 'bling' eclipsing sustainable heritage character and its quality of materials and detail. The public and politicians were indoctrinated by property developer spin that 'Dubai upon Lagan, or upon Newry Canal, or upon Derry Quays' was the bright future. Councils fought to outdo their neighbours as to who could devise the most grandiose and brash masterplan. The proposed developments acquire planning approval, usually in outline form, and instantly jump in 'value' as befits the 'investment vehicles' that is their true nature, often passing from investor to investor in a bizarre game of high stakes Pass the Parcel.

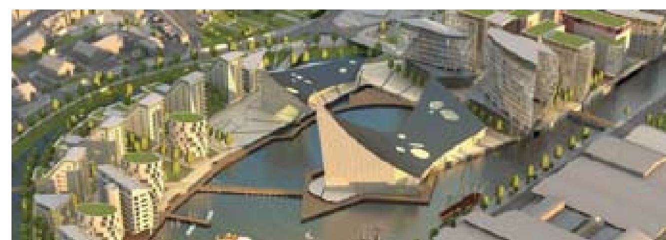
The photos *below* show Newry as it was as the 'Amsterdam of Ireland' now comprehensively ruined, (although still redeemable if the will and imagination were there, albeit with major work), as a consequence of the worship of 'brand retail' by successive Councils, and the brutal schemes of monomaniac Departmental roads engineers. The illustration of a 2016 proposed development of the neighbouring Albert Basin speaks for itself, leaving readers to come to their own conclusions as to which image is best for Newry in the future.

The latest Council-backed proposals for the Newry Quays show no evidence of any understanding of how to restore and enhance an exceptionally fine historic waterfront asset to underpin a sustainable long term social and economic future for the city.

To be fair, it would be wrong to single out Newry for criticism when historic waterfronts in Derry, Enniskillen, Carrickfergus, Belfast and Bangor have all suffered gravely from the same lack of appreciation of their quality and sustainable economic and social value of their heritage assets.

Significant harm can be done even when buildings are 'saved'. When not listed, or within an Area of Townscape Character or Conservation Area such buildings, no matter how locally important, survive at the owner's or developer's whim. The supposed protection given if a Council chose to use its delegated 'powers' of Local Listing is in reality meaningless, as Local Listing carries no legislative weight and is merely toothless window dressing. Unfortunately, builders and local developers generally, with a few worthy exceptions, are not inclined to preserve

Newry, as envisaged by a developer in 2016 (below left) and as it was around 1900 (right), with Sugar Island to the left of the superb Merchant's Quay.



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Before (lefit) and after "renovation" of an unlisted building - the former Eagle Hotel in Larne - with all character and original detail lost.

character, preferring to give the impression of a new build, with Council planning committees tending to go with the flow and grant permission regardless of cumulative negative effect.

Such are the flaws in the system that even listing does not always assure the expected levels of protection. While it is accepted that there must be some leeway to enable historic architecture to have a sustainable future, the limits which the letter and spirit of the legislation should apply are often apparently thrown to the winds where a potentially litigious owner or, disgracefully, a Government Department or political lobby is calling the tune. The listed Scottish Mutual Building in central Belfast (see second floor staircase detail, *right*) had significant original fabric and features removed in breach of planning and listed building consents under the noses of planners and Department. The Council's eventual 'solution' was not the expected rigorous enforcement of policy and the associated legal imperatives, but was to grant retrospective planning permission, conveniently leaving the building free to be sold on without any ongoing obligations on the part of a new owner. The implication being that if damage to such an important and prominent building as this can evade enforcement proceedings, is any listed building actually protected?

When an opportunity arises to restore and enhance an important listed public building, one might imagine that Government Departments and a Council might jump at a chance to both put right the degradation and mistakes of the past, and add considerably to the heritage quality and derived experience of their area. As government this would have the additional bonus of having showcased an exemplar heritage project. But... in this case, they blew it!

Unfortunately for the City of Derry, local politicians Translink and the Department for

HED

The listed Waterside Railway Terminus as 'restored' by Translink and the Department for Infrastructure: front elevation (left) and interior (right)

Infrastructure 'steamrolled' through a scheme so bland and instantly dated that the quality of the original design is overwhelmed. Simon Calder, the Independent newspaper's well-known senior travel editor and writer, said in an interview on Radio Foyle that the magic of Derry's Victorian Terminus station was lost.

Similarly the Belfast City Council / Translink / Department for Infrastructure ludicrously grandiose proposals for a new Transport Hub will involve the demolition of the art deco Boyne Bridge (*below*), an important, prominent and publically accessable surviving example of Belfast's industrial heritage, which inexplicably DfI's sister Department the

Department for Communities have refused to schedule as a protected structure. The £208m scheme is compared in Belfast City Council's vision for the city to Berlin's Hauptbahnhof Station which handles no less than 1800 trains and 350,000 passengers per day. Northern Ireland, by contrast has two hundred and six miles of railway track in total.

The Boyne bridge will be demolished to provide a clear site, not for rail infrastructure, but for part of the equally grandiose and unrealistic one million square feet of speculative private office space proposed to surround the new Transport Hub. This in a City which cannot fill less than half that square footage currently.

While Berlin values its Unter den Linden streetscapes, Belfast clearly does not.

