

## THE RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST

In Britain, preservation initiatives have tended to come, not from the State, but a host of independent and often voluntary organisations. The best known is the National Trust. This paper is about the work of a much newer trust, the Railway Heritage Trust, founded in 1985 by British Rail, with an initial annual budget of some £ 800,00 which has risen in stages to a figure of £ 1.75 million. The Railway Heritage Trust has two main functions. First to give grants for the repair of railways structures, not just stations, but bridges, viaducts, and even the occasional signal box. Second, to act as a catalyst, bringing in outside partners with matching funding for these projects. Most of the grants are given to structures that are still part of the working railway, but the Trust also has a role in helping to find solutions for properties that are redundant.

The spark for the Trust came from another, campaigning conservation trust, SAVE Britain's Heritage, which I and others founded in 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, with the aim of drawing attention to the large numbers of historic buildings falling into decay or threatened by redevelopment. SAVE hit the headlines with the statistic that applications to demolish listed buildings were running at the rate of one a day – a listed building being one deemed of "special architectural or historic interest" by the Ministry. These disturbing figures resulted partly from the fact that, early in 1975, there was an application, alas approved, to demolish an entire railway village of 200 houses, all listed, at Wolverton in Buckinghamshire.

SO SAVE went to war with British Rail, launching a lightning surprise attack, in the form a hard hitting exhibition entitled 'Off the Rails', at the Royal Institut of British Architects' Heinz Gallery. This was a blistering documentary of fine buildings callously demolished, abandoned or mutilated. The introduction to the companion volume to the exhibition ran "The purpose of this exhibition is to make you angry... No group of British architects have had their work less cared for than railway architects. No aspect of British craftsmanship has been less conserved than that of ousry railway engineers. No land has been more extravagantly wasted or more disgracefully left unused than railway land. If one purpose of nationalisation was to ensure that a previously private service operated for the wider good and benefit of the community, then British Rail have betrayed the cause of nationalisation. Few firms in the private sector would care as little for their buildings as British Rail." The vitriol of our attack took British Rail by surprise. A new chairman was just arriving, Sir Peter Parker, and to our surprise and delight he came to visit our exhibition and invited us to spar with him. He then proceeded to set up an Environment Panel and to appoint one of SAVE's trustees, Simon Jenkins, the author of the fierce words quoted above, to the main British Rail Board. Simon, at the time was editor of London's leading evening paper 'The Evening

Standard', and was appointed to represent the interests of London's travelling public.

After nearly a decade on the Board, Simon formed the view that an independent catalyst was needed to actively promote the preservation of railway architecture. He won the approval of the Board for a new Railway Heritage Trust, and then proceeded to make two brilliant appointments. First he persuaded The Hon. William McAlpine, now Sir William, to become chairman. Bill McAlpine is Britain's Number One railway enthusiast, quite a feat in a nation of steam fanatics, and even has his own fullsize standard gauge railway, with the steepest incline in Britain, beside his home in Berkshire. More than this, the family company, Sir Robert McAlpine, were – and are – one of Britain's best known building contractors, specialising in large engineering works. Their's was a name known and respected by every railwayman. Next, Simon secured Leslie Soane, a former British Rail Chief Civil Engineer who was just retiring as General Manager of the Scottish Region to serve as Executive Director. As a lifelong railwayman, Leslie knew all the questions to ask of his former colleagues, and whenever a prohibitive figure was mentioned for the repair of any station or viaduct, within a few minutes he would have exposed several reasons why it might be a major overestimate.

Simon was the third director, and I was the fourth. By this time my involvement with railway buildings had extended to becoming chairman of a trust set up to repair one of the largest of all redundant railway buildings, Brunel's original terminus of 1840, at Temple Meads in Bristol, which was falling steadily into decay while used as a carpark. Bill McAlpine astutely resolved that the Board of the Trust should have no more than four directors so that decisions could be quickly taken. The Railway Heritage Trust, I should explain, is not a charitable trust, but what is termed "a Company limited by guarantee" a form of trust company that does not distribute profits.

