

**"HISTORIC BUILDINGS AT RISK: a strategy to identify redundant (under-used) and dilapidated buildings and to rescue them"**

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**Introduction**

Of the 500,000 buildings in England, of special architectural or historic interest, that will be statutorily protected by 1988, more than 9% are estimated to be at risk from redundancy, underuse, neglect and decay. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, is launching an initiative in partnership with local planning authorities and voluntary amenity groups first to inventory and then to monitor the condition or welfare of the built heritage: to assess the nature and magnitude of the threats to the irreplaceable cultural resource (in terms of its state of utility and condition) and to act upon them.

**The Commission**

The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, whose popular name is English Heritage is a body corporate, answerable to the Secretary of State for the Environment and through him to Parliament. Set up under the National Heritage Act 1983 and coming into being in 1984, the Commission is responsible for securing the protection of ancient monuments, historic buildings and conservation areas in England. This is done by advising the Secretary of State on which buildings should be statutorily protected; by commenting on the appropriateness of alterations to, or demolitions of listed buildings; by grant aiding their repairs and in some circumstances by acquiring them for national guardianship. The Commission has an annual budget of £62 million, employs over 1200 staff and maintains and opens to the public more than 400 buildings, ruins and ancient sites.

It works closely with local planning authorities to protect the built heritage especially through the procedures in the Planning Acts, but also by offering grant aid and technical expertise as necessary.

**The Commission and Historic Buildings at Risk**

In 1971 national amenity societies recommended that the Government's Department of the Environment set up an intelligence gathering system as a means of identifying historic buildings threatened by redundancy, neglect and decay. Later Lord Montagu, in his report "Britain's Historic Buildings: a policy for their future use" (British Tourist Authority 1981) set out an entire approach to building redundancy and, in his final recommendation urged that in the 1980s a new emphasis should be placed on policies and projects to reuse the nation's building stock.

The Commission on its founding committed itself to adopting such an emphasis in its corporate plan. In 1984 it appointed the world's first Conservation Officer for Buildings at Risk and set out to encourage an awareness of and responsibility for threatened buildings throughout the country. Since that time it has been analysing why historic structures fall out of use and has designed a strategy now to first identify, then act upon buildings at risk: to bring about their reuse and to this end improve the commercial, employment and amenity prospects in their locale.

### The Scale of the Problem

By the end of 1988 there are likely to be more than 500,000 historic buildings on the Secretary of State for the Environment's statutory list for England. These buildings of special architectural or historic interest are protected in law and constitute about 2% of the total building stock of the country. The built heritage can therefore be considered to be a finite non-renewable resource whose preservation is essential for the nation's cultural welfare. But today historic buildings cannot all be museums. They have to make their way in the world and all buildings without a use are quickly threatened by neglect and decay.

There are no firm figures, but a study in the 1970s suggests that as many as 46,000 listed buildings may be out-of-use, slowly decaying for want of use, care and attention. Why?

Analysis has shown that there are two major factors at work. First and foremost, there is the general decline of the local economic base reflecting the national downturn. Within the European Community for example, subsidies to agriculture are being rationalised and farming practice is changing dramatically. This has resulted in hundreds of extant medieval barns falling out of use - as farming moves from grain production to more profitable enterprises. In the industrial heartlands too economic decline has hit many of the manufacturing industries that made Britain great. For example, the textile industry has well nigh disappeared due to competition from newly capitalised third world countries where labour is relatively cheap. The European Community has recognised the problem by offering up regional development grants to ameliorate the effects of manufacturing closure on employment and on local commerce, but still more than 120 million square feet (11.1 million square metres) of cotton and wool factories' floor space remains vacant, much of it in historic buildings.

The second factor can be identified as the public attitude. So far as buildings at risk are concerned the public remains ignorant, disinterested, obdurate or antipathetic. These terms can be applied equally to the owners of threatened buildings, their professional advisers, marketing agencies, planning departments, politicians and the public-at-large. They fail to recognise the latent potential for adaptation and reuse of these resources for economic as well as cultural benefit. Management systems fail to account for historic property preservation when rationalising or capitalising on their building stock. Hospitals for example in the United Kingdom are being renewed to comply

with modern medical practice and this is as it should be, but no account is being made in plans to dispose of redundant sites for the conservation and reuse of historic hospital buildings.