Belfast's long enthusiasm for demolishing its best architecture, while scrapping its industrial heritage and its fully electric transport system, has defied all logic and common sense. The Council's policy of championing commercially-run 'heritage experiences' and grandiose and fantasy masterplans, as a substitute for the value of a vibrant and authentic heritage city where new architecture integrates with and enhances the historic assets, facilitates the city's loss of identity - Belfast is fast becoming a city without context.

Decades of imagination-free city governance has squandered Belfast's historic excellence. The East Bridge Street Power Station built in 1895 would have rivalled London's Battersea as a regeneration project combining heritage quality with modern city living and event / gallery space but instead Belfast has a

WA Green

The magnificent East Bridge Street Power Station demolished in the 1960s (left) and its replacement (right)

Aidan Campbell

selection of random characterless office and apartment developments that could be anywhere.

The author Aidan Campbell in his book *Belfast Through Time* ironically notes the tasteful retention of the Power Station's gate pillars to the front of the Santander block (see *above*).

Much of the Belfast 'hype' is painfully

embarrassing. This riverside picture (*above*) is typical of the 'emperor's clothes' nature of much new development in the city.

A tiny town in northern Norway has a working museum restoring and building traditional wooden boats, and boasting a rope loft still manufacturing traditional rope (*right centre*), while outside displaying historic rope making machinery produced by the then biggest manufacturer of rope and textile machinery in the world - Combe Barbours of the Falls Road, Belfast - but the best Belfast can offer is a vinyl banner (*bottom right*)! The 1936 Harland and Wolff rivetted plate girders and Art Deco foundry-work of the Boyne Bridge will no doubt also merit some world class vinyl.

And so the 'system' of appreciation and protection has significantly failed. When a politically savvy developer or vested interest, with a Public Relations media campaign and a bevy of lawyers, calls the tune, the 'system' will usually fold.

It would be entirely wrong however, to attribute system failure to a lack of commitment, professionalism and enthusiasm of the civil servants given the Sisyphean and often thankless task of trying to protect the historic asset, or to the organisations and individuals who have persevered for decades in trying to stem the tide of, it must be said, ignorance, that has brought us to a point where it is possible to travel the length and breadth of Northern Ireland on country roads and not see a single historic or vernacular building - where villages and small towns are completely stripped of their character and origins - where landscape character is ignored and proposed National Parks and public access through Rights of Way are stymied by vociferous short sighted and ill-informed lobbying - where land bankers and property speculators, often promoted in the media without any in-depth analysis, set a selfish agenda portraying their hit and run profit taking as progress.

Since the transfer of planning powers in 2015 inadequately-trained Council planning committees are able to go 'rogue' without any effective oversight. With built heritage unaccountably written out of the Stormont Programme for Government, it has never been more important for the built heritage lobby to make itself heard collectively.

Organisations such as Hearth, the National Trust and Ulster Architectural Heritage, together with the building preservation trusts and the individual owner restorers have no need to prove their commitment, but the related professions are strangely silent. Successive Tourism bodies turned a blind eye to bad planning and sewage on our beaches and now ignore the cumulative loss of heritage authenticity. Funding from Heritage Lottery and the funding charities has been a rare and valuable lifeline but the many local history groups who share memories and photographs of their vanishing local historic architecture and individuality, are seldom seen to challenge or question the ongoing loss. Books of photographs of what gave our towns and landscapes character and individuality sell in every local newsagents and bookshop, so it cannot be said that the public in general are unaware of what is happening in front of their eyes.

There are no individual or party political champions in Stormont, with the best to be hoped for from a politician being a few encouraging and ultimately worthless words, usually off the record. The entrenched civil service departmental 'silo mentality' and in some cases, their arrogance or fear of politicians oils the destructive machinery.

Maybe what John Hewitt wrote in the context of the Troubles is equally appropriate when applied in this case to those who know and could speak out, but remain silent in the true Ulster tradition. I've paraphrased slightly by adding a comma:

You coasted along
To larger houses, gadgets, more machines...
You coasted along
And all the time, though, you never noticed...

Or in Seamus Heaney's poem on the classic Ulster watchwords *Whatever you say, say nothing*'.

THE ANSWER

A people who choose to ignore the destruction of their cultural heritage's most irreplaceable and

Titanic Bouncy Castle at Ootacamund, SW India.

physically durable assets, and a political class mesmerised by speculators' spin, do not deserve to be called cultured.

Until there is a universally respected formalised strategy for our historic assets, not for reasons of nostalgia, but as an essential component of the culture

Sun, Sea and Serial Demolitions might be closer to reality: Tourism NI at the Waterfront Hall,

central to our distinct societal survival, the road to ruin mapped out by Stormont in the 1950s leads to a cultural desert.

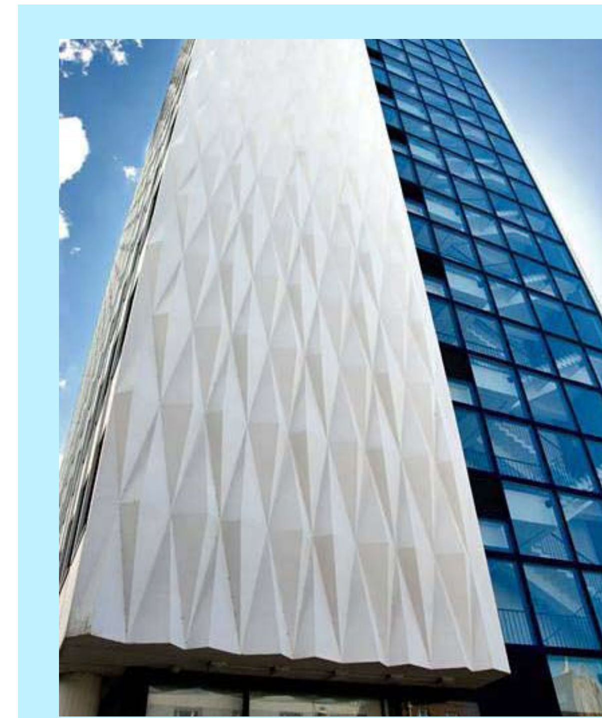
A fixation with contrived 'heritage experiences' is not culture or cultural heritage, and belief that it is, builds a road to nowhere and profits only a few.

