

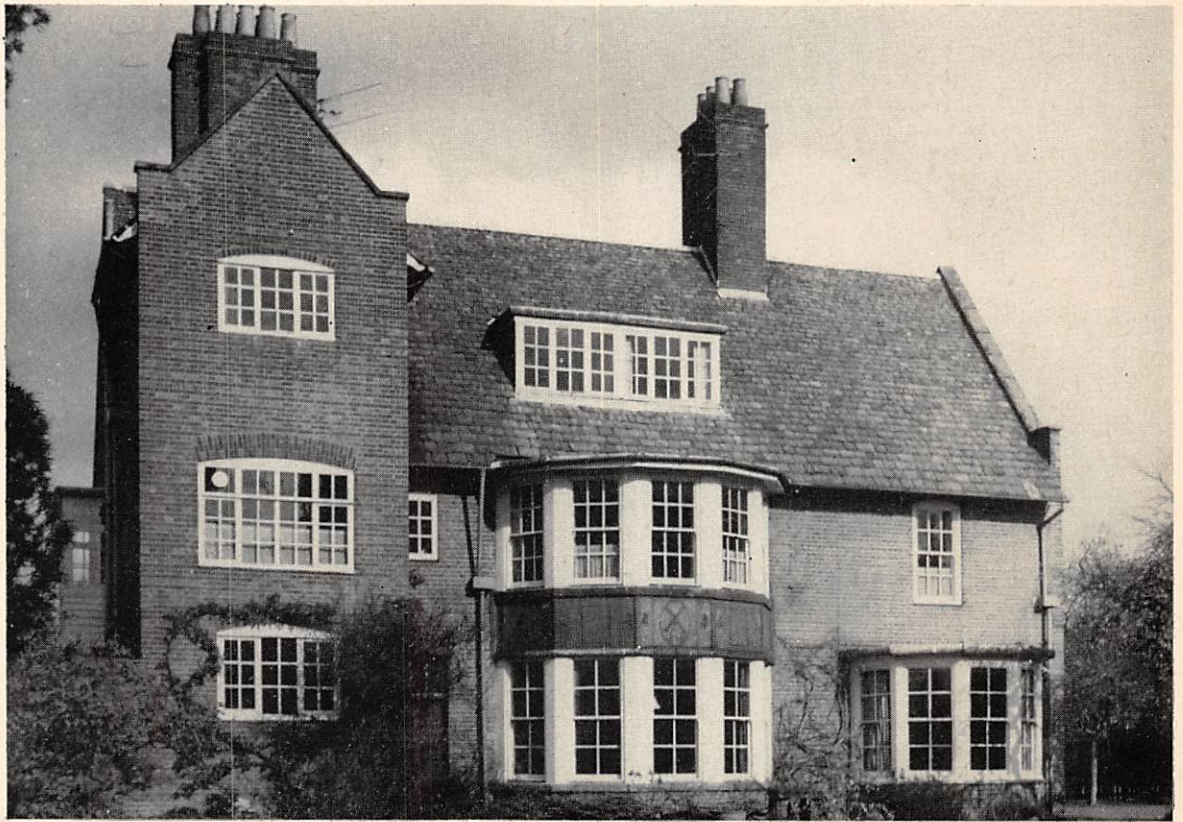
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SAVING LEICESTER'S FACE



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Threatened: "Inglewood", Ratcliffe Road, Leicester. A house designed by the famous Leicester architect and designer Ernest Gimson and built in 1892 for his own occupation. This building was recorded by the Society in 1974 in the listed building survey and in 1975 is threatened with demolition.

ALREADY 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, has entered its second quarter and, throughout Europe, its significance is being recorded and celebrated in many different ways. Never before has there been such a concentrated effort to illustrate that, be it in Birmingham or Berlin, Lyon or Leicester, Nice or Nottingham, the hopes, the aspirations the very mode of life of "people" as well as the development of their skills and aesthetic appreciation are recorded in the building heritage.

It was once so rightly said:

"Cities are a product of time. They are the moulds in which men's lifetimes have cooled and congealed giving lasting shape, by way of art, to moments that would otherwise vanish".

Many of the moulds themselves have vanished and continue to vanish and with them the unique moments they once recorded. While appreciating that society must not be encumbered with useless piles rich in sentimental associations but devoid of present day application, we in Leicester embarked upon a survey of listed buildings, with the hope of encouraging concern and appreciation of our heritage and thus of greater consideration before irrevocable steps were taken.

