

Rescue & Reuse

COMMUNITIES, HERITAGE AND ARCHITECTURE



RIBA 

MERLIN WATERSON
EDITED BY IAN MORRISON

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In memory of Jennifer Jenkins, DBE

Chairman of the Architectural Heritage Fund, 1994 – 1997
Chairman of the Historic Buildings Council, 1975 – 1984
Chairman of the National Trust, 1986 – 1990

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Foreword

Rod Hackney

This is an important book and a noteworthy addition to the pantheon of literature issued by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). That the RIBA should proudly (and rightly) publish a book that celebrates the rescue, often community-led, of some of our finest historic buildings is a worthy recognition of how far the architectural profession has travelled and, for me, a personal milestone and vindication of the essential role of conservation professionals.

After all, architects in the 1960s and 1970s were more concerned with building new edifices, including encouraging the demolition of much that was old and out of date. This was especially true in the housing field where 19th-century homes were sacrificed as unfit for human habitation and incapable of adaptation. The Modernists held sway.

In the 1980s, I was summoned to the President's office at the RIBA's Portland Place headquarters and told that what I was advocating – community-led conservation – was something the architectural profession should not concern itself with.

I dug my heels in, determined to help my fellow residents of the Victorian terraces in Macclesfield fight off the bulldozers under the guise of so-called slum clearance schemes. So began the birth of the community architecture approach in the UK, where traditional dogma was turned on its head and the role of the architect changed from that of the authoritarian professional expert to that of interpreter and enabler of residents' wishes.

Two years ago, Ian Morrison, the editor, came to my office to discuss an idea for a book on the role of architects as enablers and supporters of community-led schemes to rescue and find new uses for historic buildings which they hold dear. I immediately reflected on my extraordinary journey over the last 50 years, a period that started with my 1815 terraced home and that of my neighbours condemned as unfit for human habitation, but now considered worthy of protection in a designated conservation area; slums not only rescued and rebuilt but revered and worth considerably more than new stock housing – the heritage premium.

I did not hesitate to offer encouragement for this book and was delighted to contribute this Foreword. It is brilliantly authored by Merlin Waterson, easy to read, unashamedly down to earth, well constructed and contains a wealth of inspiring examples of how communities and architects working on equal terms and in unison can create wonderful homes, businesses and places to enjoy that enrich our environments and our lives. This book is a must for referencing our unique architectural heritage and the constant human struggle to preserve what is important in the face of adversity.

As the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health highlighted in 1975, 'ordinary people involved in bettering their own conservation, were less likely to destroy what they created'.

Well done to the RIBA for supporting this endeavour. Read with pleasure and pride, and reflect on what is possible with the right attitude, sensitivity and approach.

Preface

Any survey of the care and reuse of historic buildings during the last half century is bound to be both a celebration and a lament. As a past president of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Lionel Brett wrote:

It is debatable whether the use of one's eyes in a modern English city is, on balance, a source of pleasure or pain.

He might have added that many cities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are likely to prompt similarly mixed feelings.

Our response to the continuing erosion of our historic villages, towns and cities can be one of resignation, with the all-too-easy inclination to blame central and local government. Yet there are constructive and braver alternatives. The case studies in this book set out to demonstrate that with vigorous local effort, often supported by organisations with experience of rescuing vulnerable historic buildings, much of what is socially valuable and culturally significant can be retained and put to sustainable new uses. There is plenty of evidence of a radical new localism which is helping to shape, for the better, our historic built environment.

Some of the case studies describe the rescue of grand buildings, including town halls, markets, great churches, castles and country houses; clearly, they deserve to feature. The book also includes successful schemes, often assembled by local historic buildings trusts, for modest survivals, such as a suburban street, a family department store, a railway shed or a cemetery

chapel. It is intended to serve as a handbook for all those who want to protect the historic buildings they value, large and small.

The case studies record remarkable successes which show how buildings can be brought back from dereliction and then play a major role in revitalising whole areas and communities. The book also demonstrates how neglect and careless disposal can lead not only to the erosion of architectural distinctiveness but also to a loss of communal identity. The examples of what has recently been achieved, described in detail in the case studies, should act as a spur to anyone wondering whether the continuing fight to protect places of historic interest is worthwhile.