John Anderson is a mechanical engineer with a special interest in industrial heritage. He has been on the committee of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and also on the Glenarm Buildings Preservation Trust for many years.

Two large twentieth-century Queen's University buildings were listed in this session: the David Keir building (*left* above) and the Ashby Institute (*right*).

Designed in the 1930s but not completed till after the War, the Keir building is a relatively conservative neo-Georgian building with a copper-roofed tower that is best appreciated at a distance.

The Ashby Institute, completed in 1965 to designs by Cruikshank and Seward, is a much more dominant building, but one with more sophisticated detailing, including interior features in staircases and columns which are still intect after fifty years. However perhaps its most distinctive feature is the white concrete diamond faceting (see *left*), which has remained remarkably fresh, unlike many concrete buidings. The HBC had no hesitation in recommending it as a B+ listing.



When is a castle not a castle?

That is not entirely a trick question. Dobbin's Hotel in Carrickfergus started life as a tower house in the 16th century, but was altered over time and became a police station in the 19th century and a hotel after the last war. What had probably been a castellated rubble-stone building, possibly lime-rendered, acquired a more domestic Victorian character with its arrow-slit windows widened to accommodate sash windows. Some windows were further widened to suit the taste of the 1950s, but sufficient interest remained for the building to be listed.

This is where it gets complicated: the reason for the listing was essentially to protect the remaining archaeological interest, which was interior; but because the building was occupied it couldn't be scheduled, which is the usual way of protecting archaeological sites.

Consequently when the building was being upgraded as part of improvement works in the town the plans were scrutinised by both architects and archaeologists from HED, with the archaeologists taking the lead role. The Historic Monuments Council was duly consulted about plans to reinstate the castellations and remove Victorian accretions, but it was not brought to HBC.

While no doubt a well-meant compromise between the needs of the historic building and the demands of the hotelier, the resulting building is frankly very unsatisfactory, looking nothing like a Victorian hotel and actually nothing like a mediaeval tower house either. The modern window openings have been retained but filled with very modern fenestration, and there is nothing visible externally that is actually historic.

For a project which had strong input from HED it is an embarrassing outcome. It was a very unusual circumstance that may not occur again, but we have been assured that HBC will be consulted should there be a similar problem in the future.

Dobbins Hotel (above) as it was in the 1960s, a Victorian frontage with widened second floor windows; then during the works, with the render stripped off to reveal two storeys of rubble stonework and a later second floor; and (bottom) the rediscovered castle. with conjectural castellations and modern windows.

John Anderson

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

The Second Survey

The second survey has been criticised for its slow pace, but there is no doubt the information and records being gathered about our built heritage are extraordinarily detailed and valuable. However there is a spin-off between detail and speed, and some areas of the province have still to be surveyed, so some buildings in those areas may be unlisted and at risk.

The HED recently carried out pilot surveys in a variety of areas to assess the timescale required to finish the survey, and the manpower likely to be required to do so within a reasonable time. One of the areas identified for study was the Malone and Stranmillis area of Belfast, where it rapidly became apparent that there was a treasure trove of varied and interesting buildings, often with identified architects, that would take a very considerable time to survey.

By way of contrast, the Birches ward near Craigavon was expected to present relatively thin pickings. In fact, it has proved rich in thatch-under-tin mud-walled buildings, so it too takes time to explore a very different kind of heritage.

The bid is being made for funding to complete the survey of an estimated 3,659 more buildings on the basis of these tests, but it is obvious that much of our capital city has still to be given the proper protection it deserves.

It is in relatively recent years that the Second Survey information became available online, and even more recently that it has become significantly more accessible through the Map Viewer, which enables users to locate buildings on a map of Northern Ireland and click for more information.

The map shows not only buildings and monuments but also battlefields and marine archaeology, and layers show the historic Ordnance Survey maps which is a very valuable resource.

The HBC has welcomed this development, and looks forward to the day when photographs can also be added to the data.

George... Best?

When a developer acquired the former Scottish Mutual building in Donegall Square and announced that it was going to become the George Best hotel there was some opposition. This was a prominent and fairly complete building with a decent interior. Planning permission was granted with various conditions and work started on the building. A prominent chute with a skip at the bottom of it seemed to be constantly dusty with debris being thrown down it and campaigners called for an investigation into what was happening inside.

Eventually HED architects, whose offices overlooked the chute, took action and found that much of the interior had been gutted, with the rest hidden by false ceilings and cladding. A stop notice was put on in 2019, but much damage had already been done. The delay was explained by the fact that HED are only consultees and that the council planners are responsible for enforcing developments. Actually the building is only yards from the City Hall so it would not have been difficult for the planners to check on work either.

HBC has pointed out that building control officers will visit a site on several occasions during construction, and has asked why planners cannot do the same. They may be short-staffed, but there should be a conservation officer ready to make regular visits to work on important listed buildings to ensure compliance.