At the time, we were faced with what might seem an impossible task, a huge legacy of fine and interesting buildings, very many suffering from lack of the most basic maintenance. The point was put to me bluntly by a senior railway official. "British Rail have three priorities, the track, the rolling stock and the stations – in that order. With all the Government financial cuts we constantly face, you can't expect us to spend any money prettying up stations." Yet it soon became evident to me that British Rail was caught in a vicious downward special of dirt and dereliction. Vandalised stations, with boarded up windows and peeling paint, were putting many people off using the railway altogether. Quite simply, appearances matter.

Very quickly, we developed a simple pragmatic approach. The first thing was to make a start. Part of the problem was that expenditure on buildings was always being



*Ill. 1 and 2. Before and after views of Italianate Station at Gobowen, North Wales, built in 1844 for the Shrewsbury and Chester Railway. Abandoned and derelict it was restored with the help of a grant from the RHT.*

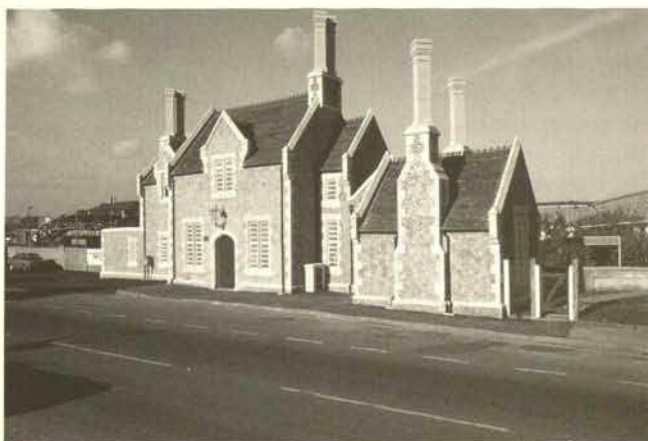
postponed. We adopted a policy of doing jobs in stages, phased over several years. Second, Leslie Soane placed tremendous emphasis on bringing in financial partners, notably County Councils and District Councils, as well as English Heritage and Historic Scotland, and government regeneration agencies. A figure of say £ 200,00 seemed prohibitive for many buildings in the 1980s but split between five organisations, and then split again over two or three financial years, the project came within everybody's budget.

Now I must mention our secret weapon. Bill McAlpine had his own collection of rolling stock, which at one time included the famous locomotive Flying Scotsman. He was also the proud owner of GE1, the 1920s inspection carriage of the General Manager of the Great Eastern Region. With an open balcony at the back, it was the perfect way to survey the railway heritage. Better still, these were excursions which no one wanted to miss. So as we carried out our tours of the different regions, we gathered together everyone who could help a project on its way. And as the board had just four members, with a quorum of two, we could, when necessary, make an offer of grant "in principle" on the spot. This was a dramatic spur to everyone attending – to British Rail staff to draw up and cost the scheme, and work out the contribution from the regional budget, and to the representatives of other bodies to come back with a grant offer of their own.

Leslie Soane was determined to complete one conspicuous landmark project within our first two years. We chose the towers of Cannon Street Station on the north bank of the Thames. The train shed roof had been destroyed during the war and the blackened towers alone remained brooding over the river. In the repairs 17,000 bricks were used to make good fractures and damaged areas and the weathered vanes were dismantled, treated for rust and gilded with 1,600 sheets of gold leaf. Ten tons of new lead were used on the tower roofs, carefully laid over new curved timbers. We treated them with as much respect as fine baroque campanile.

As Michael Stratton has just talked about the London termini, I want to begin with the smaller country and suburban stations. Here is Gobowen in North Wales built in 1844 to the designs of T. K. Penson for the Shrewsbury and Chester Railway (ill. 1 and 2). It was a small stuccoed Italianate villa, but in Britain stucco buildings do not age gracefully as they do in Italy, they blister horribly and repel every passer by. We gave a grant for a third of the cost – £ 95,000 out of £ 294,000 with contributions from the county, the district, English Estates and the Rural Development Commission. Work began in 1986 and took three years. The station emerged in a chaste new livery of pale grey and olive green, with the underside of the eaves dashingly picked out in coral pink.