What gives the book urgency is that the United Kingdom is experiencing a combination of circumstances which, unless they are confronted in an enlightened way, threaten some of the best of its built heritage. Publicly owned buildings and historic sites are being sold off. There is an imperative to build new houses on a huge scale, which is admirable as an objective, provided it is responsibly carried out. Commercial developments are being approved, sometimes with scant regard for their impact on areas of historical importance, causing radical and irrevocable change to London and many other historic towns and cities. This is happening at a time when planning controls are being questioned, and there are risks that the checks and balances which have protected much of our built heritage could be weakened. Whatever the political and economic drivers of these trends, the costs in terms of social and cultural loss are too often assessed superficially or not at all.

Economic growth, and the pressing need for new housing, does not have to involve the degradation of the UK's heritage. The case studies show how, even with very problematic buildings, and often in areas of considerable deprivation, it is possible to find creative solutions which balance the requirement for economic development and new building with the need to protect and enhance the historic environment. The enterprising adaptation of the UK's built heritage provides places which rapidly come to be cherished by those who live there. There is now widespread acceptance that it is not only possible, but also highly desirable, to integrate the best of contemporary design with the UK's inheritance of places of historic interest.

Every settlement across the UK, whether a medieval market town or postwar city centre, has a distinctive history that can contribute to a prosperous future. Many of those with the power to care for and shape the places where we live, work and visit realise that heritage can be the catalyst for renewal. It creates value and sustains economic vitality, supporting jobs, attracting investment, and inspiring creativity and cultural activity. Vigorous communities and vibrant places nurture each other.

What emerges very clearly is that the cultural, economic and social context in which these rescues have been accomplished is also changing fast. Approaches to funding, and to what makes a project sustainable, have had to change too. Only the imaginative, the fleet of foot and the pragmatic are likely to succeed in what is becoming an increasingly difficult climate for conservation. For these reasons, the messages from this book come with a real sense of urgency.

There are, however, numerous architectural practices, community organisations, and building preservation trusts (BPTs) that have shown themselves ready to take on structures in a perilous state of decay and find solutions which are welcomed and supported by the community they will serve. There is no simple formula for how these bodies should work together to rescue an important building or cherished area of historic value. Often the lead is taken by a few determined individuals who realise that to achieve their aims they have to operate through a charity, often a BPT, to be able to attract grants. Frequently, an architect is engaged at an early stage to help translate disparate ideas into a practicable scheme.

Just as there is no formula for how best to enlist support, so there are no rules for how to get the best designs for a building which needs to be repaired or adapted. The owners of the property, often trustees, will usually want to consult widely on a brief for the architect. They need to be in constant touch about what is a realistic budget. The grant-aiding bodies will need to be kept informed, and the possibility of grants contributing to the costs of preparing a scheme explored. It can be useful for the architect and the client to visit sites where similar projects have been successfully completed, and to take advice from those who have relevant experience. Most of the organisations mentioned in the book have websites, with their contact details.

The case studies following every chapter demonstrate that, more often than not, the most effective and sustainable solutions emerge after careful consultation with local people. They are community led, rather than imposed by consultants. It is the future users of the

buildings who best see their potential and who become their greatest champions. If there is a central message to this book it is that engagement with the local community is usually the way to ensure that a scheme is both successful and sustainable. The case study in Chapter 1, describing the Granby Four Streets project in Toxteth, shows just how much can be achieved by determined local action.

At times, a challenge to a needlessly destructive development is best handled by a barrister experienced in interpreting planning law. However, there are moments when unsympathetic developments have been halted by direct action, sometimes to buy time. At Granby Four Streets, some of those committed to saving its fine Victorian terraced housing lay down in front of bulldozers, picketed in front of buildings about to be demolished, and painted slogans on the steel shutters put up by the council over the windows. As the chair of the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust, Eleanor Lee, explained, it was usually done with a light or humorous touch, not least because that would be quickly picked up by the local press:

It can take many small acts of courage, but it has turned out to be a powerful thing. We started to take some very small actions, which began with cleaning and clearing rubbish, and endless brushing and painting, and the very female, undervalued domestic activities that normally take place in the home but now moved out into public spaces and started to stretch over entire streets. This breaks taboos.