Damage to listed buildings cannot easily be repaired, and never as satisfactorily as if they had simply been maintained. To add insult to injury the planners have granted retrospective LBC.

Francisco Galves Gonzalvez

PEOPLE, URBAN SPACES, HISTORIC FABRIC - a view from Derry

There is a pub in Derry - Sandinos - located adjacent to the bus station in Foyle Street just outside the City Walls. It is a long narrow pub seemingly squeezed into a sliver of a site on Water Street. Its easy-going laid back atmosphere along with the iconic figures which adorn the walls internally give it an unique appeal to an electic mix of young and old clientèle - artists, musicians, literary, media types and goths.

The summer evenings add a special dimension as the vibrant bustle spills out on to the narrow pavement where the natural tendency is to go across the street and sit on the wall and enjoy your pint as the sun settles down behind Orchard Street. However security staff insist that the street is out of bounds – no doubt due to licensing laws and insurance rules - and punters are thus directed back onto the over-crowded pavement. I have long considered it strange - particularly during the summer - that, say from 6.30pm onwards, the street is not closed to vehicles and given entirely over to pedestrians. This could easily be done by diverting traffic coming down Orchard Street along Foyle Street.

As we now seek to re-think how we use our city centres post-COVID we need to reassess how we use our outdoor urban spaces. For too long vehicles have been given priority over pedestrians.

Many European cities have already turned public spaces into outdoor restaurants and cafes with the focus very much on the pedestrian and places of social interaction.

There have previously been calls to exclude vehicular traffic from within the City walls; the current pandemic needs us to seriously consider this. At the very least we need to widen the footpaths which are generally too narrow anyway; more space will be required for social distancing, for queuing and for outdoor cafes, tables and chairs.

Yes our climate is oft times not conducive but we must adapt – wear warmer clothes, bring an umbrella – sitting outside drinking a coffee brings a different sense of perspective to our surroundings.

(above left) Post Office Street, Derry - a pedestrian zone;
(left) Shipquay Street within the Walls - note ratio of road to footpath.
(right) Victoria Terrace in the Old Town of Edinburgh

(far left) Castle Street, Derry - potential for roof cover?;
(left) Umbrella Sky Project, Agueda, Portugal: covered streets - outdoor art?

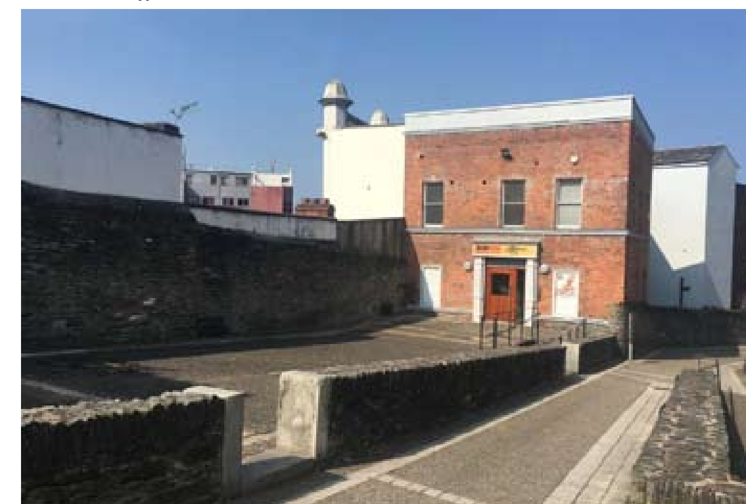
Our historic buildings have a hugely important role to play in the future of our urban spaces and maintaining and developing our unique sense of place.

Can the City Walls be more creatively used to better interact with the buildings thereon, encouraging people to use them in a variety of ways – say an aerobics boot-style training camp on a Saturday morning on Double Bastion with panoramic views over the Bogside; outdoor cafes at the Verbal Arts building, and between the Millennium Forum and St Columb's Hall: performance spaces on Hangman's Bastion outside Echo Echo Dance studios; outdoor art installations etc.

If Covid forces us re-assess our work practices and whether or not modern shiny (ubiquitous?) office blocks are required, then the role of our existing building stock becomes crucial in encouraging people to come back and live in the city – there is much potential for living above shops, and transforming mews lanes into lively quirky urban residential/studio streets by refurbishing old outbuildings.

To the rear of some of our finest terrace streets in the Conservation areas are rundown dilapidated mews buildings which are crying out to be refurbished - there are fine examples of successful similar restorations in Dublin, Edinburgh and Camden Town, London.

(below) Hangman's Bastion: Outdoor performance space outside the Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company?;
(right) Verbal Arts on the City Walls - a super stop for outdoor coffee?



(left) Clarendon Street Conservation Area, Derry.

(centre left and below left) Mews lanes in Derry;

(centre right and blow right) Examples of refurbished mews lanes in Edinburgh

(facing page, top) Kynance Mews, London

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

There are currently 2 substantial Grade A listed buildings in the city centre whose future is in doubt- Austin's Department Store within the Walls and on a prominent corner of the Diamond and Ferryquay Street, and the other St Columb's Hall built up against the Walls on Market Street.

The current Austins was built in 1906 to the designs of MA Robinson and is a flamboyant 5 storey Edwardian retail department store strongly influenced by the Art Nouveau style. It is by far the largest building addressing the square known as the Diamond. It has been lying vacant since 2016. There has been talk of converting it to a hotel. Its large ground floor windows would naturally allow greater interaction with the street with cafes and restaurants spilling out onto the footpaths (made wider of course).

