



TRUST MOVES TO RESTORE VERDANT WORKS' HIGH MILL

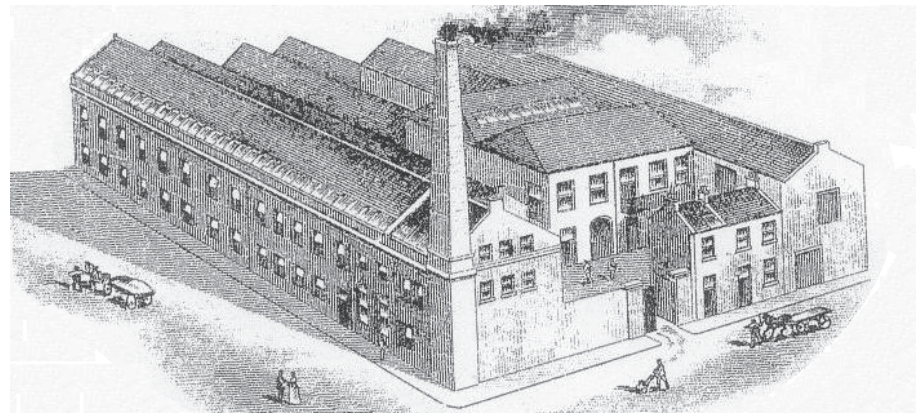
Tayside Building Preservation Trust (TBPT) is embarking on a new project to secure the future of Verdant Works' High Mill. Prior to the Trust's involvement Dundee Heritage Trust, who are the owners of the site, had considered applying for consent to demolish it. The High Mill was not in use and there was concern that it was becoming a risk to public safety.

The mill complex is category A listed and was constructed in 1833 for the flax spinner David Lindsay. An important piece of Dundee's social and architectural history, the whole ensemble is a rare and exceptionally complete survival of a small jute works.

Dundee Heritage Trust did not have the funds to restore the whole of the High Mill during their work to create The Verdant Works Industrial Museum between 1991-1996. As a consequence the building has remained derelict since becoming redundant in the 1960s. The loss of any component of Verdant Works would be of huge detriment to the site and the Trust is seeking to arrest the current decay by identifying a sustainable new use.

Dundee Heritage Trust and Dundee Historic Environment Trust have contributed £25,000 between them to fund an options appraisal and TBPT have engaged a professional team who are now undertaking the necessary work. The City Council are keen to see progress as re-use of the High Mill could be a catalyst project to help encourage investment and redevelopment within the Blackness Conservation Area.

The Trust's plan is to see the High Mill re-used as an archive centre for Dundee. Negotiations are ongoing with the Universities of Dundee and Abertay, the City Council, DC Thompson



and the Alliance Trust over transferring their archives to the High Mill once building works have been completed.

The adaptation of the High Mill as an archive centre will complement the existing Verdant Works Industrial Museum as it will allow future visitors to gain a fuller understanding of both the site and its history. The archival material documents the jute industry which came to define the city during the 19th and 20th centuries, but also the historical links between Dundee, America and India which developed as a consequence.

The Verdant Works' High Mill project is a major commitment for the TBPT. With a projected cost in excess of £10 million it will

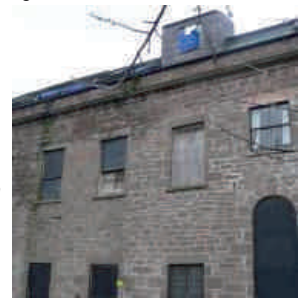
be the Trust's biggest undertaking yet.

Financial support will have to be sought from a wide variety of bodies and the situation will be complicated by the fact that the work will have to be split into two phases. A first phase of emergency works to the High Mill followed by the acquisition of adjoining property to provide the additional storage that an archive centre will require and all of the fitting out that will be necessary to both display, access and store what in many cases will be unique and valuable material. Historic Scotland have indicated that they are prepared to offer up to £500,000 or 40% of the costs of the emergency works, whichever is the lower figure, which of course, leaves TBPT with the problem of how to quickly raise the remaining 60%.

Cast-iron supporting columns and the roof of the High Mill.



The High Mill showing portions of both the restored and unrestored parts.



NOTES FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

This, the first newsletter for some two years, marks the end of an era which has been dominated by Gardyne's Land. The buildings are now functioning successfully as a backpackers' hostel. Over the last year they have won a clutch of important national conservation and regeneration awards which allows a line to be drawn under the project.

As reported above, we move on with an initial study of the High Mill at Verdant Works, a project which has the potential to be of even greater benefit to the city than Gardyne's.

The Trust could not function without the assistance of the postgraduate conservation students and two of last year's class, Stephen Brothwell and Elliot Mathew, have produced this newsletter.

Fittingly, it features a number of buildings at risk which have been the focus of some of the students' practical work. The idea for the inclusion of this article came out of a visit from Alex Adamson, the Scottish Civic Trust's buildings at risk officer and a graduate of the conservation programme.

Following an article on the effects of the recession, the Merchant's House at Brechin is most appropriately, the final feature. Since undertaking a feasibility study which established just how interesting and important this building is, the Trust has watched with increasing concern its continued decay over the intervening ten years. It is therefore pleasing that it appears to have a secure future.