*Ill. 3 and 4. Before and after views of Aylesford Station in Kent: The station has been cleaned, lost chimneys have been replaced and original windows reglazed.*



In London, we gave an early grant to the blackened suburban station at Battersea Park just south of the Thames, sandwiched between two elevated railway lines. The lofty ticket hall has lost its splendour amidst piecemeal alterations, we marbled the columns, replaced the lamps and helped strip it off the spaghetti of electric wiring.

Aylesford in Kent was another dramatic transformation (ill. 3 and 4). Opened in 1856, this little gem had been all but decapitated in the 1960s, shorn of its lofty chimneys and left to die in a corset of scaffolding. The RHT contributed £75,000 out of a total of £231,000. The coat of grime vanished, the stonework detail was replaced in cast stone, with no less than 40 trials to get the mix right. The badly rusted

to be historically authentic, but simply to show off the detail of the Victorian ironwork to best advantage.

The historic county town of Shrewsbury has a splendid Elizabethan style station of 1848. The upper floors were empty and abandoned, sodden with damp and steadily deteriorating. Now the station is restored to its rightful place as one of the main gateways to the town, handsomely floodlit at night. A new roof ensured the building thoroughly dried out, and fresh white paint made the accommodation attractive and practical for modern day use. The RHT has been able to help initiate and speed repairs and improvements at major town stations all over Britain. The Fine neo-gothic station in the port of Middlesbrough had been dam-



*Ill. 5 and 6. The ornate station at the spa of Great Malvern, Worcestershire, was badly damaged by fire but has been meticulously restored. It is renowned for its fanciful ironwork.*

iron windows, on a pretty lattice pattern, were repaired, repainted and reglazed. The station reopened in 1988, with the chimneys restored to the original design.

The most eye-catching transformation was at Great Malvern, built in 1862 by the Worcester and Hereford Railway to the designs of the architect E. W. Elmslie (ill. 5 and 6). There had been a fire in 1986 – the delight is to see all the ornamental ironwork repainted in the most festive colours imaginable. “Fruit salad” said a former head of architecture and design at British Rail, who preferred modernist rigour and simplicity. The exuberant colour schemes were the work of a retired local railwayman. They’re not purporting

aged in the war. We were able to strip away the ugly accretions that marred the exterior and restore dignity to the great ticket hall (ill. 8).

At Stoke-on-Trent, home of the North Staffordshire Railway, the 1848 station is like a large Elizabethan mansion. We put £90,000 out of a total of £226,000 which enabled the roof to be restored with the original alternating bands of tiles. One of the biggest and most lengthy programmes has been at Temple Meads in Bristol, not just on the Brunel terminus mentioned earlier, but on the majestic “through” station built to the designs of Sir Mathew Digby Wyatt between 1865 and 1878. It’s built on a 150 metre long curve with 25 wrought iron arches each spanning nearly 40 me-

tres. A cradle of scaffolding had to be built out beneath the roof to allow trains to continue to run during the restoration.

In the cathedral town of Durham, we arrived to find station officials and town councillors in despair. The station had been neglected for years and the repair bill stood at over £ 300,000 – far more than they could raise. Water was pouring in through the northbound platform canopy roof. “We’ll just have to start at one end” I said. The idea that something might be done immediately changed everyone’s attitude. We offered £ 80,000, the councillors said they would try and raise some more and very soon nearly £ 225,000 was available. Once the first few bays of the roof



Ill. 7. Balcombe viaduct on the London to Brighton line is a monumental Italianate structure with a spectacular enfilade of arches in the piers.

had been repaired and painted everyone wanted to continue. Architecturally, this was quite a modest station but it was the gateway to Durham. The main east coast line is carried over the town on a huge viaduct which gives everyone a magnificent view of the famous cathedral and castle – a World Heritage Site – on an acropolis opposite. The station was many people’s first impression of the town and it had to be a good one. Pride has been restored and flowers and hanging baskets are everywhere – though the modern canopy of the southbound platform now cries out for similar treatment.