It is interesting to note that prior to the erection of the war memorial, the central square was a much used public space – perhaps it could revert to this as a farmers' market (covered?) at weekends.

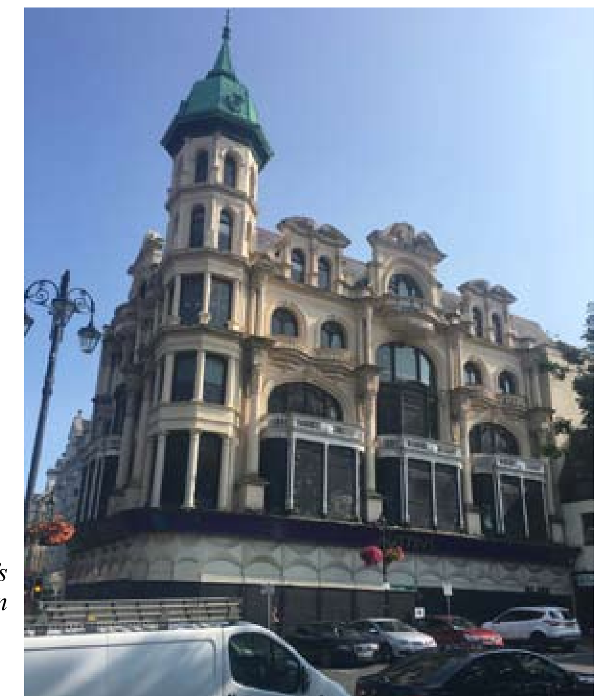
St Columb's Hall (Architects Croome and Toye) was built by the Catholic Church in 1888 as a Temperance Hall and a place to educate its citizens following on from the granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

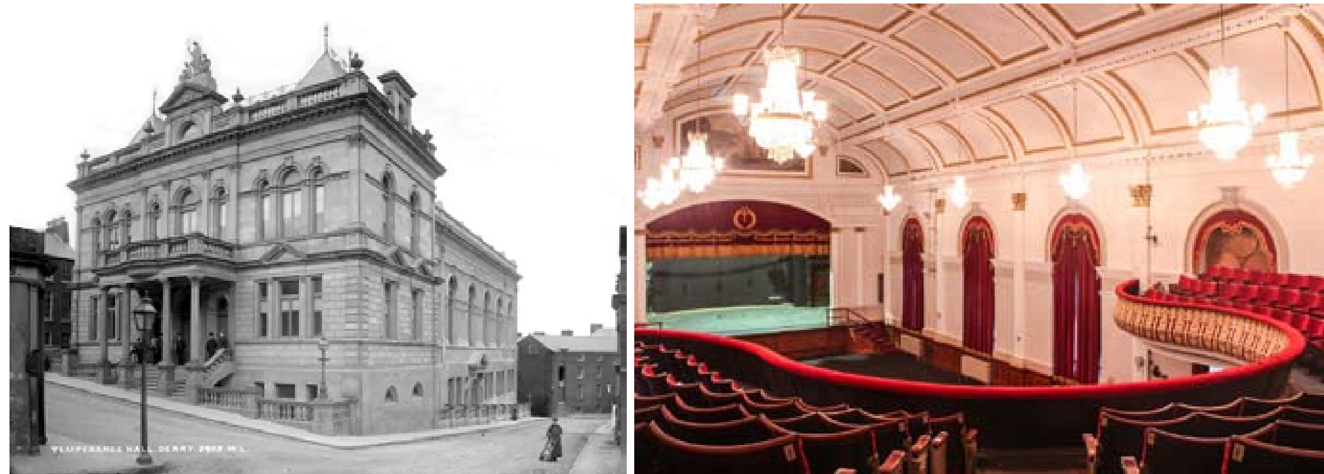
The building's overall style has been described as Italianate, and "triumphalist" and it is worth noting how much of the detail which was so carefully designed and carved is still extant today.

It has hosted many international star performances but its real strength lies in the numerous local community groups who made use of its facilities - for meetings, lectures, dances, choirs, band practice,

(left) Austin's department store in about 1912; and

(right) as it is today..





(left) St Columb's Hall about 1900; and (right) its interior today..

drama and music societies, boxing clubs, fesieanna, and of course the infamous pantomines and shows of the 1940s and 1950s and Fr Daly's variety shows of the 1960s.

However, since the turn of the century the Hall has faced an uncertain future and in 2012 the Church having conceived, built and managed the premises for over 120 years finally relinquished its ownership. Its future still hangs in the balance.

The Hall occupies a prominent city centre site adjacent to the City Walls on the corner of Newmarket and Orchard Streets. It has seen many of its neighbouring buildings fall victim to demolition – some due to the Troubles and some to "progress" - yet it still holds its own, squeezed as it is between the Millennium Forum and Foyleside Shopping Centre.

Its footprint, size and variety of internal spaces makes it ideal for a mixed–use urban redevelopment scheme. Its survival depends on the same community energy and vision as of those who created it.

The current owner (from the private sector) has commendaby formed a charitable organisation, St Columb's Hall Trust, to try and re-establish the building's unique value , to regenerate the built heritage of this structure and to develop a series of sustainable projects that will benefit the local community including:

- •Improved Mental Health and Wellness
- •Economic and Social Well-Being
- •Digital and Cultural Innovation
- •Live Music and Entertainment
- •Giving a Voice to our Community

Both St Columb's Hall and Austin's Department store have key roles to play in the development of the city centre post COVID in sustaining the city's unique sense of place.

