

## Topic 2: Conservation of the Built Heritage in the UK Overseas Territories

Conservation of the built and cultural heritage is an important component of the work of most of UKOTCF member organisations in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and is often important also in combination with the natural heritage in both educational and economic activity. The conference included a small but important element on the built heritage, including a key note address by Martin Drury, former Director General of the National Trust [for England, Wales & Northern Ireland] and recently a Council member of UKOTCF. There was also a poster on this topic from the St Helena National Trust. Also within this theme, the National Trust for Jersey kindly hosted a “Vin d’Honneur”, a Jersey tradition, at the Historic Farm at Hamptonne, in the heart of Jersey’s countryside. This served both as a practical example of appropriate uses of historic buildings and as a welcome venue for informal discussions out of the intense programme in the conference. Named after the family who lived here in the nineteenth century, the Syvret building dates from the 1830s and is the most recent of the three houses to be built. The rooms are extremely high and are typical of those found in the large houses being built in St Helier (Jersey’s capital) at this time. This building houses the exhibition *Living Memories* which tells the story of how rural life has changed in the island in the 90 years since the Great War. The northern end of this range of buildings is used as a cider barn and contains an apple crusher, a twin-screw apple press and barrels as well as other farm tools. The cider-making equipment is all in working order and is used every October to produce cider. The photographs below are from this event.



# A Future for Historic Buildings in the UK Overseas Territories

**Martin Drury, formerly Director-General of the National Trust, and former UKOTCF Council Member**



Drury, M. 2007. A Future for Historic Buildings in the UK Overseas Territories. pp 46-49 in *Biodiversity That Matters: a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities, Jersey 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006* (ed. M. Pienkowski). UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)

This presentation considers historic buildings in the Overseas Territories and their potential for making a contribution to the local economy. Examples are given of the significant role they can play in attracting tourists. Drawing on the experience of organisations in other countries, this will also show how buildings of historic interest which no longer serve their original purpose can acquire a new, income-producing function through being let for self-catering holidays.

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The theme of this short presentation is that old buildings, even when vacant or dilapidated, are an economic asset. They represent an opportunity, not a constraint. They are good for business and good for the local economy.

It is a great pity that, in the Environmental Charters of the Overseas Territories, so little attention is given to the built environment, which is mentioned only briefly in connection with education. This is a pity because we now know beyond any doubt that people attach as much value to historic buildings as they do to the natural environment. And, it is a pity because the historic buildings in the Overseas Territories I have visited are as precious and, in some cases as rare, as their endemic species and their scenery.

In 2001 a MORI poll entitled What does 'Heritage' mean to you? revealed overwhelming support for the historic environment in England. Here are some of its findings:

- 98% think the heritage is important for the education of children and that all children should be given the opportunity to find out about it.
- 96% think the heritage is important to educate adults about the past.
- 95% think the heritage is important for providing places to see and things to do; 93% for encouraging tourists to visit and 88% for creating jobs and boosting the economy.

- 88% think that there should be public funding for the conservation of the heritage.
- 76% disagree that we already preserve too much.
- 76% think their lives are enriched by the heritage.

Only 2% said they had no interest in the heritage at all. 51% had visited an historic attraction in the previous year, compared to the 50% who had been to the cinema and the 17% who had been to a football match.

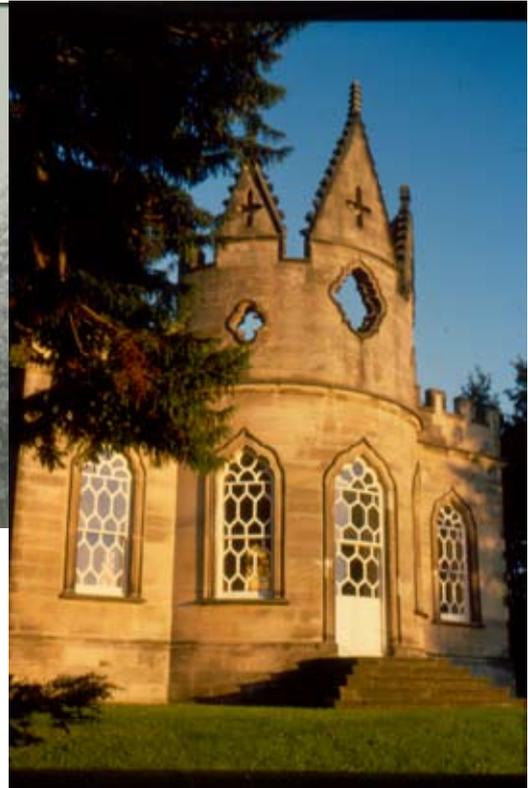
Before that poll was taken, it was assumed that only the better-off had any interest in the heritage or any feeling for it. So, it is hugely encouraging to know - and to know for certain - that the heritage



*Kingswear Castle, Devon. Built in 1502 to protect the mouth of the river Dart. One of 185 historic buildings rescued by the Landmark Trust and now available for short holidays.*



*The Banqueting House, Gibside, Co. Durham. Built in 1746 as an eye-catcher in one of the earliest landscape gardens in Britain and seen here before (above) and after (right) acquisition by the Landmark Trust in 1977.*



is highly valued by all but a tiny percentage of the nation as a whole.