During the last 40 years, following the example of a small band of dedicated pioneers, there have emerged outstanding architectural practices specialising in conservation work and experienced in working with those who turn to them for guidance. They include some of the finest architects in the world and, when given the opportunity, they are capable of using their ingenuity to turn wonderful but dilapidated buildings into assets that make a crucial contribution to people's lives. It is also the case that modern design, engineering and materials can make possible a variety of ingenious and satisfactory solutions, each with attractions. The client does not need to feel that there is only one legitimate approach when bringing new life to historic buildings, but securing the skills of a suitably experienced and skilful architect is almost always a prerequisite.

There are various conservation accreditation schemes for architects which are recognised by the RIBA. Some of the courses leading to accreditation are specially arranged to make it possible for architects to attend modules at weekends, so that the training is compatible with the demands of busy practices. Some are run in conjunction with the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, based at The King's Manor, University of York, and combine lectures with site visits to discuss best practice with other architects and builders.

This book has been jointly commissioned by the RIBA and the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF). I am grateful to my Commissioning Editor at the RIBA, Ginny Mills, and to the former Chief Executive of the AHF, Ian Morrison, who has been a diligent content editor, for entrusting it to me. Matthew McKeague, who

stepped into Morrison's shoes at the AHF, inherited the project and has supported it enthusiastically. Both organisations want to celebrate the role of architects and conservationists in the care of the historic environment, and particularly the way local communities can play a vital part in safeguarding buildings they value.

The sharing of aspirations is now much stronger than previously. In the last half century, conservation organisations have sometimes found themselves fighting for the preservation of historic areas such as markets and shops, with distinguished architects being employed by developers to argue for demolition and clearance to make way for their ambitious proposals. This happened when Basil Spence designed new flats in Hutchesontown as part of schemes to clear traditional housing in the Gorbals district of Glasgow; and when James Stirling became the architect for a scheme involving the demolition of eight listed buildings on a site opposite the Mansion House in the City of London (although his building has itself since been listed).

The public is now much more sceptical about the benefits of wholesale redevelopment and more appreciative of imaginative, carefully integrated new buildings which respect their context and retain elements of what went before. Schemes for the adaptation of the UK's great Victorian railway stations – for example St Pancras and King's Cross – and historic markets, including Covent Garden and Spitalfields, are admired, enjoyed and have proved highly profitable. In contrast, many postwar office blocks, high-rise flats and ill-conceived shopping precincts have not worn well. This book brings

together many examples of where the marriage of the old and the new has been highly successful: its message is overwhelmingly positive.

Sometimes, schemes to rescue buildings at risk involve powerful partners with great resources. However, frequently the protection of an area or building rich in history is the result of communal and voluntary effort. My choice of case studies shows how much can be accomplished by a few determined individuals whose reward is to see buildings they cherish preserved and put to good use. I have had to be highly selective, choosing projects from all over the UK which demonstrate the range of what can be achieved, and which show how the architects involved have responded to the qualities of the place they have been asked to preserve. The voice of the conservation architect is a significant part of these case studies with, among others, James McCosh describing Richard III's tomb in Leicester Cathedral, MJ Long at Porthmeor Studios, St Ives, and Jackie Gillespie talking about Royal William Yard, Plymouth.

Gathering together material for this book has been made a pleasure by the many people who have helped me and who have worked unstintingly for the buildings and areas I describe. I have benefited from conversations with Jane Kennedy, John Maddison, Kit Martin, Martin Drury, Joanna van Heyningen, Birkin Haward, Terence Dooley, Christopher Ridgway, Keith Knight, Simon Jenkins, Sir Laurie Magnus, Samantha Wyndham, Marcus Binney and Garth Sheldon. Lyndsay Summerfield at Historic England has, most perceptively, helped me to improve the text. My wife, Imogen, has always been an invaluable support and

has accompanied me on many of the visits; Ben and Alice Waterson helped with communications while we were in Canada, and my daughter Natasha has given much valuable advice based on her international conservation experience.