Tribute must be paid to all who participated – members of the Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects as well as of the general public, all of whom brought and applied great enthusiasm and each his own specialist knowledge and ability.

What better team could there be for as surely as "people" are the *raison d'être* of architecture, "people" should express their concern for it.

L. LLOYD-SMITH

President, Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects

IT WAS in 1973 that the Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects felt that a reappraisal of the list of local buildings thought worthy of special attention had become a matter of urgency and decided, through its environment committee, to carry out a survey to examine and assess the merits of every building within the City of Leicester. It was fully appreciated that such a task was of enormous proportions but the issues at stake were of such importance that there was clearly no alternative.

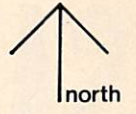
The operation involved hundreds of hours and many miles of travelling by enthusiastic architects, members of the Photographic Society, Civic Society and others who shared the concern. The Society now feels that this undertaking can make a valuable contribution to European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 and an exhibition will help to make the findings more widely known.

The early objectives of the "Listed Building Survey" – as it became known – were to influence and educate public opinion and to work with both local and national authorities to provide and expand an awareness and appreciation of the city's heritage in the built environment. These aims are very close to those of the EAHY whose objectives are briefly:

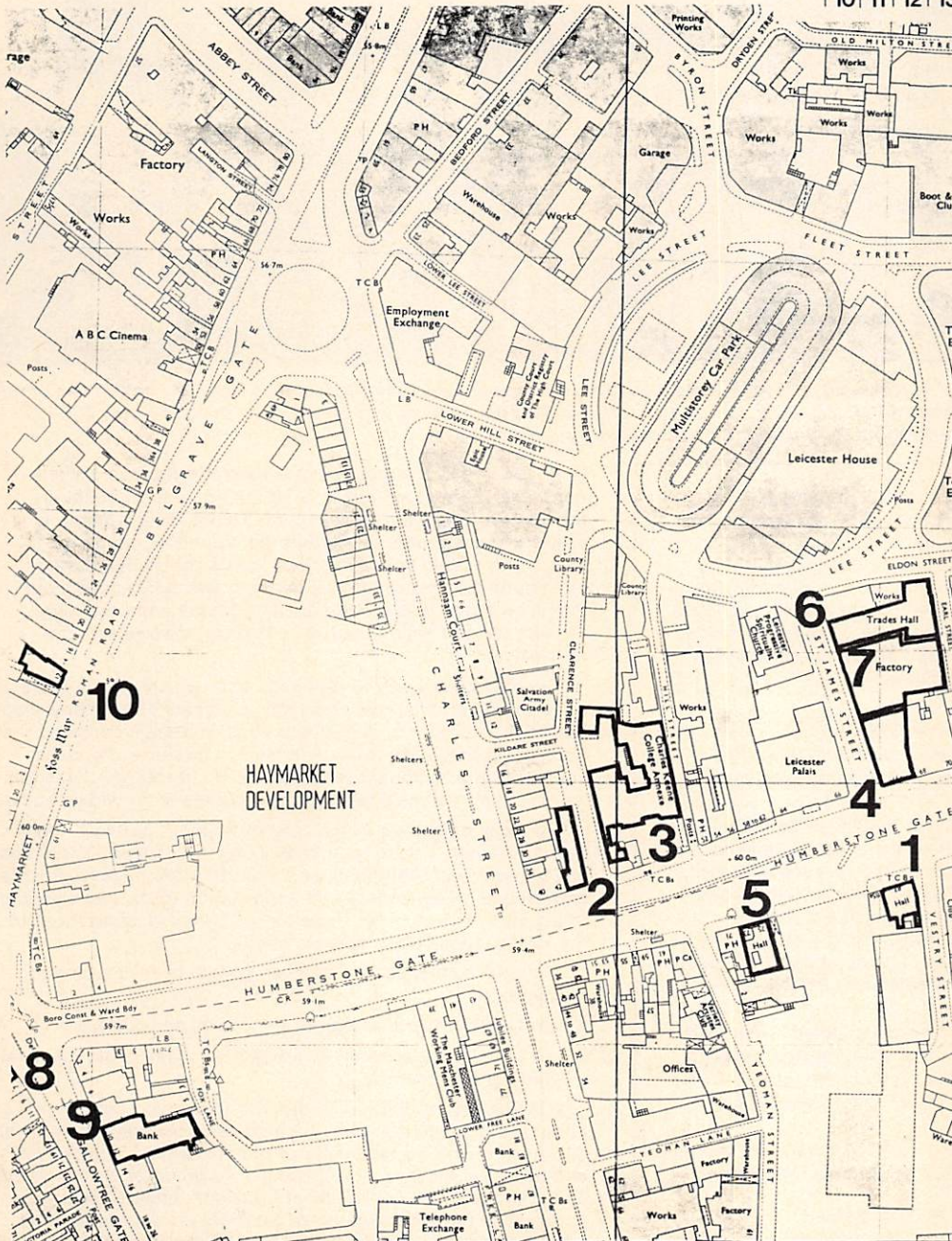
1. To awaken interest of European people to their common heritage.
2. To consider the character of our towns and cities.
3. To protect and enhance buildings and areas of architectural and historic interest.