On the south coast Bognor Regis presented a different problem. Measured on a national scale the 1902 station was

not specially impressive but Bognor Regis, despite its grand name, has nothing to match the elegant terraces of Brighton, Hove or Hastings. One of the most striking groups of buildings in the town are set on the corners of the crossroads in front of the station. Like the station, they are in red brick. British Rail, faced with a large bill for station repairs, initially proposed to demolish the station but there was strong feeling in the town that it should remain and soon it was declared a listed building. The real problem was that it was completely hidden by an ugly row of shops, really little more than shacks. We persuaded British Rail they should be demolished, and the station was once again seen to best advantage across its forecourt.



Ill. 8. The ticket kiosk at Middlesbrough Station stands in a splendid neo-Gothic hall which has been cleared of ugly alterations.

I came to open the station and I have to report disaster soon followed. The newly restored building was struck by lightning and badly damaged by fire. “That’s the end of our efforts” I thought, but under new arrangements in the run-up to privatisation British Rail had to insure the station and the cost of repair was fully covered. In the old days British Rail “carried” its own insurance, that is, rather than pay for an insurance policy, it simply decided to save the money and pay up when necessary. But of course, if an old station burnt, restoration was rarely seen as a necessity, rather the loss was a useful saving.

Canterbury West stands for hundreds of small stations disfigured by clumsy additions and alterations. We helped pay

for these to be removed and restored the columns to the recessed portico. Now it is an elegant little landmark once again. Here we also provided funds towards the repair of the only remaining overhead signal box in the south of England. It had been brought here from Blackfriars Station in London. Surbiton in South London was another sorry sight when we first visited. Built in 1937 in Moderne style to announce the arrival of the electric railway, it was now just a mass of greying, spalling concrete. To some it was hardly historic, but our offer of help remained and at last a beginning was made on the clock tower.

At Bournemouth, there was a much bigger battle. The station was huge, built in the days when long excursion trains steamed in from all over Britain during the holiday season.

step in with an offer of test repairs. Even this did not go smoothly but at last the work is underway, and the good news is that once the grime was removed and the stone accents replaced or cleaned it is suddenly an impressive sight.

Bury St Edmunds, a station of 1846, had been badly truncated but the local conservation society was battling hard to save it, though it was too large for British Rail's needs. We were able to help and once again cleaning produced a magical transformation revealing a wonderful rose coloured brick, made crisp by careful tuck pointing (ill. 9). Wemyss Bay, near Glasgow, was another station far too large for British Rail's needs. It was built in 1903 to serve the ferries across to the Isle of Bute and there was a long and elegant



*Ill. 9. Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, was threatened with demolition. Local people fought fiercely to save it and it has now been restored and cleaned with the help of a grant from the RHT.*

As a result it had a huge trainshed over the tracks – it rains occasionally at the English seaside as you know – but the glass had all been removed to save on maintenance as well as the glazed ends to the roof. It was a scene closer to a scrapyard. W. Jacomb, the engineer building the station in 1885, seems to have produced a design for a cathedral rather than a station, for the long flanking walls, punctuated by big buttresses supporting the trainshed roof, contain virtually no accommodation. So there was no prospect of generating funds through restoring space to sell or let. Bournemouth looked doomed. British Rail resolved to demolish and replace the station, but after a public inquiry the Environment Minister ruled it must stay. We were then able to

