

UNITED KINGDOM

20th-Century Heritage at Risk

This year ICOMOS-UK is focusing on 20th-century heritage to reflect the Montreal Action Plan and the growing interest in 20th-century heritage in the UK. This interest was fuelled by a very successful seminar on 20th-century heritage run by ICOMOS-UK, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the 20th Century Society to celebrate International Sites and Monuments Day on 18 April 2002.

This report aims to contribute to the debate on how we define what is of value and significance from the 20th century within the UK. Recent losses of key buildings, and the continued erosion of more commonplace 20th-century buildings, highlight the need for more public debate on how we sustain our 20th-century heritage. This chapter looks at risk buildings within certain themes of 20th-century heritage:

- key 20th-century buildings
- social housing
- cinemas
- Welsh chapels.

Key 20th-Century Buildings

Brynmawr Rubber factory, Brynmawr, Gwent

The vulnerability of key 20th-century buildings has been highlighted by the recent tragic demolition of the 1951 Brynmawr Rubber factory, Brynmawr, Gwent, designed by Ove Arup & Partners 1946–51, and the first major post-war building listed in Wales in 1982. This spectacular building of thin concrete domes, built to generate economic development at the head of a remote Welsh valley, was lost last year in spite of enormous local efforts to find a

new use for it and even though it was 'protected' by Grade II* listing. Its demolition has highlighted the need to debate what should be valued at a national level and thus protected while a new use can be found.

De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, East Sussex

Recent rising interest in 20th-century buildings is beginning to have an effect and there is now hope for this building on the south coast of England, which has been at risk for many years. Built in 1935 to the designs of Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, this dramatic, chalk-white, modern movement seaside cafe, bar, theatre and exhibition space, with views from the first floor cafe out to sea, was built by Bexhill Town Council to cater for the hugely popular seaside visiting in the 1930s.

The Town Council was persuaded by its socialist mayor and principal landowner, the Earl De La Warr, to develop the site of a former coastguard station in order to enhance the town's reputation as a holiday resort. The public competition was won by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, with their truly modern scheme of an all-welded steel frame. Mendelsohn and Samuely were among the first German architects/engineers to find refuge in Britain; their collaborator Chermayeff, was a naturalised Englishman of Russian/Chechen origin who produced much of the theatre interior. The result was the first building in the International Style in Britain.

Changes in holiday fashions over the past 40 years have contributed to the run-down of many sea-side resorts, leaving their buildings under-funded and neglected and vulnerable to inappropriate change in use. Four years ago, problems of falling revenues and rising costs led the Council to think of selling the building as a



De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, East Sussex, 1935. The impressive exterior of the building.

super-pub. General opposition to this conversion forced a change of mind.

The pavilion is now to be rescued and restored at a cost of £7 million for a similar purpose to that for which it was built, providing bars, cafes, performing arts spaces and galleries. Money raised includes grants totalling £6 million from the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund and from a new trust to which ownership will be transferred.

St. Peter's College, Seminary, Kilmahew, Cardross, Scotland

The college was designed by I. Metzstein, J. Cowell and McMillan of Gillespie, Kidd and Coia in 1966. The Seminary buildings within it have become at risk as the need for which the college was built – to train priests for the Catholic Church in a remote setting – has all but disappeared. The Seminary, a modular concrete structure, is a very good example of collegiate buildings from the 1960s. It is now unused and in a ruinous state. So far no purchaser has been found, nor has a scheme been put forward that could give it a new use. One suggestion is that it should perhaps become the first stabilised and protected 20th-century ruin.

The Lion Chambers, 170–172 Hope Street, Glasgow, Scotland

This is an example of a building at risk, not because of changes of use or lack of use, but because of the innovative method of construction used, which now makes it difficult to repair the building without damaging its character.

These Glasgow chambers, designed by James Salmon Jun (Salmon Son and Gillespie) in 1905, and built in an Art Nouveau style, are eight storeys in height and display a pioneering use of Hennebique experimental, reinforced concrete, slender construction. Methods of repair are being investigated, but in the meantime the building is continuing to deteriorate and the cost of repair continuing to rise.