Staff at the AHF have also been endlessly patient and helpful. I am grateful to Gavin Richards, Ian Rice, Ruth Johnson and Andy Richardson. I am especially indebted to the regional support officers of the AHF who helped to plan my visits, introduced me to those driving forward projects in different parts of the country and who suggested buildings which needed to be included but which were unfamiliar to me. They have also proposed welcome amendments. Tessa Hilder made time to read the whole text through at a late stage and her comments have been much appreciated. I have also been helped by members of the AHF's council, particularly the chairman, Liz Peace, Richard Keen, who shared his exceptional knowledge of conservation projects in Wales, and Elizabeth Davidson, who was an inspiring guide to buildings in Glasgow.

In Scotland, I have also been assisted by Gordon Barr, Anne McChlery, Pat Cassidy, Melanie Farrow, Gareth Hoskins, Kate Gray, Lori Anderson, Una Richards, Sarah Price and David Walker.

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In Wales, I was helped by Ken Hilton and Brian Davies. Over many years, I have learned an immense amount from working with the late Elisabeth Walters, and from the books about Wales she wrote as Elisabeth Beazley.

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I am particularly grateful to Oliver Brodrick-Ward at the AHF, who has sourced illustrations and been tireless in the search for strong images; and to those who have worked on the book in the publishing department of the RIBA, especially Richard Blackburn.

Their enthusiasm has been infectious. They have my admiration and gratitude.



MERSEYSIDE MARITIME MUSEUM

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ABOVE
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1. Replace or revive?

How is it that some of the most neglected and ruinous historic buildings somehow find new uses and a new lease of life? There is, of course, no single, simple answer. Yet what such rescues usually have in common is a coming together of different contributions and skills. It is fortunate that the United Kingdom has planning systems, including the listing of historic buildings, which may be under strain, but which deserve to be celebrated and judiciously guarded. There are individuals, organisations and communities who are prepared to devote knowledge and time to protect the places they value, and who can turn to an array of charities and funding bodies for help. They can seek advice and early financial assistance from the staff of Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Cadw, the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) or the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and will frequently find that the conservation officers of local authorities respond positively. Often, the support of those with fundraising and management skills can be enlisted. Architects with conservation and design expertise, who can translate ideas and aspirations into practicable building projects, can be recruited. And there are the builders and craftspeople who know how to carry out repairs without damaging the fabric they are trying to save. What all these different contributors have in common is the imagination to envisage how an unloved or derelict building can be revitalised.

Those involved in such rescues are entitled to feel that, but for them, the project might never have succeeded. However, all but the most straightforward schemes are essentially a shared endeavour.

Left: Albert Dock, Liverpool.

Communities and conservation

Frequently, there has been an assumption that local people will not be concerned about the uncertain future facing the area they live in, or the fate of historic buildings on their doorstep. That assumption has been proved wrong time and again. One of the first architects to galvanise community support for schemes to protect Victorian housing and industrial buildings, and turn them to new uses, was Rod Hackney. In 1972, he embarked on a crusade to stop the clearance of Black Road, Macclesfield, which had been designated as slums. Instead of demolition, Hackney eventually gained permission for the residents to assist with repairs to their homes, and for the transformation of their back yards into tidy and partly shared communal spaces, under his supervision as architect. This might have had no more than local significance had Hackney not run a brilliant campaign to obtain consent, involving first the local press, then the national papers, as well as councillors and the local member of parliament. He had demonstrated the potential of what he called 'community architecture'. Hackney's ideas were forcefully advocated in his book, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Cities in Crisis* (1989), which is particularly critical of high-rise blocks of flats designed to house those moved out of 19th-century terrace housing. His criticisms have been given renewed urgency by the Grenfell Tower tragedy in London in 2017.

The initial reaction to Hackney's ideas was at best dismissive, and at worst openly hostile. Hackney's response was to stand for the post of president of the RIBA. His campaign, in 1986, turned into a battle between the advocates of the Modern Movement, including those who thought the role of the architect



fig 1.1 Rod Hackney with Black Road residents, Macclesfield.

was to produce what they believed was good for society, and Hackney's supporters, who were convinced there needed to be a radically different approach to the development of towns and cities that involved the people whose lives would be transformed by redevelopment. The RIBA presidential candidate favoured by the old guard dismissed Hackney's ideas as 'damaging nonsense', but he had misjudged the ability of the RIBA's Fellows to sense a change in public mood and aspirations. Hackney won the election with a substantial majority, and set about using the RIBA as an advocate for what he called 'Humanism not Modernism'. He had won a powerful body of supporters, not just nationally but internationally.