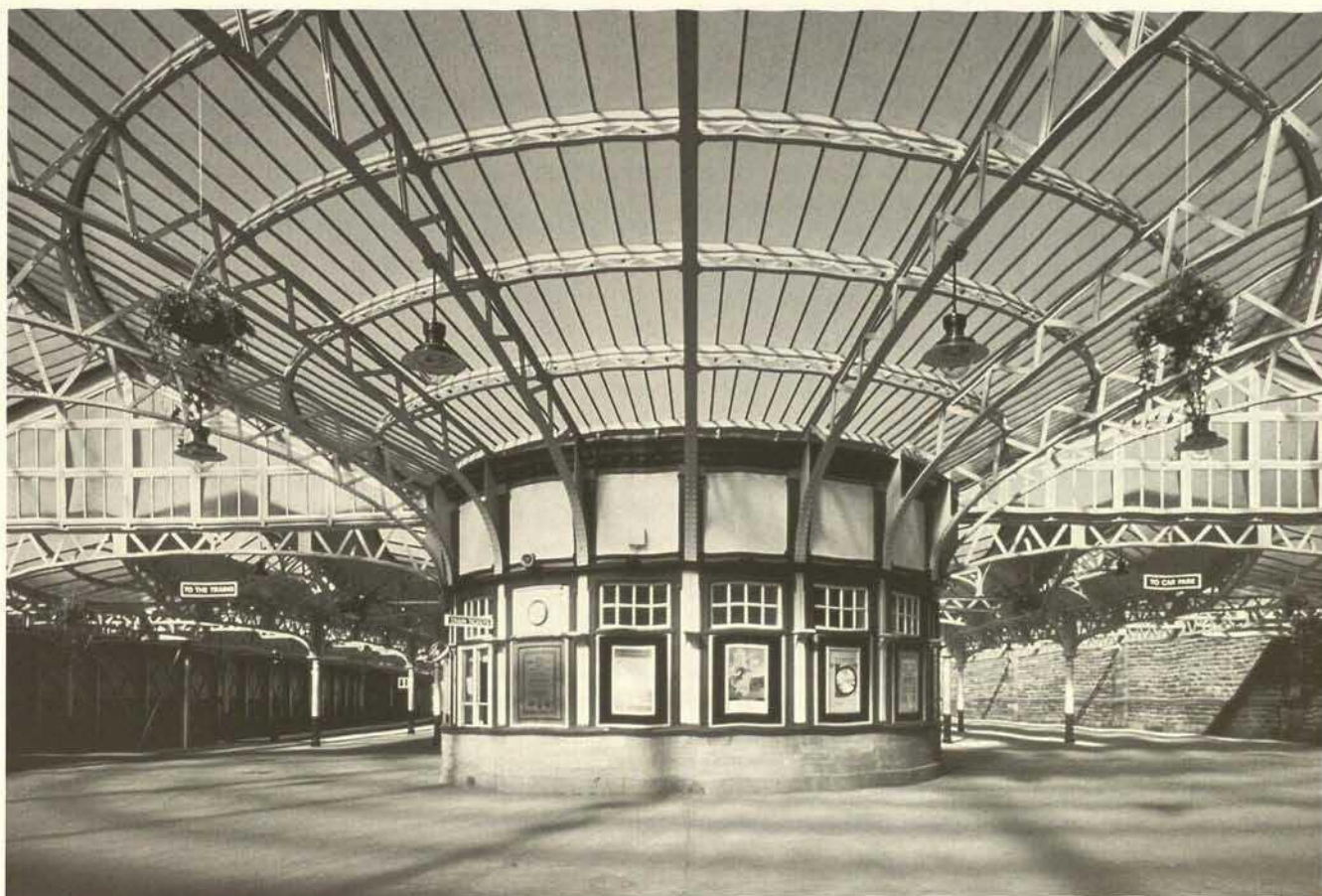
glazed walk down to the sea – rather in the manner of an esplanade winter garden (ill. 10). Our funds went towards full repair and repainting of the whole length of the platforms and the covered walk to the ferry, supported by Historic Scotland and the European Regional Development Fund who were keen to promote the revival of tourism. Now the Wagnerian Castle of the Marquesses of Bute on the beautiful Isle of Bute is open to the public, there is an added reason to go there.

A substantial proportion of our funds has gone towards viaducts and bridges. Balcombe viaduct in Sussex carries the main London to Brighton line over the Ouse Valley. Frequent trains cross at full speed so any work is difficult. Built

in 1840-41 with a run of 37 brick arches, it is a magnificent landmark (ill. 7), embellished by eight pavilions in the Italianate style fashionable at the time. While the brick structure was fundamentally sound, the stone parapets had weathered badly, particularly on the leeward side. BR's solution was simple, take off the high stone parapets and remove the pavilions and do repairs to the badly worn stones of the cornice (which served a purpose) in plastic stone. We held that the removal of the parapet would change the whole proportions of the structure and English Heritage wanted stone repairs to be carried out in real stone. The sums involved were enormous and we had to wait ten years before a start could be made. Now impressive progress has been made and full repairs is due to be completed in two years time.

contribute to test repairs on King Pier 12 and intermediate Pier 13, two of the worst effected. The cost worked out at £ 350,000 giving a likely total of £ 3 million. The final bill came to £ 3.5 million just half of what BR had feared. Now the Settle to Carlisle route is back in action as a highly popular scenic tourist route taking walkers and hikers to some of England's most remote and romantic country every day.

