

CASEWORK IN SCOTLAND

by John Gerrard

Photographs reproduced by Courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

This being the first account of Scottish historic building casework to appear in *Transactions* it may first be helpful to look at the different arrangements applying north of the Border.

The Secretary of State for Environment has little authority in Scotland, and none in terms of planning. These powers belong to the Scottish Secretary of State, who is responsible for listing, wields the stick of Listed building and ancient monuments legislation, offers through the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland the sometimes meagre carrot of grant aid and decides whether or not to call in cases for decision through Public Inquiry. In England some of these functions will be taken over by the new Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission but in Scotland it has been decided, after wide consultation, to keep them all together under the existing fairly small and well-integrated Scottish Office administration. The relevant legislation is effectively the same on both sides of the Border, although Scottish Planning Acts are, in part, differently worded and tend to appear after, rather than before, their England and Wales equivalents.

For no very obvious reason, the Scottish Listed building categories are lettered A, B and C rather than numbered I, II and III. The Scottish lists are, so far, unaffected by the perhaps rather frenetic updating set in train by Mr. Heseltine in England and Wales. 'C' category buildings are, however, being systematically reviewed, the least important being discarded and the rest upgraded to give them statutory protection for the first time. This has added numerous locally-interesting buildings to the statutory lists and has increased the casework accordingly. Even so, at least half of the Scottish lists were compiled before 1970 and are now in need of more thorough review, particularly with regard to 19th and 20th Century buildings. The "Heseltine" listing campaign in England and Wales has therefore provided useful ammunition for those wanting to see more official urgency in bringing the Scottish lists properly up to date.

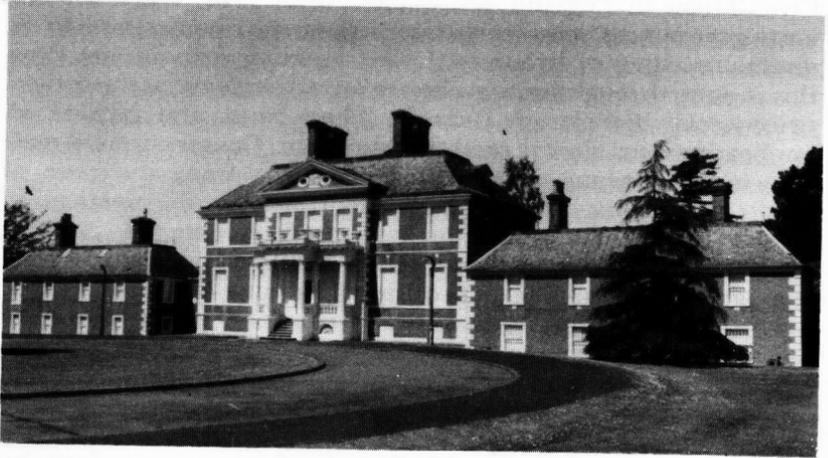
Just as the official system in Scotland is separately controlled, voluntary casework is handled by a different set of cultural 'heritage' organisations. The four 'Joint Committee' Societies, including the A.M.S., have no established remit beyond Gretna Green and Berwick where the Scottish Georgian Society takes over as one of the two national bodies recognised for casework grant aid by central government.

In spite of its name this Society, like the A.M.S., covers the whole spectrum of historic building casework, from the mediaeval period to the 1930s. The other country-wide organisation involved day-by-day is the Scottish Civic Trust, which has added this role to the other environmental work tackled by its fellow Civic Trusts in England and Wales. Until 1975, when Scottish local government was reorganised, these two bodies had to be directly notified of proposed Listed building demolitions. Now this is done through local authority advertisements in the official twice-weekly *Edinburgh Gazette*. These must also include all applications to alter Listed buildings in Conservation Areas, allowing the usual 21 days for comment from the date of publication. This arrangement might not be so practical in England, with its much greater total volume of relevant applications but it works very well in Scotland. Here the weekly average amounts to one or two Listed building demolition cases, plus a few more in Conservation Areas and perhaps sixty or seventy applications to alter Listed buildings. Reference to current issues of the 'Gazette' allows a complete over-view of all immediate Scottish casework and avoids the problems which used to arise when individual notification letters were delayed or went astray in the post. The Scottish Georgian Society responds to this caseload through its six regional voluntary panels while the Scottish Civic Trust copes through one full-time member of staff (myself) and through liaison with its still far-from-complete network of affiliated local Civic Societies.

I have selected five recent cases for particular comment. **Ferguslie Mills, Paisley** had grown by 1900 into the largest single complex of spinning mills in Scotland. The run-down of cotton thread manufacture in the West of Scotland had progressively made the whole group redundant, beginning in 1972 with a gigantic four-storey classical block of 44 x 42 bays, built in stages between 1826 and 1856. This was demolished when no practical alternative use could be found for such a vast area of floor space on a site still within the owners' control.

In November 1982 an application was submitted by a developer to demolish the only remaining Listed mill, a magnificent 400 ft x 130 ft five-storey block of 1887, designed in a free Renaissance style by the Bradford architects Woodhouse and Morley. It has been identified by "SAVE Britain's Heritage" as probably their finest design and at least the equal of any comparable surviving mill block in the North of England. The application was fortunately lodged over a year before the mill was due to close completely, giving time for alternatives to be considered. Consent was refused by the Local Authority, which asked the developer to study conversion possibilities, for example flatted housing, in parallel with ideas for developing cleared land round about.