Peter Tracey lives in Derry, where he runs his own architectural practice. He has a long-held interest in historic buildings and has worked on a number of conservation projects in recent years. He is the incoming Chairman of the HBC.

Postscript

Reminiscences of membership of HBC over the last six years

The past 6 years I have spent on the HBC have been quite insightful and stimulating; apart from the delight in the discovery of historical gems during the monthly grind of "listings" as part of the Second Survey, the various presentations of planning proposals by architects and developers has been interesting - generating much debate amongst Council members.

One project in particular springs to mind. Kieran McGonigle presented his scheme for the restoration and extension of a terrace townhouse in College Gardens within the Queen's University conservation area for offices and residential accommodation for parents whose children were receiving treatment for cancer at the nearby City Hospital.

Many of my Council colleagues were dubious of the scheme, considering it involved too much change. Having witnessed the worrying and increasing trend of the exodus of businesses from the Clarendon Street conservation area to out of town office parks in my own city of Derry, I was enthused by the scheme's efforts in breathing new life into a derelict urban listed building, retaining the rhythm of the listed terrace and creating a complementary and well considered contemporary piece of architecture to the rear mews – lanes which are so often treated as unimportant urban backlands and waste grounds.

Fortunately HED and the planners were similarly enthused and the building went on to win an RIBA award.

PLACE NAMES

Place names hold a particular fascination for me and are as important as the buildings within their locale when it comes to considering the notion of "sense of place".

For instance, I did not know that Stranmillis comes the Irish name of An Struthán Milis – the sweet stream (because the tidal waters did not originally come up as far this point); or that "Ligoniel" is from the Irish "Lag An Aoil" meaning the Limestone hollow;

Dernawilt in Co. Fermanagh is Doire na Mhoilt - the Oak wood of the Wethers - (a wether being a castrated ram!)

I would encourage that all place names be translated during listings in the 2nd Survey to give more meaning to "place".

One note of regret is the demolition earlier this year of Burntollet Bridge near the Ness Wood (an Eas – the waterfall) between Claudy and Derry to make way for the new A6 upgrade.

This bridge was a fine example of a fully semi-circular 19th century structure and had a quite a significant recent social history being the scene of the attack on the Civil Rights march in October 1969.

Peter Tracey

College Gardens extension (above) and front elevation (facing page)

(above) Burntollet Bridge before its demolition.

Green energy

For many years it has been argued that modern buildings are more energy-efficient than historic ones, and this has been used as an argument for demolishing some old buildings and for gutting many others. In the last few years the argument has been turned on its head, and we hope this will make the protection of our architectural heritage more routine.

There were several reasons for condemning old buildings. An obvious one was that many were draughty, with ill-fitting windows and doors. Less obvious was the fact that the energy performance measures were based on modern materials and construction techniques, and they now seem to have under-estimated the performance of traditional materials. Finally their construction with solid walls and high thermal mass was seen as a defect because they did not easily respond to the sporadic heating patterns that had become normalised with modern boiler controls.

Conservationists have long complained about the energy that goes into modern construction, with high quantities of steel, concrete and glass. This is finally being recognised by professional bodies like the RIBA and RICS, who now point out that some 35% of a building's total life energy output happens before it has even opened its doors. So it makes sense to adapt existing buildings rather than replacing them, quite apart from looking again at the energy performance of older buildings. With steady rather than sporadic heating, and reasonable levels of ventilation rather than making buildings airtight, older buildings can perform very well.

And all this is without looking to the higher temperatures coming with climate change. Already London is experiencing very high summer temperatures that can only be dealt with by introducing energy-intensive air-conditioning - or draughts and heavy thermal mass. What was it people were complaining about?

Thatch

Perhaps our "greenest" buildings are amongst our most ancient - thatched cottages are famously "warm in winter and cool in summer", and being constructed of mud or rubble stones, painted with limewash and roofed in straw they use very little energy in their construction.

The fate of the declining number of thatched cottages in the province has exercised Historic Buildings Councils for many years. While widely recognised as a distinctive indigenous building type, much loved of tourists and part of our collective folk memory, thatched cottages are usually small, often isolated and without mod cons, and expensive to maintain now that thatchers are hard to find.

The HBC held a special Thatch Day in association with Fermanagh District Council in Enniskillen in May 2018, with the hope that some solutions might be found to help maintain the surviving buildings.

Not surprisingly, the problems were easy to spell out; the typology and variety of thatched buildings were explained in depth; but there were few solutions.

With fewer than a hundred thatched cottages remaining (not counting the "thatch under tin" survivals), thatched cottages are on the brink of extinction in Northern Ireland, and the problem of finding new uses for these small and often isolated cottages is urgent.

We continue to list small vernacular buildings when they are found in little-altered condition, and every thatched building, and many where thatch survives under a tin roof, are listed: but finding economic uses for them is much more difficult, and the issue will have to be returned to by the next Council.

The fragility of thatched cottages is clearly demonstrated in this series of photographs of "Lily's Cottage" near Florencecourt. In 1991 (*top left*) it was beautifully kept with well-maintained thatch and an immaculate garden. Then Lily went into a home and the cottage was vacant (*top right*), though with all the furniture and traditional ornaments intect (including the wally dugs, *middle left*). By 2008 the house had been broken into and vandalised (middle right), with water penetrating the thatch (bottom left). With the thatch compromised, it soon gets waterlogged and begins to collapse (*bottom left*). By 2015 (*bottom right*) little was left apart from the brick gables. This is one of our fewer than a hundred thatched cottages and remains listed...