Leaderfoot is one out of some twelve major redundant railway viaducts in Scotland, built in 1865 for the Berwickshire Railway. Here we helped finance repair prior to its transfer to Historic Scotland as an industrial monument. Now the public can admire the magnificent view from the top – viaducts, being built over valleys, almost always have spectacular views. Glenfinnan Viaduct in the Highlands, between Fort William and Mallaig was built in 1901 for the



*Ill. 10. Wemyss Bay, built in 1903 to serve the ferry across to the Isle of Bute, was designed with a glass roof in the manner of contemporary winter gardens at seaside resorts. The RHT ensured it was handsomely restored.*

At Sheffield we have helped towards the cleaning and repair of the magnificent Wicker Arch of 1849 by the engineer Sir John Fowler who worked on the Forth Bridge. The golden stone is once more revealed and the arch restored as a focal point at the entrance to the city. The most difficult problem of all was the Ribbleshead Viaduct on the Settle to Carlisle line. Opened in 1875, the line runs across rugged moorland and was built to provide the Midland Railway with its own route to Scotland. Traffic had run down over many years, and British Rail was seeking to close the line, citing the estimated £ 7 million cost of repairing this one viaduct of 24 arches as evidence that the project could never be viable. Leslie Soane tackled the problem by offering to

West Highland line. It follows a dramatic curve and is an important and early example of the use of mass concrete. Also, I have to say it was built by McAlpine's, which prompted a celebration complete with pipers when we came to visit it. With viaducts we have learnt that many of the problems stem from failure of the original water run-off arrangements. Water seeps down through the track beds into the spandrels of the arches and on down into the piers. Spouts intended to throw water out of the structure have become blocked, and there is no way out for the water except to soak slowly downwards. The principle usually

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### Fortsetzung des Artikels von Marcus Binney

adopted in repairs is to place a new waterproof membrane beneath the tracks, ensuring that water is thrown off at high level.

The work continues. The vast canopies at Hellifield in Yorkshire had lost all their glazing. As the Settle and Carlisle Line declined, restoration looked an impossible task but now the line is flourishing again we have been able to help with full repair and repainting and they are as smart as the hothouses in any Botanic garden. A gallery and refreshment room have opened in the restored platform building. British Rail's station and structures are now vested in Railtrack. When Railtrack came forward with the dramatic news that it would spend £760 million on station repairs and improvements, it seemed that the Railway Heritage Trust itself would soon be redundant. But, Railtrack have recognised the virtue of having an independent catalyst, with a wide-ranging brief to help initiate repairs to historic railway structures all over the country. We now have a new Executive Director Jim Cornell, former Managing Director of British Rail Infrastructure Services and Richard Tinker, a former BR architect as Company secretary. In twelve years of existence we have given grants of £13,869,609 to some 563 stations and railway structures. Now that Railtrack has nearly 2,000 listed properties, there is still plenty more work to do.

At the beginning, it appeared that the best the Railway

Heritage Trust could do would be to help save a sample selection of representative buildings. In fact we have been able to help alter the whole philosophy of the railway to the practicality and desirability of preserving its past. The question now is usually when, rather than whether, to begin repairs. We have prompted urgent works on fine and interesting structures that would have simply crumbled away. At times, we have been able to avert impending demolition. We have saved handsome interiors from desecration, and often put a marker on historic fittings and furniture that might have vanished.

We have helped bring empty offices and upper floors back into use. Best of all our relatively small pot of money has helped encourage a higher standard of workmanship and finish. We have tried where possible to encourage the reinstatement of authentic colour schemes but we have not been dogmatic about this. Stations tend to require more frequent painting, cleaning and maintenance than many buildings, and there will be plenty of opportunities for further refinements in the future. Many British stations were once proudly painted in railway liveries. Brighter lighter stations, old as well as new, have a key role to play in bringing back custom to the railways and we have found people and politicians all over the country willing to respond enthusiastically to this message.