If the old guard at the RIBA had been more attuned to shifts in thinking about planning and architecture on both sides of the Atlantic, they might not have reacted so negatively. Much of what Hackney was saying had been brilliantly articulated in Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which showed how needlessly destructive much urban renewal was in the United States. Jacobs demonstrated how important it is to respect the qualities of liveliness and diversity among different social groups, which explains why some districts are much more valued than others. Indeed, many of Hackney's and Jacobs's ideas had already been powerfully expressed by John Ruskin and William Morris, both of whom came to realise that a thriving and healthy society is more likely to produce great art and an attractive urban and rural environment. Hackney was also tapping into other changes. Society had become less deferential, not just towards politicians but towards the professions.

Among those who responded enthusiastically to Hackney's ideas was the Prince of Wales, who visited Macclesfield to see the Black Road project for himself. When the Prince of Wales made his much-reported speech at the RIBA's 150th anniversary dinner in 1984, the press latched on to his description of the proposed extension to the National Gallery as a 'monstrous carbuncle'. Sadly, they scarcely reported those passages in his speech which advocated a more humane approach to building in historic cities. In a carefully argued section, the Prince of Wales stated:

To be concerned about the way people live, about the environment they inhabit and the kind of community that is created by that environment, should surely be one of the prime requirements of a really good architect. It has been most encouraging to see the development of community architecture as a natural reaction to the policy of decamping people to new towns and overspill estates where the extended family patterns of support were destroyed and the community life was lost.

The Prince of Wales may have embarrassed some in his audience, but he struck a chord with many both inside and outside the profession. He proceeded to set up the Prince's Regeneration Trust, which since 1999 has supported 90 projects, from Govanhill Baths, Glasgow, and the North Wales Hospital, Denbigh, to the Middleport Pottery, Stoke-on-Trent (see the case study in Chapter 5, p. 73).

Building preservation societies and community action

The changes in attitude at a national level coincided with energetic action regionally. Around the UK, local communities were setting up building preservation trusts (BPTs) that were prepared to work for the conservation and adaptation of buildings under threat. These were non-profit-making charitable bodies, and so could take on projects which local authorities might find difficult to undertake because of the time required to put projects together and to raise adequate funding from grant-giving schemes.

Preservation trusts were able to come to the rescue of buildings valued by nearby communities. For example, in the 1980s, British Rail decided they had no further use for the goods shed designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1845 on the Cheltenham and Great Western Union Railway. The repair of the building by the Stroud Preservation Trust is described in the case study on p. 17.

The way former industrial communities have supported efforts to protect a nearby historic house has sometimes taken people by surprise. When the future of Seaton Delaval in Northumberland was in doubt, few thought that an area still struggling with unemployment after the closure of its mines would become the house's champion. The building is Sir John Vanbrugh's most compact, most powerful design, but a baroque extravaganza might have been thought to appeal principally to connoisseurs, rather than to those living in a region with high levels of deprivation.

In fact, the response of people in Seaton Sluice and Blyth was extraordinarily generous and in 2009 helped to tip the scales in favour of acquisition by the National Trust. The mines may have gone, and with them local employment, but Seaton Delaval helped local people to feel pride in their own distinctive past.

Three minutes' walk from Birmingham city centre are some of the 'back to back' houses which were once home to the city's working classes. They were preserved thanks to the efforts of the Birmingham Conservation Trust, who appreciated their rarity and interest. The trust raised the funds needed for their repair, devised plans for showing them to the public – four distinct periods of occupation are presented – and carried out detailed research from primary sources, which is the basis of what visitors are told. The 'back to backs' are now safeguarded by the National Trust and are so popular with visitors that access has to be by timed ticket. These and many other projects described in this book show just how deeply rooted in local communities the preservation of historic buildings can be. Very often

fig 1.2 Seaton Delaval, Northumberland.





figs 1.3, 1.4 Back to backs,
Birmingham.

supporters are quick to see that these are not cultural indulgences but can provide local employment, engage volunteers and support economic and social recovery.