Another recent survey, Heritage Works, published in 2005 by a group of commercial developers in association with English Heritage, found that:

- historic buildings provide a focal point that people can relate to and are familiar with;
- the survival of historic buildings distinguishes one place from another;
- historic buildings attract tenants who would not be interested in less distinctive buildings;
- it is nearly always cheaper to repair an old building than to put up a new one;
- an old building or a group of old buildings can play a central part in economic and social regeneration;
- the key to unlocking the economic potential of an old building is to find a viable new use.

One viable new use for an old building is adaption for holiday use. At a time when people - in England at least - work longer hours than ever before,



they attach more

importance

than ever to the time they spend with their families on holiday; they are therefore willing to spend more money on their holidays today than in the past.

In this connection I would like to mention the work of the Landmark Trust. The Landmark Trust was founded in 1965 to rescue small buildings of historic interest that have been abandoned or are at risk and then to repair them and give them new life by letting them for short holidays. Once a building has been restored and adapted in this way, its future is secure because the income from letting pays for its upkeep. It is a simple, but effective model for the sustainable use of old buildings.

Over the years the Landmark Trust has rescued 185 buildings which are now available for renting. They include follies, forts, medieval farm houses, towers built for various purposes, banqueting houses, mills, lock-keepers' cottages, a pig-sty designed to look like a temple, a building in the form of a giant pineapple, a

*The Pineapple, Dunmore, Scotland. After serving as Governor of the Bahamas, the Earl of Dunmore returned to Scotland with pineapples which he propagated under glass. In 1777 he built a summer-house on his estate in the form of a giant stone pineapple, where his guests would assemble to sample the exotic fruit. Leased from the National Trust for Scotland in 1973 and restored by the Landmark Trust as a holiday home for four.*



*The Appleton Water Tower, Norfolk. Built in 1877 to supply water to houses on a large landed estate and incorporating a dwelling for a caretaker. Repaired and adapted by the Landmark Trust as a holiday home for four.*

light-house, a former priory, four Scottish castles and a small prison. All are remarkable in some way - for their architecture, their history or their situation. Many are on the coast or in beautiful country; some are in the heart of historic cities. Most are in Great Britain, but four are in Italy and four in the USA.

‘Landmarks’ are simply furnished with old pieces carefully chosen to fit in happily with their surroundings. Rugs and carpets have generally seen enough use elsewhere to make them agreeable to the eye and the pictures usually have a special



*Old Luffkins, Peak Dale, St Helena. One of several abandoned 18th-century farm houses on the island.*

reason for being there. Each building has its own history album giving an account of its past and its restoration. Books about the neighbourhood and works of literature with local associations are also provided. There are jigsaw puzzles, large-scale maps marking footpaths and a log-book in which visitors record their own discoveries for the benefit of their successors. All Landmarks have modern bathrooms and well equipped kitchens; and some have dishwashers and freezers. All have heating of some kind, where possible including an open fire or stove. Otherwise, intrusive equipment is kept to the minimum and televisions are not provided. In the words of the Landmark Trust’s founder, Sir John Smith, ‘staying in a Landmark is meant to be an experience of a mildly elevating kind’.

On St Helena there are many buildings which would be suitable for adaptation in this way. They would provide an alternative to the small number of hotels on the island and, when the proposed airport is in operation, would be likely to attract visitors who enjoy walking and immersing themselves in the history and culture of remote communities.

On the small island of Salt Cay in the Turks and Caicos archipelago many of the simple wooden houses that contribute to its unique character have been abandoned and lie derelict. They were once occupied by people who operated the sluices and raked salt for the industry, now defunct, which gave the island its name. Salt Cay is more accessible than St Helena, but the economic potential of these buildings for holiday letting is unappreciated and unrealised while the character of the island is gradually eroded by the construction of modern houses that could be anywhere.

The Landmark Trust model is well suited to places with the precious and increasingly rare asset of an



*Salt Cay. Well maintained traditional salt-worker's house on one of the Turks and Caicos Islands.*



*Salt Cay. Abandoned salt-worker's house.*

unspoiled built and natural environment. These are the places which attract low-volume, high-spending and thus, sustainable tourism.

The Mihai Eminescu Trust in Romania is based on the Landmark Trust. Its work is concentrated in an area of the Carpathian Mountains settled by Germans in the 13th century. In the aftermath of the 1989 revolution most of the population returned to Germany, leaving a group of 17th-century villages set in hill country of outstanding beauty more or less deserted. The aim of the Mihai Eminescu Trust is to reinvigorate the economy of the villages by attracting tourists without damaging the combination of traditional architecture and fine landscape that distinguishes this remote and beautiful region of Eastern Europe.