This case emphasises (i) the desirability of early planning applications to determine the future of Listed buildings and (ii) the interdependence, in major instances, of Scottish and other British casework investigation.



Threatened with demolition: Strathleven House, Dumbartonshire, a pioneering example of the Palladian style in Scotland. It dates from close to 1700.

Strathleven House, near Dumbarton, is a case of even greater importance. Originally called Levenside, this 'A' Listed mansion now stands inside an industrial estate. Its date of build and designer are both unknown but stylistic evidence places it close to 1700, the most likely architect being Alexander Macgill or James Smith. Its Palladian composition, with contemporary linked pavilions, puts it in the vanguard of the new 18th Century style, of which it may prove to be the British pioneer. It is probably no coincidence that Colen Campbell, the movement's chief publicist, was still resident in Scotland when Levenside was built.

The future of the house has been threatened since the 1950s, when its grounds were acquired for industry by a state development agency. The house was neglected, except for partial use as a canteen, and an application to demolish it was only forestalled when the previous owners were taken over in 1976 by the newly-formed Scottish Development Agency. Since then the condition of the house has continued to deteriorate, priceless original panelling and stair balustrading having fortunately been removed for safer storage. No buyer having come forward, on the Agency's terms, a formal demolition application was made in 1982 and refused by the District Council. Since then other attempts to purchase the building have been discouraged by the Agency, as inadequate and a Public Inquiry was expected before

the end of the year. This now seems to have been put into legal cold storage, for reasons yet unknown. Pressure is being maintained on the Secretary of State to bring this unhappy history, involving one of Scotland's most important houses and one of his own agencies, to a constructive head.

Bonnington Mills, Edinburgh was almost the only surviving example of the once-*numerous* small industries powered by the Water of Leith. The group comprised a corn mill, a separate granary, miller's house, row of workers' cottages and Bonnyhaugh House, built by the City in 1621 as part of a package deal with a Dutch master-dyer. Mills have operated on the site for at least 500 years, with nearly all the present buildings dating to the 18th and 19th Centuries.

The site was bought by a building contractor, who applied in 1971 to demolish all but Bonnyhaugh House. This was refused. Five years later, the same firm acquired recently-cleared land to the west for housing development and reapplied to demolish the mill and granary in order to form a road access to the rest of the site. This attracted opposition and was called in for a Public Inquiry held in 1978. The Reporter accepted evidence that a safer access could be formed on adjacent land owned by the applicant and Listed Building Consent was again refused by the Secretary of State. Nothing daunted, the same firm reapplied in 1981 with unchanged plans, having meanwhile failed to maintain or sell the mills. The Local Authority again gave consent, and despite appeals from the original objectors, the Secretary of State declined to call in the case for a second time, giving tacit approval to demolition.

It was perhaps unkindly noted that the only major change had meanwhile been political and that the new Secretary of State belonged to a Government more in tune with the kind of private enterprise exemplified by the applicant. This decision caused anxiety and high indignation, particularly among the Societies and individuals represented as objectors at the 1978 Inquiry. It particularly cast doubt on the strength of the present Administration's own worthy, if wordy, intention that "no worthwhile building of architectural or historic merit is lost to our environment unless it is demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that every effort has been exerted by all concerned to find practical ways of keeping it".

6 Luib, Isle of Skye. A once-fine example of a traditional Hebridean house, this small building has lain empty for a decade, with only limited and inadequate repairs to the thatch. A satisfactory scheme to restore and gently extend it was drawn up in 1978 but not executed.

The owner applied for an improvement grant in 1982 to carry out this scheme, having meanwhile failed to sell the



One of the few remaining traditional Herbridean houses: 6 Luib on the Isle of Skye. It is hoped that grants will make restoration feasible.

property at his own valuation. The grant was refused and he then applied to demolish the house and to build anew on its site. Very few such houses now remain from the hundreds that once covered Skye and only a handful are in habitable condition. Objections from amenity societies encouraged the local authority to refuse the application and the owner now intends to reapply for the grants which could make restoration feasible.

The problems created by 'ecclesiastical exemption' are thrown into sharp relief by the case of **St. Luke's Church of Scotland, Edinburgh**, built in 1904 to the design of an excellent church architect, Peter MacGregor Chalmers. Recently made redundant, it was offered for sale and attracted two potential purchasers willing to keep it in ecclesiastical use. One of these was Fettes School, whose grounds adjoined the church. The School intended to use it as their chapel, with little or no change to the fine, consistently designed and furnished interior. The other, a Chinese fundamental Protestant group offered a higher price, obtained the building and then drew up plans to remove all the important fittings, including stained glass, and to insert a concrete floor at mid-height, subdividing the ground floor into numerous small rooms. Being exempt from Listed building control, since remaining in ecclesiastical use, nothing can now legally prevent this architectural disembowelling of one of Scotland's best Edwardian buildings. The case also highlights the lack, in Scotland, of a Redundant Churches Fund, which could if

necessary, have helped buildings of this calibre to remain unspoiled. Several current examples exist, as at Rosskeen, Ross-shire and Campsie High Kirk, Stirlingshire, of important redundant churches inhibited by graveyards and other physical circumstances from attracting appropriate new uses. At present it is very hard to see a long-term solution to this problem unless the major Scottish denominations can be persuaded to contribute to some equivalent Fund.