The role of the architect

A younger generation of architects has built on what Hackney achieved in Macclesfield. When Bird's Custard relocated from Birmingham to Banbury in 1964, it left behind factories close to the centre of the city. These have been transformed by Glen Howell Architects into a shopping area and creative and digital workspace which, over time, has expanded and fed into other innovative businesses. In London's East End, the firm of Selgas Cano has turned the former Brick Lane Carpet Factory into a creative hub which combines modernity with carefully preserved historic features, for instance by leaving old concrete exposed in ways they choose to call 'old-tech and non-tech'.



fig 1.5 Brick Lane Carpet
Factory, London.

The skills of a conservation architect are particularly valuable when potential new roles for a threatened building are being assessed. Architects have been trained to see how the best possible use can be made of available spaces; how access can be improved, especially for visitors with special needs; and whether or not additions to the building will enhance its use. The case studies which follow show that sometimes a sensitive and imaginative extension to a historic building, to facilitate new uses, may be the best way of protecting what is most significant about the earlier fabric.

Foundations

For centuries, builders and architects have found ingenious solutions to the task of integrating new buildings with their older neighbours. When materials were expensive or difficult to transport, there were strong incentives to add to or adapt existing buildings, rather than clear the site and start again. Most of the great cathedrals, historic towns, village streets and country houses were allowed to accrete, with the timber, stone or brick that happened to be available giving pleasing variety. Our forebears often seem to have understood the benefits of recycling building materials rather better than some of today's developers. When the Greyfriars Friary in Leicester was suppressed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, stone and timber from the friary was used to repair the nearby church of St Martin. A 'bayme' (beam) was bought from the 'freers' (Greyfriars) for 15 shillings and then used in what became Leicester Cathedral.

This was not simply a matter of economy. Both patrons and builders often wanted to give their work a sense of context and of the passage of time. At Blenheim,

Oxfordshire, Vanbrugh argued for the preservation of the ruins of Woodstock Manor because he believed that the new palace he was designing would be enriched by the survival of 'the Remains of distant Times'. Very often it was the most capable architects who were skilful at integrating their work with what came before. At the Royal Hospital Chelsea, Sir John Soane designed a stable block and new infirmary which respected the scale and elegance of the 17th-century buildings by Sir Christopher Wren, yet are entirely original: they are described by the architectural commentator, Ian Nairn, as 'something near a miracle'.

During the 20th century, the inclination to neglect or demolish historic buildings, to see them as obstacles to progress, increasingly took hold. Indeed, the urge to obliterate the evidence of the past became not merely commonplace but for many architects an ideological necessity. Existing buildings were often regarded as evidence of an unjust social order: to remove the evils of Dickensian London, it was relatively straightforward to remove the buildings associated with it.

Frequently, this implied the destruction of Georgian buildings, and there was an easy justification. Classical architecture was the style favoured by the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy. It is a measure of the barbarity of the 20th century that the systematic obliteration of architectural monuments of different periods, cultures or religions occurred again and again. The Nazis systematically destroyed Jewish buildings, in the case of the Baden Baden synagogue using its stone as road-fill and taking its congregation to Dachau concentration camp. Fifty years later, in the Balkans, ethnic and cultural cleansing was no less extreme, and was specifically directed at historic monuments such

as the Mostar bridge, of which the Croatian Slavenka Drakulić wrote:

The bridge in all its beauty and grace was built to outlive us; it was an attempt to grasp eternity. It transcends our individual destiny. A dead woman is one of us – but the bridge is all of us forever.

For the Croats, the restoration of the bridge was as significant as its destruction; just as after the reunification of Germany the rebuilding of Dresden's Frauenkirche, destroyed in the bombing of 1945, was highly symbolic. The repair of historic buildings in Northern Ireland, frequently damaged for sectarian reasons, has taken on great significance. It is as much about reconciliation and the rebuilding of communities as it is about conservation. For these reasons, projects in Northern Ireland have been given prominence in Chapter 9, which considers both community and architectural integration.

The desire to sweep away buildings for ideological reasons was a feature of postwar Britain. The terraced housing of the great industrial cities of the Midlands and the North had become, to many, symbols of exploitation. Whole areas of Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham and many other cities were almost completely cleared to make way for poorly designed and cheaply built high-rise flats: not only terraced housing but the factories and churches, warehouses and pubs were swept away as well, and with them the communities they had served.