People who are interested in the Trust's work may want to consider becoming a friend. See details on the final page.

Neil Grieve

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Over two thousand three hundred buildings are recorded as being at risk in Scotland according to the Buildings at Risk Register.

The Scottish Civic Trust (SCT) established the register in 1990 to publicise the fate of Scotland's neglected architectural and historic heritage. The register would not be possible without funding from Historic Scotland.

The considerable work from SCT and others has seen over a thousand buildings restored since the register started. This compares favourably with the 348 buildings on the register demolished in the same period.

An EUC graduate, Alex Adamson of the SCT, told Tayside Building Preservation Trust that the register's role remains vital.

"Even with the recession we are still seeing more buildings saved than demolished. People are aware of the need to keep listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas, including many planners and developers."

"But," he says, "some developers are seeking to maximise their profits and are using the recession as an excuse not to take on conservation projects."

Adamson argues that the inclusion on the list does not mean that a local authority is failing in



Dunalastair House, Perthshire has not been valued and has deteriorated in the last 30 years.

its duty to conserve.

As Adamson says "Dundee has perhaps the largest proportion of industrial buildings at risk of anywhere in Scotland."

"The fact that these buildings have been retained out of use is a testament to the city. Consequently lots more buildings have been saved."

The register includes numerous building types, ages and locations but statistics alone fail to give a true impression of the individual significance of many of these structures.

The work of this year's EUC students demonstrates the historic and architectural value of some of these buildings and emphasises the vital role the SCT continues to play in promoting them.

A diverse selection of Scotland's architectural heritage at risk is summarised below.

For more information about buildings at risk in Scotland and to view the register visit:

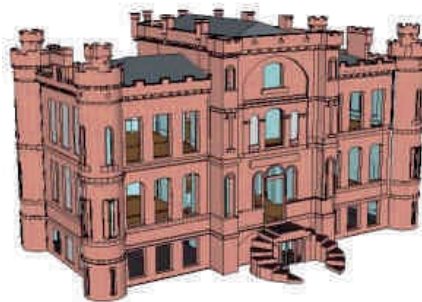
www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk

GELSTON CASTLE, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE

The grade A listed Gelston Castle, is recognised as the last Adam castle-style house in Scotland and was constructed in the early 19th century for Sir William Douglas.

Douglas was a Scot who had made his vast £4 million fortune in America (equivalent to £2.7 billion in today's money).

After his death, the Castle continued to be a family residence until 1939 when it was requisitioned for use as a school for delinquent



boys. This use however left the castle's fabric in a poor state of repair and after the war the whole estate was sold. At that time the lead flashings on the roof of the castle were removed to avoid the payment of rates.

Since that point, the Castle has been left to decay. Although the interiors have been lost and cannot be restored the survival of the shell is remarkable and will hopefully give rise to a plan to secure its future. The owner is willing to sell if a realistic proposal is made.

EAST LODGE, PERTHSHIRE

The design of lodges generally reflects estate rivalry with each one trying to outdo their contemporaries. The grade B listed East Lodge at Drummond Castle is a good example of this one-upmanship.

Built in the 1840s, it would have once resembled a small Italianate folly. As with most small lodges it was extended throughout its history to adapt to the needs of the occupiers. The circular wing was constructed in the early twentieth century by architect G.T. Ewing.



There is a strong possibility that the lodge was built as part of a wider scheme of castle improvements for the arrival and three day visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1842.

The lodge was continually occupied until 1993. Since then the property has remained empty and at times boarded up.

The leaking lead and zinc roof detailing is causing wet rot, initially in the roof structures and now in a small area in the floor.

POLLOKSHAWS WEST STATION, GLASGOW

The B listed Pollokshaws West Railway Station built in 1847 is the oldest surviving railway station in Glasgow. It is one of the small number of historic landmark buildings within the neighbourhood of Pollokshaws which was extensively redeveloped in the 1960s.

The station is atypical of the period, an early example of the railway architecture that would become common in the later 19th century. The use of brick as the principal building material is also very unusual at this time.



Although the station is in use, it is unmanned and the buildings have been vacant since 1998. Maintenance issues and poor quality repairs have left the site vulnerable to deterioration and vandalism. 'Sterilisation' works undertaken by First ScotRail have seen the interior decoration and window frames removed as well as the slates and lead flashings replaced.

Although this has stabilised the building its character and significance have suffered as a result.

UGSTON OLD FARM, EAST LoTHIAN

Located near Haddington, Ugston Old Farm, is a grade A listed farm steading. East Lothian has long been a key agricultural county and has a wealth of listed farm buildings. Few of these date back as far as Ugston to the 16th century, however.

The building appears to have formed part of a much larger property. It has been considerably altered and reduced for farm use. The huge barrel-vaulted room on the ground floor and curtailed fenestration on the first floor provides evidence of these massive changes.



As a result of changes in agricultural practices, the steading has been surrounded by layers of later development. As a result it has largely fallen out of favour and is now used for storage.