The Commission has resolved that these attitudes should be challenged by education, stimulation, persuasion and in some cases, by confrontation. The key to this initiative is to draw the public's attention to the issues and to show how the problems can be solved.

### The Scheme: a National Welfare Census of Listed Buildings

For the past 6 years architectural historians in England have been combing the country identifying buildings of architectural interest worthy of placement on the statutory list. This Resurvey has been financed by the Secretary of State for the Environment through English Heritage. By May 1987 the Relisting will be complete, but it only recognises the worth of the buildings; it was never intended to assess welfare (occupation and condition). These factors are seen now as vital intelligence - so that local planning authorities can act to rescue buildings which are unoccupied, out of use, neglected and decaying by offering technical assistance to the owners; by helping to sell the building; by giving grant aid to repair the building and so on. Centrally too, if the Commission had foreknowledge of the state of condition of all the listed buildings in England, it could make strategic plans regarding the distribution of its grant aid; it could address the issues of impending redundancy of building types and could manage the heritage more efficiently.

Each local planning authority at district and county level is being invited to undertake a rapid survey of listed buildings in their area. The survey is normally external from public highways and a form has been devised to collect data consistently and with the minimum of subjectivity. The field data is then drawn together centrally, checked and loaded onto computer to produce a status report on the stock.

The registration form when completed identifies the building, its location, its statutory grade and status and whether or not it lies within a designated conservation area (historic quarter). It also describes current and original usage and categorises ownership type where the actual owner cannot immediately be identified. The form registers whether the building is currently for sale and where applicable gives marketing details. However, the key to the form's usefulness is in the assessment of the building's states of occupancy and condition.

Clearly an historic building that is unoccupied and in poor condition is more at risk than one that is partially occupied and in fair condition. Thus it is possible on a scoring system from 1 - 4 to work up a logarithmic scale of risk or threat. For example a building that scores a low number is in serious condition needing attention, whilst a high score indicates fair though continuing risk were a watching brief would be advisable. Although these judgements are subjective, the survey team is given objective guidance on the reverse of the form as to which categories might be appropriate in a particular case. The surveyors themselves are

given basic training and are supervised by qualified architectural and planning staff. In a recent pilot scheme fully qualified professional planners were compared for performance against the lay team and the results were identical.

Computer loading of the data ensures consistency of input and a rapid retrieval system capable of a wide range of illustrative techniques. Ordinary personal office computers are used and the software packages are of no great complexity. Large historic cities may have a total listed building stock of between 4 - 7,000 of which perhaps 360 - 630 may be at great risk. Data handling therefore is relatively speedy. The machine can develop priority lists, identify all empty property; produce information on risk buildings in one district and isolate owners or ownership groups having difficulty with their property. It can produce lists of buildings for sale and can categorise building use types, listing status etc. etc. most easily.

#### How is the information used?

Armed with this data and its analysis local planning authorities can identify their problem sites accurately and build up pictures of the state of the threatened stock. They can then establish formal contact with the owners to offer assistance; to cajole them into action or to threaten the weight of the statutory planning system.

Technical or financial advice may be offered to guide cheap repairs or locate sources of public subsidy or private funding. The planning authority can also offer to permit a change of use to a more profitable function that would finance repairs. Assistance can also be offered to help market the property.

Some authorities publish lists of buildings-at-risk and these attract developers wishing to buy. These developers may include public housing agencies as well as charitable (non-profit) historic building preservation trusts besides those private concerns motivated by profit. Those looking to dispose will be aided by this scheme which focuses the attention of those looking to acquire in this small sector (2%) of the U.K.'s property market.

The ultimate sanction of course is for the authorities to acquire the threatened property themselves, either by agreement or compulsorily under the law. The Commission offers grants to city and district councils if they take this action and offers further grants for their rescue and repair (but not adaptation) if they are of national significance.

Local authorities work in conjunction with charitable (non-profit) historic buildings preservation trusts and off-load rescued buildings to them to maximise grant aid. The trusts repair and convert the buildings to new uses and then sell them on privately and plough back any profit into the next rescue.

In cases of national significance, the Secretary of State on the advice of English Heritage can intervene too and compulsorily acquire threatened buildings. In such a case and where the Commission has itself acquired property (though only by agreement), the current trend is to follow the lead given by the trusts and carry out emergency repairs before selling on to a new and enthusiastic user.