Social Housing

1. Garden Cities & Suburbs

The great, designed, social housing schemes, built initially in response to changing social and industrial pressures from the growth of the industrial cities of the UK at the turn of the 19th/20th century, are now beginning to attract much interest as a UK phenomenon. At the same time, their overall designs are becoming vulnerable to fragmentation as individual choices work against the significance of their whole concepts.

The garden-city concept was developed by Ebenezer Howard in 1898, detailed in a book titled *'Garden Cities of Tomorrow'*. Howard was concerned with deteriorating social conditions in the towns, but also with the depopulation of the countryside. He saw Garden Cities as being an answer to both. Letchworth Garden City was the first garden city built in Hertfordshire, by Parker and Unwin and dating from 1903.

By degrees, the Garden City concept, which involved designs for the spatial organisation of people as well as for individual commercial and domestic buildings, evolved into Garden Suburbs, where housing predominated and the design concepts were centred on the layout of roads, houses and open spaces.



Westerton Garden Suburb, Bearsden, Glasgow, 1912–15. Typical houses in North View.



Cumbernauld, Lanarkshire, 1963–8. An aerial view of housing near the town centre.

The risks that particularly affect garden cities and suburbs come not from demolition or lack of use, but rather from the slow but persistent erosion of the overall coherence that typified their initial designs. These creeping threats result from the impact of new economic developments, from inadequate planning controls to stop changes to details and from application of such elements as traffic calming measures – which generate a mass of signs and other devices that often do not respect the special character of an area. Conservation areas have been designated in some garden suburbs, but the majority remain vulnerable to fragmentation and loss of identity.

Rosyth Garden City, Fife

This garden city, at the end of the Forth Bridge, was designed by A.M. Mottram and built in 1916 by the Admiralty for workers at the Rosyth Docks. It illustrates the top end of a fragmentation process, with many houses being sold to private individuals and with no conservation area to maintain the consistency of character of the houses. The result is a sad loss of coherence and character.

The Westerton Garden Suburb, Bearsden, Glasgow

By contrast, the Westerton Garden Suburb – built by John A.W. Grant, architect and Raymond Unwin, consultant, between 1912–15 – shows the benefits of designation. Through the encouragement of Historic Scotland, it has been designated as a conservation area and this has produced a positive, protective effect.

2. New Towns

The *New Towns Act* of 1946 was a major part of the UK Government's response to post World War II reconstruction and resulted in greatly increased and improved housing for the urban population. The aim of the Act was to relieve pressure on the dense and decaying inner city housing and create new, more spacious, well-serviced and orderly domestic environments. The idea was rooted in the same concept as Garden Suburbs, to recreate the space and greenery of the countryside within towns, through planning houses with gardens and interspersing them with well-designed, communal open spaces. In the ten years from 1950, new towns were created in England at Stevenage, Crawley, Harlow, Welwyn, Hatfield, Basildon, Newton Aycliffe, Bracknell, Peterlee and Hemel Hempstead.

Many of these new post-war landscapes are undervalued and at risk from the same creeping erosion as garden cities and suburbs, with individual houses being changed by owners who have exercised their 'right to buy'. As well as these risks, the towns are succumbing to redevelopment, large scale change and most of all to general neglect as budgets for maintenance and repair are reduced by Town Councils. As with garden cities and suburbs, most of these new towns were built to an overall architectural pattern and when individual houses are changed or neglected, or open spaces neglected or destroyed, this affects the value of the entire unit.

Harlow New Town

Harlow was one of the first post-war new towns, designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Gibberd managed to conserve much countryside within the town, building around established landscape trees, and created many more areas

with a rural feel through extensive tree planting. He also designed formal open spaces within the town, notably his Water Garden now listed grade II*.

Despite this planning designation, the gardens recently became at risk through a proposal to relocate them in order to re-develop the town centre. English Heritage strongly objected to this, arguing that to do so would 'damage the overall design and concept to such a degree that the proposals could be seen as amounting to demolition'. Nevertheless, in spite of this strong objection, the proposals are going ahead.

Byker Estate, Newcastle upon Tyne

The Byker estate was built for the City Council in 1970–81 to the designs of architect Ralph Erskine's Arkitektkontor, on a neglected area of Newcastle. Residents were asked for their comments on the architect's 'Pilot Scheme' in 1970–1971, a significant and innovative level of public consultation in its day.