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

REUSE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS TO ADDRESS HOUSING NEED

Pressure is growing for more social homes to be built in Northern Ireland as new analysis predicts it could take another twenty-two and a half years to tackle the current waiting list.

As concerns grow over the impact of welfare reforms it has been suggested that Northern Ireland's social housing stock needs to increase by as much as 30%. While Stormont achieved targets it set for the number of new social homes started over eight consecutive years since 2010, it failed to meet its target for the 2018/2019 financial year. Officials at the Department for Communities (DfC) have also reduced the number of new social homes they plan to start building between 2016 and 2021 from 9,600 to 7,600.

Northern Ireland is the only region in the UK without a developer contribution scheme - either through a financial contribution or by introducing a quota on the number of new homes in a development that must be affordable or social – despite this being identified in Stormont's first housing strategy as one way to provide more homes, and the required legislation to facilitate this already existing.

The roll-out of welfare reforms has also been identified as a major concern – both for households being able to pay their rent and for the ability of housing associations to continue to build new homes if their tenants fall into arrears.

There is also an ongoing debate around how to solve the financial crisis facing the Housing Executive, which estimates it requires a cash boost of £7.1bn over the next thirty years to help maintain its current housing stock.

Other initiatives to increase the supply of social and affordable homes, as outlined in Northern Ireland's first ever housing strategy, and a Fresh Start Agreement commitment to reform social housing provision have failed to be fully realised in the absence of a functioning Executive at Stormont.

New social homes are delivered through Stormont's Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) which includes new build properties and empty homes that have been brought back into use.

Housing associations receive grant funding for every unit they deliver through the new homes programme.

The SHDP is managed by the NIHE which allocated £496.6m to housing associations between the start of April 2013 and the end of March 2018 for completing 7,727 new homes. This is equal to a Government subsidy of, on average, 57% towards the cost of every home delivered. The remainder was

Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2010-2019

Year	Target (starts)	Homes started	Target (completed)	Homes completed
2010/11	2,000	2,418	1,400	1,409
2011/12	1,400	1,410	1,450	1,310
2012/13	1,325	1,379	1,200	1,254
2013/14	1,275	1,299	1,200	1,967
2014/15	2,000	2,013	1,200	1,658
2015/16	1,500	1,568	1,200	1,209
2016/17	1,600	1,604	1,200	1,387
2017/18	1,750	1,759	1,200	1,507
2018/19	1,850	1,786	1,450	1,682
Total	**14,700**	**15,236**	**11,500**	**13,383**

N.B. Not all these homes will be new build properties. Some will derelict properties brought back into use, as well as homes purchased by housing associations (e.g. old NIHE properties or new homes built by private developers).

For a full definition of the different types of SHDP works, visit: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/scheme-types

KEY	
Target	The Department for Communities sets the targets for number of new social homes it hoped to start each year while the Northern Ireland Housing Executive sets the annual targets for new social homes to be completed. It does not exclusively include new builds and will also include derelict properties brought back into use and homes bought by housing associations (e.g. those previously owned by the NIHE or built by private developers). For a full breakdown of Stormont's Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), see tables 1.8 and 1.9 of section 1 (supply) here: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-statistics-2017-18
Homes started	New starts are recorded when housing associations confirm the start on-site of new build/rehabilitation/re-improvement units, or the purchase of off-the-shelf units, for social housing.
Homes completed	Homes are recorded as completed when housing associations confirm the completion of new build/rehabilitation/re-improvement units, or the purchase of off-the-shelf units, for social housing.

Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Department for Communities

financed by private borrowing.

Increasing land prices, objections to new developments from local residents and constraints with rural sites, such as challenges accessing water, electricity and sewage infrastructure, were given as reasons for missing the target in a 2017 report prepared by the NIHE's Rural Residents' Forum.

Radius Housing Association director of communities Eileen Patterson said: "The SHDP has been very successful in delivering new build social housing. However, the supply of new social housing is not keeping up with the increased demand and there is a real challenge of providing the right type of homes in the right location."

Donegall Street, Belfast: historic buildings at risk restored as social housing.

Hearth

She added: "The supply of suitable land sites is a real challenge for housing associations and does impact on their ability to deliver new homes. There have been some delays in the planning process as the councils embed their new role in planning and pressures on existing infrastructures in some areas can hinder further new developments."

While 13,450 new social homes were started through the SHDP between 2010 and the end of March 2018, only 73% (9,783) of these were newly built as social homes, according to NIHE housing statistics published by DfC. A further 13% (1,730) of the new homes started during the same timeframe were built by private developers and bought by housing associations for use as social homes. These are known as 'off-the-shelf' homes.

Belfast City Council wants to have 66,000 more people living in the city centre by 2035. That will mean building or converting about 30,000 new homes.

Across the UK and Europe city centres are prime real estate, yet only about 3,000 people live in Belfast city centre. Historically people have not been encouraged to live in the city centre but that attitude is changing. It is hoped bringing more people to live in the heart of the city will have a knock-on effect on shops, restaurants and bars.

If all these new homes re built on the outskirts of the city people would want to drive in to work or take public transport, whereas if urban living can be made attractive people will walk or cycle to work - you can change how the city looks and feels.