### Conclusion

The rescue of buildings-at-risk is a complicated time consuming business. There are failures too. Each week around 4 listed buildings are demolished with official permission because they are deemed to be "beyond reasonable beneficial use". Many, many more lie fallow and forlorn - threatened by redundancy, neglect and decay. The buildings-at-risk welfare census, devised by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England and operated by local planning authorities, aims to identify the scope of the problem and to produce strategic information to assist in the solution.

Those countries already possessing sophisticated art-historical inventories might consider this scheme for adoption as an addendum whilst other, in the process of formulating new inventory initiatives, might adopt it from the start - helping to assess not only what constitutes "built heritage" but also what condition it is in. For without the latter no responsible curator can profess that conservation is generally successful.

**WELFARE CENSUS RECORD FORM**

REF. NO.: \_\_\_\_\_ BLDG. NO.: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SURVEYORS NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ ORGANISATION: \_\_\_\_\_ FILE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>1. LOCATION</b></p> <p>No./Title : _____</p> <p>Street : _____</p> <p>District/Parish: _____</p> <p>Town : _____</p> <p>County : _____</p> <p>Postcode : _____</p> <p>Nat.Grid Ref. : _____</p> <p>Rate Office No.: _____</p>	<p><b>4. LISTED BUILDING STATUS</b></p> <p>Grade I : 1 _____</p> <p>II* : 2 _____</p> <p>II : 3 _____</p> <p>Unlisted in a CA : 4 _____</p> <p>Underdesignated Area : 4 _____</p> <p>Conservation Area : 3 _____</p> <p>Ancient Monument : 2 _____</p> <p>Both : 1 _____</p>
<p><b>2. OWNERSHIP</b></p> <p>Name : _____</p> <p>Address : _____</p>	<p><b>5. OWNERSHIP TYPE</b></p> <p>Private : 1 _____</p> <p>Trust : 2 _____</p> <p>Company : 3 _____</p> <p>Local Authority : 4 _____</p> <p>Statutory Undertakers: 5 _____</p> <p>Crown : 6 _____</p>
<p><b>3. MARKET DETAILS</b></p> <p>Asking Price : _____</p> <p>As At (Date) : _____</p> <p>Floor Area : _____</p> <p>Agents Name : _____</p> <p>Address : _____</p>	<p><b>6. MARKET STATUS</b></p> <p>Not For Sale : 1 _____</p> <p>For Sale : 2 _____</p>
<p><b>PHOTOGRAPH/ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>7. SURVEY TYPE</b></p> <p>External &amp; Internal : 1 _____</p> <p>External Only : 2 _____</p> <p>Remote : 3 _____</p>
	<p><b>8. USAGE</b></p> <p>Residential : 1 _____</p> <p>Industrial : 2 _____</p> <p>Distribution : 3 _____</p> <p>Retail : 4 _____ ORIGINAL</p> <p>Offices : 5 _____</p> <p>Utilities : 6 _____</p> <p>Education : 7 _____</p> <p>Transport : 8 _____</p> <p>Defence : 9 _____</p> <p>Religious/Community : 10 _____ LAST/PRESENT</p> <p>Recreation : 11 _____</p> <p>Agriculture : 12 _____</p> <p>Mining : 13 _____</p> <p>Other - please specify: _____</p>
	<p><b>9. CONDITION</b></p> <p>Very Bad : 1 _____</p> <p>Poor : 2 _____</p> <p>Fair : 3 _____</p> <p>Good : 4 _____</p>
	<p><b>10. OCCUPANCY</b></p> <p>Unoccupied : 1 _____</p> <p>Partially Occupied : 2 _____</p> <p>Occupied : 3 _____</p>
	<p><b>11. RISK STATUS CALCULATION</b></p> <p>Condition x Occupancy + Listed + 1 Building Status _____</p>

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**Summary:**

Of the 500,000 buildings in England, of special architectural or historic interest, that will be statutorily protected by 1988, more than 46,000 are estimated to be at risk from redundancy, underuse, neglect or decay. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission of England, set up by Act of Parliament in 1983 is launching an initiative in partnership with local planning authorities and voluntary amenity groups first to inventory and then monitor the condition or welfare of the built heritage: to assess the nature and magnitude of the threats to the irreplaceable cultural resource (in terms of its state of utility and condition) and to act upon them.

