

BULLETIN 1.3

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CONSERVATION BREAKTHROUGH

Conservation in Britain made a major step forward on 31 August 1974 when the new Town and Country Amenities Act came into force. Introduced as a Private Member's measure by Mr Michael Shersby MP the Bill was substantially the same as that put forward by Sir John Rogers MP but lost at the February General Election. The new Act enjoyed the support of the Government and all parties and was unopposed in both Houses.

The last seven years have seen four Acts passed to strengthen conservation powers, of which the Civic Amenities Act 1967 was the first. In 1967 the climate of opinion in favour of conservation was almost non-existent but today, with the new Act, legislation has come about which represents the interests of a substantial proportion of the population.

The contents of the Town and Country Amenities Act fall into three parts relating to conservation areas, listed buildings and trees and gardens. The provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act 1972, where the demolition of selected unlisted buildings in conservation areas could be brought within control, are repealed. Under the Town and Country Amenities Act no unlisted building (subject to the exclusion of sheds, etc.) in a conservation area may be demolished without consent granted by the local authority or, if the local authority is the applicant, by the Secretary of State for the Environment. If ever designation of an area was regarded as enough it no longer can be: the Act imposes on local planning authorities a duty to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas and to submit the proposals to a public meeting. In addition the Secretary of State is given power to make separate regulations for the control of advertisements in conservation areas. These provisions give new scope for the protection and improvement of our 3,065 conservation areas. Nevertheless many suitable areas have not yet been designated and in future where county and district councils are unwilling the Secretary of State could have the power under the new Act to designate conservation areas himself.

For listed buildings the Act's most important provision changes the basis of compensation on compulsory acquisition for preservation. In future, payment by a local authority will be for the value of the listed building only and not, as hitherto, for the value of the site for redevelopment.

Thus, local authorities should be more ready to serve repairs notices knowing that if acquisition of the building follows it is likely to be less costly. Another provision will allow local authorities to recover costs that they incur in carrying out

urgent works to unoccupied listed buildings. In future, local authorities should be more ready to take action where an unoccupied listed building is in disrepair. This provision can be extended to unlisted buildings in conservation areas if the Secretary of State so directs. A further section in the Act requires local authorities to give publicity to planning applications for development that would, in their opinion, affect the setting of a listed building.

Two new clauses moved by the Government were added to the Bill in Committee and increase the powers for the protection of trees. The scope of a tree preservation order is extended to cover cases of uprooting and wilful damage and the penalties for contravention of an order are increased. The Minister of State, in moving this addition to the Bill, said that if it worked well in conservation areas it might be extended to other parts of the country. The Act also enables the Historic Buildings Council to make grants towards the preservation and upkeep of gardens of outstanding interest. Previously it has only been possible to aid gardens associated with a building which was itself outstanding.

On the eve of European Architectural Heritage Year Britain now has some of the strongest and potentially most effective conservation legislation in the world. The opportunities for industrial archaeological conservation within the framework of this existing legislation are considerable and the Association for Industrial Archaeology will be vitally concerned in the coming years to ensure that industrial monuments receive the highest possible quality of protection.

CAPTAIN BROWN'S BRIDGE

The Union Suspension Bridge at Berwick-on-Tweed, completed in 1820 to the designs of Captain (later Sir) Samuel Brown, is to be restored. Brown (1776-1852) had introduced the chain cable into the Royal Navy and in 1817 took out a patent for wrought-iron links which he incorporated in the Union bridge across the Tweed. The suspension bridge has a span of 361 ft and its 18 ft wide deck is hung from twelve wrought-iron chains. Major repairs have been undertaken on two occasions; the first in 1971-2 by the Berwick and Norham and Islandshire Turnpike Trustees and the second in 1902-3 by the Tweed Bridge Trustees in whose care the bridge now is. A steel cable has been added on each side above the chains to help them support the platform (a similar arrangement can be seen on Telford's Conway Suspension Bridge). The tollhouse on the English side has been demolished—the bridge was made free in 1883—but that on the Scottish bank, belonging once to the Berwickshire Turnpike Trust, still stands. Recently the decaying timber structure below the suspended road caused the bridge to be closed and for a while its future was uncertain but now this earliest surviving suspension bridge is to be completely restored by the local authority.