As more jobs are created in the city centre that pushes up demand for places to live, which is something that Belfast's first "build-to-rent" project by Lacuna Developments was designed to tap into. However that sort of scheme is rental only, targeting longer term tenancies, and the landlord is a property company.

In order to meet the targets for the development of social housing provision and the increase the number of people living in Belfast City Centre, the option of reusing historic buildings should be explored in more depth by housing associations.

However housing associations face a number of challenges when considering the option to purchase such buildings;

1. Financing

Banks tend to regard new-build schemes as lower risk than converting or restoring existing buildings.

This is partly a matter of familiarity, and banks need to see more examples demonstrating the success and popularity of converted historic buildings.

2. Insurance

Structural insurance premiums are based on new construction and take little account of existing construction.

Again this is largely a question of familiarity. While it is true that fire damage to a historic building can be expensive to repair, Grenfell has demonstrated that modern tower blocks can suffer much more serious claims.

3. DfC Design Guides

In order to obtain Housing Association Grant (HAG), there is a requirement for housing associations to comply with DfC design guides for space standards, energy performance etc.

DfC can be flexible on listed buildings and accepts that there are trade-offs. While an existing building will rarely meet exact standards without major alterations, it may provide more generous spaces at lower cost than new buildings.

It would be helpful if DfC were to bring its grant levels for "rehabs" into line with those for new builds, instead of setting the grants lower because the life of the building is (often mistakenly) assumed to be shorter than that of new-builds.

4. Accounting

Expenditure on refurbishment and remodelling projects are generally subject to 20% VAT, where new build in greenfield sites is VAT exempt.

Alastair Coey Architects

It would be helpful if DfC was to raise the grants for existing buildings, recognising that it is far "greener" to re-use buildings than to build new, and that the VAT paid on such schemes actually goes back into Treasury so is not a cost to government.

The budget for housing schemes is categorised into revenue and capital expenditure. Revenue expenditure is unfortunately a common occurrence with regard to listed buildings because of the piecemeal repair of components as opposed to full scale replacement, both at initial refurbishment and for the lifetime of the asset, although many components of historic buildings last longer than their new-build equivalents.

Housing associations generally review financial viability over a 30-year period where capital and revenue expenditure is assessed.

The revenue expenditure associated with new build is generally limited to the repainting of the asset at 6-8year intervals. The remainder of the expenditure is usually capitalised.

In comparison the revenue expenditure in the case of historic buildings is typically high as whole component replacement is avoided to protect the historical importance of the building. If revenue and capital expenditure were not separated historic buildings would perform well by having a longer inherent life.

A review of financial management matters in relation to revenue expenditure could provide clarity with regards to how repairs to main building components could be capitalised, the argument being that the repair to verges, ridges and leadwork on a roof could extend the life of the roof by at least 10-15years, making the case for the expenditure to be capitalised.

Historic buildings tend to be within cities and town centres which in turn helps to create sustainable communities. Bus routes, shops, universities and workplaces are often convenient, which reduces the requirement for car ownership. Schemes tend to be smaller and more individual, leading to tenants identifying more strongly with them, and that can lead to reduced vandalism and greater tenant involvement.

The former Good Shepherd Convent, acquired for offices by Choice Housing Association - the costs are expected to be below the cost of a new building, and the quality of finishes and space far superior.

There is a substantial number of historic buildings on the Heritage at Risk Register. The Register highlights the vulnerability of our historic built environment and acts as a catalyst for its restoration and reuse.

The Register contains a selection of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and other historic structures from throughout Northern Ireland - ranging from humble dwellings to large industrial complexes - which are currently at risk and require a sustainable future. Housing associations should be communicated with in respect of these buildings and encouraged to explore development opportunities where possible.

Greenfield development sites are becoming more difficult to acquire in areas of social housing need and in most cases do not exist. The obstacles affecting the viability of listed building refurbishments should be explored in order to provide solutions for housing associations going forward to help address the social housing need in Northern Ireland.

Ciaran Andrews is a chartered building surveyor, and is one of only two accredited conservation surveyors in Northern Ireland. He has been involved in conservation projects at Castle Leslie and at Belfast City Hall amongst others.

This report would not normally include an obituary, but mention should be made of Gordon McKnight, who died in 2018 at the age of 99.

Many architects do not live to see any of their buildings listed, but more than half a dozen of his widely diverse designs were listed during his lifetime, which is certainly a record in this jurisdiction. He specialised in church architecture, adapting earlier buildings as well as designing many of his own. Among his best-known designs are Orangefield Presbyterian Church, the chapel at Methodist College and Martyrs' Memorial Free Presbyterian Church, all in Belfast; but he also designed churches in Portadown, Bangor and at Corrymeela.

He was born in Rathfriland in 1919 and was a talented artist and film maker in his spare time. His watercolours utilised the smooth graduated washes beloved of traditionally-trained architects, and he was an Associate of the Royal Ulster Academy for some twenty years.

Shortly before he retired in 1991 he decorated the building his practice occupied with a trompe l'oeil mural of a sharpened pencil breaking through the brickwork. It was a great advertisement and showed something of Gordon's sense of humour.

The Chapel of Unity at Methodist College Belfast

Historic Buildings Council for Northern Ireland 2016-2020

Acknowledgements

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The front cover shows Bank Buildings the day after its disastrous fire in August 2018.

ROYAL ULSTER SOCIETY

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