It is apparent to the public that our towns and countryside are in danger of being ruined by the ruthless demolition of some of our finest buildings, regardless of their individual architectural and historical merit or of their value as a group of buildings. Bad and unsympathetic development frequently dictated solely by commercial interests aggravates the problem. A growing and vital demand for more public participation in these matters is gaining a healthy impetus and acquiring respect by many

one mile



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0.14

0 50
metres

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS

REVISION OF THE STATUTORY LIST
OF BUILDINGS OF ARCHITECTURAL
OR HISTORICAL INTEREST

D

Ref on map

1

map No

0.14

APPROXIMATE DATE OF BUILDING

1868

ROAD/STREET

HUMBERSTONE GATE

BUILDING ARCHITECT IF KNOWN

NUMBER/NAME

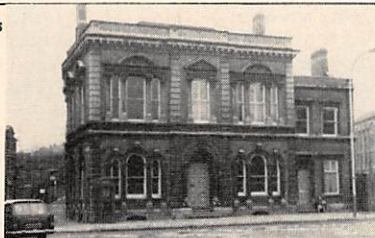
ST. MARGARETS VESTRY HALL

SIDE OF STREET N.S.E. or W.

SOUTH

1. Is the building of architectural value. ☒ (FACADE)
2. Is the building a good example of the demands of a particular use, irrespective of architectural merit.
3. Is the building a good example of a particular architect's work.
4. Does the building form an important part of a 'terrace' or group of buildings.
5. Does the building form an important part of the street or neighbourhood scene. ☒
6. Is the building a good example of a building technique or type of craftsmanship.
7. Any other reasons (p.t.o. and state briefly).

PHOTOGRAPHS



NAME & ADDRESS OF PERSON(S) SUPPLYING THIS INFORMATION

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R. Montgomery

Above: Specimen survey form. One such form is completed for each building or group of buildings to be noted. The form has been completed in respect of a building in section 0.14 (left) shown as No. 1 on the map. This building has been "spot-listed" by the Department of the Environment since being recorded in the survey. It is now threatened with demolition to make room for office development. Left: Section 0.14 from the key Plan (inset). This is an example of a typical map section and the buildings noted during the survey are numbered, and are used to illustrate this article. The margin on the right hand side is left blank for notes.

responsible authorities. It is, however, natural that lay opinion should look to the architectural profession for leadership and professional guidance. Local amenity societies are being formed and, as pressure groups, they are doing valuable work, particularly on social problems, but what has become known as the "built environment" must inevitably be the special responsibility of the technically qualified, and it is for this reason that the Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects decided to accept this responsibility within its own area.

The aspirations of the society are perhaps to be found in an article written in connection with a recent exhibition in London: "Never in the history of any nation has vandalism been carried out so consistently and for so long".

The words of a Government circular directed to local authorities amplify this: "The number of buildings of special architectural and historic interest is limited and has already been reduced by demolition, especially since 1945, and unless this process is completely arrested or at least slowed down, the disappearance of virtually all the listed buildings can be predicted in a calculable time".

It is perhaps ironic that a "slowing down" may indeed occur but simply because, as a mathematical fact, there will be fewer listed buildings available for demolition should the present trend continue.