Glasgow provides an extreme example but was by no means exceptional. In 1946, the city engineer designed a new road system that would cut off central

Glasgow from the surrounding districts. The centre itself was to be cleared to make space for high-rise slabs. Comprehensive redevelopment was justified by the myth that areas like the Gorbals, where there was severe deprivation, consisted entirely of teeming slums. In reality, many of the tenements were soundly built, with good-quality, middle-class houses integrated with them. Driving through the centre of Glasgow in the early 1970s meant witnessing street after street of stone-built terraced houses being smashed apart.

Areas of Norwich received similar treatment. The local authority did more long-term damage to its stock of fine historic buildings than was caused by the persistent raids of the Luftwaffe. Worcester fared even worse. The City Planning Department (not the Architect's Department) and the council cleared the area immediately around the cathedral to make way for a main road that acts like a python wrapped around Worcester's greatest building. In scores of other historic towns and cities, the damage was not just to their historic centres but to the social fabric of their suburbs. Very often such schemes were motivated by the need to find solutions to problems of congestion and to promote economic growth. As in our own time, the objectives were worthy but the solutions often misguided and destined to fail.

The comparison with historic cities in other European countries is often striking. For example, the great medieval city of Tallinn, in Estonia, was bombed first by the advancing Germans and then by Soviet Russia as the Baltic States were reoccupied. After the war, the middle-class suburbs, often consisting largely of wooden houses, were neglected but not swept away wholesale. New Soviet blocks of flats were built on the

outskirts of the city and were quickly found to have the familiar problems of vandalised communal areas and bleak open spaces around them. However, historic Tallinn remains largely intact and has played a vital role in the revival of the Estonian economy.

Why was the narrative so different in different countries? In the UK in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was a widespread acceptance in architectural and planning schools that the Modern Movement provided the key to a better social order. The most articulate and influential exponents of this belief were often architects such as Walter Gropius – driven out of Germany when the Nazis closed the Bauhaus and other progressive institutions, and immensely influential in England. The study of architectural history in the UK was also shaped by refugees such as Nikolaus Pevsner who, in his *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1936), argued – not always convincingly – that the buildings of the Modern Movement derived from the enlightened ideas of the best 19th-century architects.

Pevsner probably did more than anyone else to foster an appreciation and understanding of Britain's historic buildings through his indispensable, county-by-county *Buildings of England*. However, he had scant regard for the social interest or value of the buildings he despised. In the *Shropshire* volume, for instance, he dismissed Shrewsbury's General Market, an Italianate building of 1867–9 by Griffiths of Stafford, as 'the chief Victorian contribution to public architecture in the town, and not one to be proud of'. Shortly afterwards it was demolished, as was the Shirehall of 1836–7, a handsome building in Portland stone by Robert Smirke, which was pulled down to make way for a concrete-clad car park.

If there was a zeitgeist influencing the architecture of the 1950s and 1960s, it favoured the alliance of the Modern Movement with the bulldozer, and the outcome was often characterless high-rise flats and shoddy shopfronts. It was happening all over Europe, in the United States and in the Soviet Union. There were notable exceptions, of course, such as the buildings on London's South Bank, Goldfinger's Trellick Tower and BDP's Preston Bus Station. But these rarely attempted the sympathetic integration of the best contemporary architecture with cherished historic buildings, which could often have been adapted to new uses.

There were, however, architects who built up practices capable of undertaking major conservation schemes, and who showed how repairs to cathedrals, public buildings and private houses could be carried out in an exemplary way. The architect often chosen by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) was John Macgregor. For example, in 1951 he succeeded in repairing the Saxon church at Elsted, at the foot of the Downs, which Pevsner's and Nairn's *Sussex* described as 'not what it seems at first glance', by providing a new nave which 'preserved all the old work without copying it'. Macgregor designed modern buildings which sit happily alongside historic ones, including ziggurat social housing at Lennox House, in Bethnal Green, London.

In East Anglia, Donovan Purcell helped to build the reputation of the firm Purcell Miller Tritton – in due course to be renamed simply Purcell – and was for many years architect to Ely Cathedral. Two later partners, Michael Morrison and Jane Kennedy, have made significant contributions to buildings as varied as the National Gallery, London, St George's Hall in Liverpool, and Shackleton's 'temporary' huts in Antarctica.