By means of simple, cheap registration forms local planning authorities will be able to draw up annual registers of buildings-at-risk. As part of an employment scheme in economically depressed areas, lay teams of youngsters have been hired to expedite the surveys and the information collected and stored on computers. The lists thus produced become management tools to assist professionals in prioritising rescue activities within limited national and local resources. Owners of buildings-at-risk can be offered technical or financial assistance to repair their properties or can be helped to sell the buildings or find a more profitable change-of-use that would ensure their repair. Ultimately, through the United Kingdom's conservation planning legislation, the local authorities can acquire such buildings and ensure their survival by finding alternative new users and uses.

It is hoped that the registers will become local and national "shopping lists" for developers wishing to refurbish historic buildings. These developers may include public housing agencies as well as charitable (non-profit) historic building preservation trusts besides those private concerns motivated by profit. Those looking to dispose of unwanted historic buildings will be aided by this scheme which will focus the attention of those looking to acquire such spaces in this small sector (2%) of the U.K.'s property market.

The registers will help the Commission and local authorities to target their resources and to plan campaigns based on actual need to eliminate redundancy and decay in the heritage stock. They will provide detailed information for national heritage strategies to be further developed and enhance the United Kingdom's already well defined activity in building conservation.

The paper describes the scope of the problem confronting England, a developed country with a well established art-historical inventory of its built heritage and with sophisticated planning and financing machinery in place - yet with scant knowledge of the physical state and condition of its stock. It identifies typical historic building types suffering redundancy and neglect as symptoms of the economic rationalisation of the birthplace of the industrial revolution. The paper describes the monitoring system in detail and shows how its adoption could be used elsewhere .

"BATIMENTS HISTORIQUES MENACES : une stratégie pour identifier et sauvegarder les bâtiments menacés par la désuétude et le délabrement

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Résumé :

Des 500 000 bâtiments anglais présentant un intérêt architectural ou historique, qui seront protégés par la loi en 1988, plus de 46 000 sont considérés être menacés par la désuétude, le sous-emploi, l'abandon ou la décrépitude. La Commission pour la Protection des Bâtiments et Monuments Historiques d'Angleterre établie par décret parlementaire en 1983, agissant en collaboration avec les autorités locales et les associations bénévoles lance une initiative visant, dans un premier temps, à inventorier et dans un second temps, à contrôler l'état ou la condition du patrimoine national : pour évaluer la nature et l'ampleur des menaces qui pèsent sur cet héritage culturel irremplaçable (en termes de sous-emploi et d'état général) et pour agir en conséquence.

Grâce à des formulaires d'enregistrement simples et bon marché, les services locaux de l'aménagement pourront établir un registre annuel des bâtiments en péril. Des équipes de jeunes ont été recrutées dans le cadre d'un projet pour l'emploi dans les régions en crise et chargées des inspections, les données ainsi collectées sont saisies et mises en mémoire sur ordinateur. Les listes ainsi produites deviennent des outils de gestion qui assistent les professionnels pour décider de l'ordre prioritaire des activités de sauvegarde dans les limites des ressources nationales et locales. Les propriétaires de bâtiments en péril peuvent bénéficier d'appuis techniques ou financiers pour procéder à la réparation de leurs propriétés ou peuvent bénéficier d'une aide à la vente de leurs bâtiments ou à la reconversion dans un emploi plus lucratif qui permettrait leur réparation. En dernier ressort, en appliquant la loi relative à la conservation du patrimoine du Royaume-Uni, les autorités locales peuvent acheter de tels bâtiments et en assurer la sauvegarde en leur trouvant d'autres usagers et d'autres usages.

Ces registres aideront la Commission et les autorités locales à cibler leurs ressources et à planifier leurs campagnes de protection en se basant sur les besoins réels. Ils fourniront également des renseignements détaillés sur les stratégies à développer pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine national et renforceront l'action déjà entreprise par le Royaume-Uni pour la protection de ses bâtiments historiques.

L'exposé décrit l'étendue du problème auquel doit faire face l'Angleterre, un pays développé disposant d'un inventaire artistique et historique bien établi de son patrimoine immobilier et disposant également d'un système complexe de planification et de financement, mais n'ayant qu'une piètre connaissance de l'état actuel et de la condition réelle des objets de ce patrimoine. L'exposé identifie les types de bâtiments historiques menacés par la désuétude et le délabrement comme des symptômes de la mutation économique qui touche actuellement le berceau de la révolution industrielle. L'exposé décrit ce système de contrôle de façon détaillée et montre comment l'adoption d'un tel système pourrait être envisagée ailleurs.