The destruction of so many beautiful and irreplaceable buildings has been progressive for half a century but the crisis point has been reached only in recent years. This authorised vandalism assumed serious proportion just after the first world war and was followed by fluctuating peaks up to 1938 by which time an average of 20 large "stately homes" were being destroyed each year. When the British Army occupied many of the famous houses during the second world war, so much wanton damage was caused by misuse and thoughtless adaptations that they were later found to be beyond economic repair and restoration. It is perhaps true to say that more stately homes were lost this way than by Hitler's bombs!

And what of Leicester?

It was anticipated that the benefits of the Listed Building Survey would take several forms. Principally it was realised that members of the Society and their associates would, as a result of their indefatigable tour of the city, become intimately aware of its buildings – not only the familiar examples but also the less apparent vernacular types, which contribute equally to the character of the built environment. Such an awareness would broaden their knowledge of Leicester, make the list more comprehensive and thus permit the expression of informed opinion where alteration or demolition was proposed.

Within this sphere of its activity the society also saw its future role in arousing public concern arising from any publicity which may result from this survey. The last few years have seen a remarkable awakening of public interest in many aspects of the environment by various sections of the community and no longer can decisions be made at Government or local authority level without involving public participation. It is to be hoped that the public will respond to this recently acquired right.

The City of Leicester has a long and distinguished history and the buildings which make this city are themselves a mirror of its social and artistic aspirations. In this city of prosperous commercial activity, pressure for changes in the fabric of the built environment, if completely unfettered, would destroy or overlay many buildings which, from a purely commercial point of view, might initially be considered obsolete yet which foresee considerable social and artistic significance. To deprive the city of such buildings would certainly result in the loss of its history as recorded by the architectural heritage and may well lead to a permanent impoverishment of the life of its inhabitants.

It must not, however, be thought that the efforts of the Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects are concerned solely with preservation. A lively city cannot consist of buildings which are retained purely as monuments to the past. Buildings should only be preserved when they are serving a useful function, or when, while retaining their original architectural or



Electrical shop, Humberstone Gate, with interesting Victorian facade which has been brightly and colourfully decorated. (No. 2 on map).

College Annex (originally Wyggeston Girls' School) Humberstone Gate. Designed in 1877 by architect Edward Burgess in Gothic style and typical of Victorian Schools. (No. 3 on map).

historical qualities, they can be so adapted that they contribute functionally as well as aesthetically to the city and do not become a burden to society. New buildings must rise alongside the old. History illustrates with what success this can be done, but they must have respect for the style and character of their neighbours and be carried out in a sensitive manner without imitation if their contribution to the environment is to be worthwhile.

The Survey – Its Mechanics

As a result of its relationship with other local amenity groups, the Society thought that some of their members may well appreciate and enjoy the opportunity of being associated and helping with the survey. The response to such an approach was most encouraging and a number, including architectural students, local photographers and unattached enthusiasts, offered their services.

All who were interested were invited to attend an open meeting of the Society at the County Assembly Rooms, Leicester, in May 1973. There a representative of the County Planning Department outlined the legislation related to Listed Buildings and the assistance and advice which is available for the protection and maintenance of such buildings and areas of architectural or historic significance. It was explained that the Statutory List currently under review for Leicester will classify buildings in three grades only:

- I Buildings of outstanding interest (only about 4 per cent of listed buildings are so far in this grade).
- II* Particularly important buildings of special interest which warrant every effort being made to preserve them. The interiors of buildings in this grade are also protected.





Warehouse in Humberstone Gate. Victorian building with good facade. Ground floor currently used as amusement arcade; basement is a night club. (No. 4 on map).

II Buildings of special interest which warrant every effort being made to preserve their external appearance.

Statutory listing does not, of course, mean that a building will be preserved in all circumstances, but it does ensure that the question of alteration or demolition is thoroughly explored with the opportunity for the expression of all opinions before a decision is reached.

The secretary of the Society's Environment Committee suggested criteria for assessing the buildings to be visited and expressed the opinion that where difficulties arose it would be better, initially, to give the benefit of the doubt to borderline cases, a final decision being made later by a panel of architects. He added that the examination of these buildings would inevitably lead to a consideration of other matters and the survey team would become aware of the relationship of one building to another, to the spaces between them and the street scene generally. The importance of the interiors of buildings was stressed as were interesting features of craftsmanship and detailing. Consideration was also to be given to potential conservation areas. Trees suitable for Preservation Orders should be recorded and all "eyesores" which for a number of reasons detracted from an acceptable environment, should be noted.