Perhaps the most striking element of the town is the long spinal block that shields the estate from the main road and metro line. Thus, the north elevation is almost blind, whereas the south side, by contrast, is full of life, with balconies, windows and bright colours.

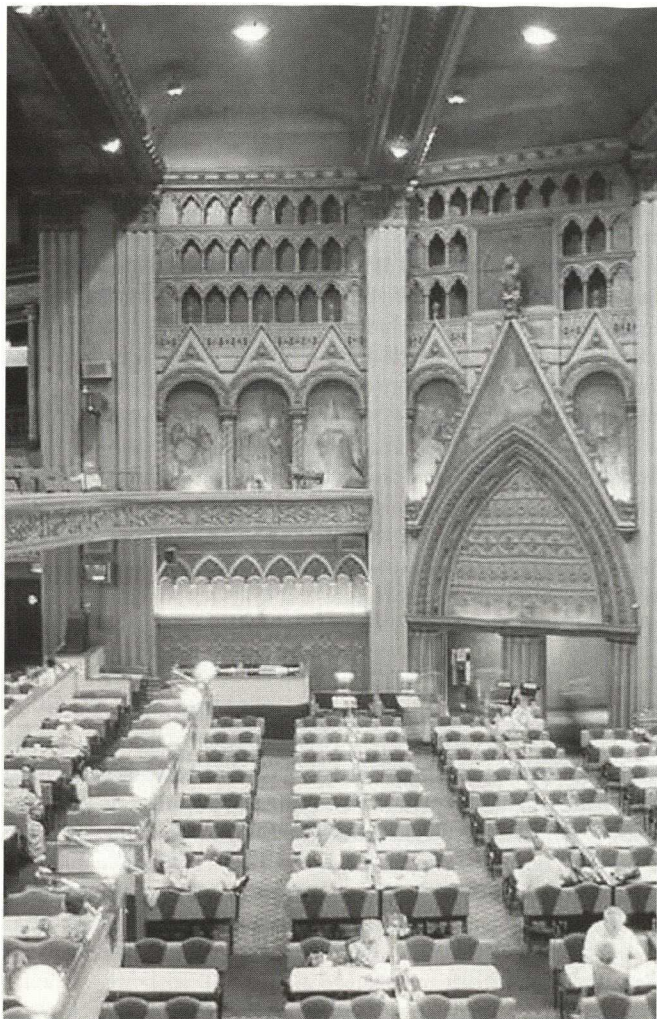
In response to what are seen as major threats to this key development, which has been identified by ICOMOS-UK as one of the top-twenty and key pieces of 20th-century heritage, the town has been proposed for listing as grade II*. At the same time, a Conservation Plan is being developed with the City Council. Time will tell whether these measures can sustain the integrity of this important example of town planning.

Cumbernauld New Town, Lanarkshire

Phase 1 of this new town was designed by Geoffrey Copcutt, and built in 1963–1968. The later phases continued into the 1970s. In the 1960s the innovative nature of the town's planning brought Cumbernauld to the attention of planners and academics throughout Europe. The planning features incorporated large communal open spaces, houses designed to be within 10-minutes walk of the town centre and central amenities providing not just shops but also theatres, libraries and local government offices. The site is now at



Byker Estate, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970–81. A section of the main spine 'wall'.



Granada, Tooting, 1932. The exotic Venetian Gothic interior of this Grade 1 listed cinema.



The Granada Cinema, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, 1939. All that remains of the cinema is the lobby area: the rest has been converted into a nightclub.

serious risk, with the Seafar housing section scheduled for demolition and the designed landscape lacking attention as a result of declining resources. The housing and landscape remain without even the protection of a Conservation Area, although the key buildings have been listed.

Cinemas

The building of cinemas in almost every town and suburb within the UK between the late 1920s and the 1940s was an extraordinary, popular, social and architectural phenomenon. Cinemas gave small towns contact with the outside world and it is 'to be doubted if any other institution ...brought more comfort to more people at a time when it was more desperately needed'. Between 1932 and 1937, 890 cinemas were built in England and by 1939 there were a total of around 5000, of which 900 were owned by Oscar Deutsch, a Birmingham scrap merchant who founded the Odeon Cinema chain in 1932.