The Trust has bought houses in several of the villages, repaired them and introduced modern amenities. They are now available for holidays. The repairs are carried out by some of the few



*Seventeenth-century farm houses lining the main street of Viscri, Romania, one of the villages deserted by the German-speaking population in 1989. The Mihai Eminescu Trust has restored several houses which can now be rented for holidays. The Mihai Eminescu Trust runs courses for young people in the repair and maintenance of historic buildings.*

young people who survived the exodus, supervised and trained by experts from the United Kingdom who treat the experience as a holiday and make no charge. The Landmark Trust has helped by disseminating information about the work of the Mihai Eminescu Trust among the 120,000 people on its database.

In repairing and maintaining old buildings it is essential to use the techniques and materials that were used in their construction. Principally, this means using lime rather than its hard and impervious modern equivalent, Portland cement. Lime is no more expensive than cement and, once the skills are learned, the work takes no longer to complete. An old building properly repaired and maintained will last indefinitely; use of the wrong materials and techniques will cause constant trouble.

There are four principles which, if followed, will preserve the character and thus, the value, of an old building at minimum cost:

- use lime mortar;
- never replace when it is possible to repair;
- if it is not possible to repair, replace like with like;
- do a little maintenance every year and thus avoid major expenditure every ten years ('little and often').

In conclusion, buildings constructed before the advent of modern communications are a diminishing resource in the world. Whatever their condition, old buildings are an economic asset with the potential to help in the regeneration of local economies. A proven way of realising this potential is by letting them for holidays, but their value will only be sustained if they are repaired and maintained using traditional materials and techniques.

# Poster: St Helena Historic Houses and Sites: What Future?

Cathy Hopkins, St Helena National Trust

Hopkins, M.C. 2007. St Helena Historic Houses and Sites: What Future? pp 50-52 in *Biodiversity That Matters: a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities, Jersey 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006* (ed. M. Pienkowski). UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)

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## St Helena Historic Houses and Sites: What future?



Woodcot: Privately owned property, well maintained. Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century with later addition of a porch.



This fairly recent rebuild of an old country house is an example of what can be done when money is available- unfortunately, all too often buildings have been allowed to fall into ruin. Modern bungalows are replacing a rich legacy – how can we stop this?



Plantation House: restoration work and new roof funded by FCO



Longwood House: French property, well maintained as a museum by the French Government.



General Bertrand's Cottage 2002. Since then the shutters have been removed by Government and not replaced. The roof was re-tiled with FCO funding. The Trust is seeking an agreement with Landmark Trust and SHG to lease the property for residential tourism. However, no funding is available for restoration work.



A view of Main Street in the early 1900s -Note the spire on St James' Church and the beautifully proportioned Georgian frontages of the houses.



View of Main Street early 1960s – the addition to the hotel and intrusion of electricity poles & wires. Loss of fountain.



Hutts Gate Store in early 1960s. Built on site of earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century building, the current cottage dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Hutts Gate 2006: lack of funding to restore this building sees it gradually falling into ruin. A grant scheme would help owners to maintain and restore historic buildings.

Rock Rose some 20 yrs ago, now a virtual ruin – private ownership



Houses with a special history- Teutonic Hall where Napoleon took tea, rapidly falling into ruin; the other Wellington House, maintained as a hotel .



This photo taken in the 1960s shows commercial buildings near the Market – the shutters became dangerous and were removed rather than repaired.



Luffkins – a plantation house shown in 1970s and since 2002 . Private ownership.



Banks' Battery looking out to sea.



Repuise Point and Friar's Ridge – the coastal fortifications attract local and visitor interest despite the difficulties of accessing them and their condition.



- The Environment Charter 2001 commitment Number 9 states that the St Helena Government will
- "Encourage teaching within schools to promote the value of our local environment (natural and built) and to explain its role within the regional and global environment."
- The government of the UK will under its commitments Numbers 8 & 9
- Use the existing Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories, and promote access to other sources of public funding, for projects of lasting value to St Helena's environment.
- Help St Helena identify further funding partners for environmental projects, such as donors, the private sector or non-governmental organisations.
- How does HMG justify a commitment to valuing the environment when the funding criteria under OTEP is limited to the natural environment and the "other sources of funding" have not been identified since the Charter was signed in 2001.

- SHNT has developed a project with SHG to bring volunteer archaeologists with a specific expertise in built heritage, to train local Government and NGO personnel in recording of historic buildings and sites and, at a later stage, to offer "hands on" training in restoration techniques.
- Funding remains the key element to restoration and conservation of our built environment – few owners of historic houses (including Government) can afford to maintain them.
- We wish to develop a grant/ revolving fund scheme to support owners in maintenance / restoration work.
- We believe that OTEP criteria should be widened to include the built environment. We seek the support of other Overseas Territories in asking for this change to the criteria OR
- That FCO/DFID should pro-actively assist St Helena to find alternative sources of funding
- Help us to help ourselves and save our built heritage from further "decline and fall".

Prepared by SHNT September 2006