A member of the Society's Environment Committee, who was

Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. Victorian meeting hall with carved brickwork decoration incorporating interesting ceramic busts. (No. 5 on map).





Boot and Shoe Trade Union Hall, St. James Street. Built in 1902 and of local historic interest due to local industry. Good facade and interior. (No. 6 on map).

Kendalls Umbrella Works, St. James Street. (No. 7 on map).



responsible for the practical organisation of the survey, explained the methods to be adopted. He suggested that teams be formed each consisting of an architect, one or more other members and a photographer. An Ordnance Survey Map of the city had been divided into sections each gridded and coded. Each team would become responsible for a number of sections and for the examination of every street and road within them. Observations together with appropriate photographs would be entered on a specially prepared form.

Following this initial meeting the work proceeded smoothly during the summer months. Many helpers volunteered to do the work during their lunch breaks while others gave their valuable time at weekends and in the evenings. The teams reported on progress and problems encountered at interim meetings which proved to be enthusiastic discussions of buildings "unearthed". It was realised that many interesting buildings do exist, but frequently they are passed by unnoticed, for the want of careful observation which can so often reveal fine features or interesting buildings in culs-de-sac hidden from main thoroughfares.

The series of photographs illustrate buildings that were recorded from one typical map section.

By the autumn of 1973 most of the area of the map had been covered and the teams met to hand in their survey forms which during the winter months the Society's Environment Committee methodically processed, classifying the buildings into one of the following categories:

- Group D Buildings immediately in danger of demolition or drastic alteration due to redevelopment of the site, road works etc.
- Group A Good buildings worthy of addition to the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Merit.
- Group B Buildings of quality, worthy of consideration at a later date.
- Group C Buildings perhaps not worthy of listing individually but which contribute considerably to a group or to the character of the area.

Thos. Cook & Son, 5 Gallowtree Gate. The travel agent, a local man, set up his business in Leicester and put up this building in 1894 for his office. It was occupied by Cooks until recently. Now the ground floor has a new shop front unrelated to the building facade. (No. 8 on map).





Barclays Bank, 10 & 12 Gallowtree Gate, built in 1909 and designed by Stockdale Harrison. Good carved stonework in the facade. (No. 9 on map).

Offices at 12 Belgrave Gate of Stead & Simpson, boot and shoe makers. Italian Florentine Renaissance facade. (No. 10 on map).



From the above, those buildings marked D formed a "danger list" so that representation could be taken to prevent demolition. For the buildings marked A it was decided that applications for listing would be made to the Department of the Environment.

Most of this work was completed by the end of 1973 and during the summer of 1974 the whole exercise was repeated to extend the survey to the village suburbs of Belgrave, Humberstone, Evington, Knighton, Aylestone and Braunstone. The society intends to extend the area of this survey to the whole of the county but such is the enormity of the work that it is hoped to co-operate with amenity societies in towns and villages of the county, many of which have already undertaken similar studies.

Achievements so far

The Department of the Environment is required to prepare a list of buildings of special architectural and historic merit and importance but events have shown unfortunately that this list, although compiled conscientiously, was by no means comprehensive and there were many serious omissions. It seemed obvious that further consideration based on expert local knowledge and opinion was essential and it was for this reason that the society's own Listed Building Survey was undertaken. Happily this was welcomed by the Department whose inspector was delighted to meet architects in Leicester during 1973 to work out how collaboration could be organised and the benefit of local professional advice put to good use. At his request the survey of the centre of the city was therefore completed by December 1973 and submitted to the Department to assist with the revision of its own list. A number of the buildings not previously listed by the Department but which are on the society's "Danger List" were "spotlisted" by the Department during 1974 in an immediate endeavour to prevent or delay demolition due to redevelopment proposals affecting them.

The difficulties of producing a final statutory list covering every building or group of buildings of merit are, of course, immense and it is inevitable that it should be updated from time to time, but while loopholes exist there is the danger that irreparable harm can be done. It is to be hoped that the Society's interest, concern and effort will help to prevent the repetition of the mistakes of the past.

● The Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects wishes to thank the many organisations and individuals whose help was acknowledged and displayed in an exhibition which it is hoped encouraged the interest of the public, established acceptable guide lines and promoted greater concern for the built environment.