The emergence of television in the late 1950s heralded the demise of many cinemas and the current resurgence of interest in films is now being satisfied, not by the remaining earlier cinemas, but by large, new, out of town multi-screen buildings. Of the 5000 cinemas existing in the 1930s, only 551 were recorded in 1999

and, of those, it is now estimated that only 200 are being used for showing films. Of all categories of 20th-century buildings, cinemas are probably the most vulnerable.

The first cinemas were listed by English Heritage in 1972. A recent study of cinemas by English Heritage has recommended that 30 more cinemas needed listing, in addition to the 123 already listed. In spite of listing and surveys, there have been notable casualties, such as Ernö Goldfinger's Elephant and Castle Odeon in South London, which was destroyed in 1988.

The interiors of many cinemas were wonderful baroque fantasies, often bearing little resemblance to their exterior designs. Interestingly, Bingo has been a salvation for many cinemas, leaving original interior features intact. One example is the grade 1 listed cinema, the Granada in Tooting, which retains its exotic Venetian gothic-style decoration with gold-painted arcading and folk art murals.

The greatest threat to cinemas is inappropriate use, which compromises the decoration and space of the interior. Nightclubs or health clubs can bring very unsympathetic forms of intervention.

The Granada Cinema in Harrow, London

The Granada Cinema in Harrow, built in 1937 and grade II listed, is an example of a cinema at threat from health-club use. The

Granada cinemas were a small, independent chain developed by Sidney Bernstein, who believed that cinema audiences preferred traditional style. He employed long-established theatre architects such as Cecil Masey. The Harrow cinema was built in a classical style and the interior was designed by Theodore Komisarjevsky, a Russian-born theatre designer and producer. Health-club use will compromise the wonderful interior.

The Granada Cinema, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey

This cinema, built in 1939 is grade II* listed; it was also designed by Komisarjevsky, in an Italian Renaissance style with richly decorated grille-work on the side walls and a huge chandelier suspended from the centre of a large roundel on the flat ceiling. It is currently in use as a nightclub and the interior has been subdivided. It is now threatened with further alterations.

Liberty Cinema, Southall

The Liberty Cinema is a success story. The cinema is grade II* listed, built in 1929, with a sumptuous Chinese Style interior fused with Art Deco. After successive changes of ownership in the 1970s, the cinema was closed for business and the building was placed on the English Heritage's Building at Risk Register. The future of the Liberty now looks bright. Its purchase in 1998 by a local businessman, who intends to restore the cinema to show both Bollywood and Western films, has brought strong support from the local Asian community.

Welsh Chapels and other Religious Buildings

Another category of 20th-century buildings at severe risk are Welsh Chapels. The 20th century saw a mass of chapel building in Wales, especially after the strong evangelical revival, which started in 1904–5 and continued until the start of World War I. Many were designed by notable Welsh architects who produced custom-

designed chapels. The result is a major legacy of 20th-century non-conformist church buildings in the industrial settlements of Wales.

Many of these chapels are now at serious risk as the heavy industries – such as coal-mining, slate-quarrying, tin-plate and steel-making – upon which the industrial settlements depended have declined since World War II, as have the congregation numbers.

Possibly the majority of chapels have been closed and lie unused. New uses are difficult to achieve without damaging the external appearance of the buildings and dividing up valuable interiors. In order to safeguard these chapels a Welsh Chapels Trust has been formed that aims to protect the most important redundant chapels.

Before World War II, the strength of the Welsh Chapel was so large that it outnumbered Anglican Churches by three or four to one. The chapel is still important to many Welsh communities, particularly towns, where it is often the dominant building. The loss of this group of buildings would be an irreplaceable one, to both the nation's religious culture and to its architectural and historic heritage.

Tabor Chapel, Maesteg, Glamorgan

The redundant, grade II listed Tabor Chapel in Maesteg is a typical example of a chapel at risk. The chapel was designed by the well-known architect W. Beddoe Rees of Cardiff, who wrote a design guide for chapels. It was built in 1907–8 by Lewis Williams, contractor, to replace an earlier chapel of the Calvinist Methodist community, which was built on the same site in 1840. The site is known locally as the place where the Welsh National Anthem was first sung in the vestry of the Chapel.

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