In common with other farm buildings of the period it is too small and would require extensions to make re-use attractive. Also, being part of a working farm makes finding an alternative use difficult. Consequently it has suffered from severe deterioration and its future remains uncertain.

BOOM OR BUST? THE RECESSION'S AFFECT ON CONSERVATION

We have all heard about the high profile casualties of the recession, Glasgow's airport link and Edinburgh's third and fourth tramlines included. But the recession is having an impact on development pressures closer to home, providing both opportunities and pitfalls for today's conservation lobby.

In Dundee the approved extension to the Overgate Centre, which would have required the demolition of listed tenements at 34-36 Lindsay Street, has been called off at least temporarily.

In Perth the proposed shopping centre and new pedestrian link between High Street and Mill Street has also been shelved. This plan has been criticised as it involved the demolition of buildings within Perth's central conservation area and on its effect on the enclosure of the High Street.

While negative connotations predominate, recessions can actually be good news for conservation - as past experience has shown.

Most now recognise the historic link between economic recession and the growing



Culross in Fife has only survived intact because a decline in its fortunes made redevelopment unprofitable.

importance of the conservation ethos as the need to reduce costs turns attention towards retaining what is already there.

John Tarn described the 1974 oil crisis as "the inevitable pause in what had been a breathless era, which allowed the development of conservation strategies."

Indeed, the mid 1970s and 1980s saw some considerable victories for urban conservation,

such as the ultimate demise of the 1967 Princes Street renewal plan in Edinburgh, the proposed inner ring road for York and the 1968 Greater London Council redevelopment plans for Covent Garden.

Yet that was in an era in which the conservation movement was still finding its feet. The current recession may bring similar short-term benefits to our historic centres but this will only translate into the longer term if it provokes a reappraisal of the relative costs of conservation against new-build.

In particular we must guard against seeing conservation as an unaffordable luxury in a time of austerity.

Cost-cutting by developers has forced the building trade to re-focus on repair and maintenance work. Consequently professional advice and training are now more important than ever.

If handled well this recession could provide the necessary impetus to acknowledge the economic, environmental and social benefits of conservation.

MERCHANT'S HOUSE STRIPPED BARE!

More than a decade after Tayside Building Preservation Trust first took interest in the Merchant's House, 68-74 High Street, Brechin, it seems that the building's future is secured. Kit Martin (Historic Houses Rescue) Ltd is preparing a scheme to convert the property back to residential use with financial assistance from Brechin's Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Renewed interest in the property was sparked by the Trust's discovery of a remarkably old ashlar post roof. It consists of 24 oak timber frames, pegged with large projecting treenails. Dendrochronological analysis in 1999 showed that some of the roof timbers had come from trees in Scandinavia felled in the spring of 1470.

This raised more questions than it solved as other known examples of imported timber roofs, including Stirling Palace, were within buildings of far higher status than the Merchant's House.

The need for a new conservation plan to inform the current proposals for re-use has allowed two EUC students the opportunity to look further into this issue.

The idea that the timbers in the roof were felled for the Merchant's House could be immediately discarded as records indicate that the High Street was devastated by a fire in 1672. Archaeological investigation has also revealed that Merchant's House is simply too young.

It is almost certain that a 1400s high-status building would have been connected to the cathedral given its dominance of burgh life. The more spacious plots in the former cathedral lands to the west of the High Street would also have escaped fire damage in 1672.

The histories of some of the ecclesiastical buildings in Brechin that might potentially have

Looking along the crossbeams of the 1470 dated Merchant's House roof. Some of the beams have assembly marks and many beams show signs of reworking. The discovery of its true age was the main reason the building was relisted by Historic Scotland in 2000 category A. This makes the roof of national importance.



Depiction of central Brechin around 1550. The red spot depicts the location of the Merchant's House today while the blue spot is the Precentor's Manse and possible source of the roof timbers © Angus Council 2010.



The Merchant's House showing the front elevation. The nepus gable on this elevation is visible in old photographs and was removed in the 1960s.

been the source of the Merchant's House roof were then examined. This allowed the Archdeacon's Manse, the Chancellor's Land and the Chaplain's Land to be ruled out as they fell redundant soon after the break with Rome in 1560 implying an implausibly early date for their timbers to have been re-used.

Conversely, the Bishop's Palace, Maison Dieu, Brechin College and Little Mill were all recorded as extant until the 1700s, which would post-date the building of the Merchant's House.

The only possibility the records allow for is that that the roof originated from the Precentor's Manse. The precentor, who was the leader of the choir, would have been an important figure in the church, albeit not of the same status as the archdeacon or bishop.

The manse would consequently have been a considerable building and, after the Reformation, it served as a hospital until at least 1671. Council records report that the manse was, however, demolished shortly after the fire as it had become uninhabitable.

The correlation between the decline of the Precentor's Manse and building date of the Merchant's House supports this connection, and may have solved one of the town's greatest secrets.

Become a friend of Tayside Building Preservation Trust and help save vulnerable buildings in our region.

Friends will receive:

- Invitations to conservation lectures
- Periodic site visits to our projects
- Newsletters
- Opportunities to become involved in projects

To join send a minimum donation of £10 to:

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