

An Ancient Monuments Society Inventory

by

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This short notice records the discovery of a 'very scarce' document which sheds light on an aspect of the early history of the Ancient Monuments Society.

The Ancient Monuments Society was founded in 1924 in Manchester. The person responsible was the Manchester architect and antiquary John Swarbrick. The first publication was a *Year Book*, issued in 1926, which says that the Society had appointed a sub-committee 'to co-ordinate the work of those who are prepared to undertake the preparation of inventories of ancient monuments, examples of old craftsmanship and works of art worthy of preservation'. A recently found document relates to this activity, perhaps a pilot study. It is a duplicated copy of a typescript dated 1925 entitled 'Ancient Monuments Society: Ancient Monuments & Craftsmanship of Lancashire and Cheshire (Past and Present)'. It is headed 'Private for revision and comment only' and its front cover notes that it is 'circulated in order to obtain further particulars and also in order to indicate how other inventories might be prepared'. It shows the Society at the forefront of efforts systematically to record historic buildings.¹

In the 1920s there was a national schedule of ancient monuments, compiled following the Ancient Monuments Acts of 1882 and its successors, especially the Act of 1913. There were also inventories, drawn up (in England) by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. The Commission's published county volumes had prefaces which included lists of buildings thought most worthy of preservation but progress was painfully slow; by 1925 none of the north-western counties, where the Society's interests were focused, had been covered. In the 1920s the Commission was limited by a cut-off date of 1714 for buildings which could be included. In London there was the *Survey of London*, but elsewhere there were no institutionalised efforts to compile local inventories. The 1926 *Year Book* refers to a sub-committee and the inventory refers to reports but Swarbrick's fingerprints are all over it; his title in the AMS was 'Honorary Reporting Architect' and it may well be that this document is largely his own work.²

The 1913 Act established an Ancient Monuments Board which had begun greatly to increase the number of scheduled monuments, including more standing (but unoccupied) buildings which were offered some small degree of protection. The Board established county committees, of which that for Lancashire was led by F. H. Cheetham, a Southport

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antiquary and leading light in the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, based in Liverpool. When the AMS was founded Cheetham challenged the choice of name, perhaps because he felt that it was too close to that of his official Ancient Monuments Committee. In 1922 Swarbrick had been President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, based in Manchester, but probably more important than any Manchester-Liverpool rivalry was Swarbrick's belief that the Ancient Monuments Board and its county committees did not pay enough attention to more recent buildings. In December 1924, soon after the AMS had been established, Swarbrick complained that the Board was 'more interested in preserving prehistoric remains than in protecting fine buildings of later and more cultured times that show the development of our national architecture'. The typescript inventory is testimony to this interest in buildings thought in the 1920s to be too late in date to be of historic interest or in need of formal protection. The majority of buildings included are of 17th century date or earlier, but there are entries for the 18th and 19th centuries as well.

The document comprises thirty-two foolscap pages; it appears to be complete although it ends abruptly with an inventory item right at the foot of the last page. Items are arranged by the two counties, sub-divided into hundreds, numbered consecutively in each hundred. Most inventoried items are also given a period classification. Classes such as 'M' for medieval, 'E.R' for 'Early Renaissance' and 'L.R' for 'Late Renaissance and Neo-Classic' may be obvious, but there are also some odd classes such as 'M.S' and 'E.R.S' for medieval and early Renaissance 'survival'; the list of abbreviations has seven classes which do not appear in the inventory at all. The dividing line between early and late Renaissance appears to be 1700 or 1714 – the dates adopted by RCHM(E) in 1900 and revised in 1913, to allow for the inclusion of the dome of St Paul's in the forthcoming London volumes.

The inventory has 224 entries for Lancashire, made up for the six hundreds as follows: 83 in Salford, 43 in West Derby, 42 in Blackburn, 21 in Leyland, 18 in Amounderness and 17 in Lonsdale. Two of the Blackburn Hundred entries are admitted to be imports from Yorkshire. For Cheshire there are 171 entries, made up for the seven hundreds as follows: 61 in Macclesfield, 49 in Bucklow, 17 in Wirral, 12 in Eddisbury, 11 in each of Broxton and Nantwich and 10 in Northwich. This gives a total of 395 entries. Of these by far the largest group comprises 244 for 'Early Renaissance' which, in more conventional dating terms, seems to mean Tudor and Stuart. There are 71 entries for 'Late Renaissance and Neo-classic'. The remaining 80 entries comprise 48 for other and mixed classes and 32 which were not classified at all.

The inventory was not meant to be comprehensive, even by the standards of the 1920s about what was thought interesting. There is a note that the inventory is chiefly of secular buildings and that 'pre-historic, ecclesiastical and other remains' would be inventoried separately. Nevertheless some 18th century churches were included, such as St Ann's, Manchester, St Paul, Liverpool ('now in process of demolition') and St John Knutsford, and there were notes about later furnishings in medieval churches. Some demolished buildings were included (such as Francis Goodwin's Manchester Town Hall). One purpose of the inventory was clearly to act as a catalogue of the architectural history of the two counties; almost all the entries have a note saying 'add particulars,

comments or references' and there is a request (presumably to those on the circulation list) that references to illustrations, descriptions and records should be provided. Just a few have notes already. For instance, the entry for Bank Hall, Warrington, reads: '1750. Stone. James Gibbs said to have been the architect. Kelly's *Directory* states that Leoni was the designer. In Beresford Chancellor's *Lives of the British Architects* p241 Gibbs is said to have designed a house for Mr Thomas Patten near Warrington'. There are a handful of references to the Lancashire *Victoria County History* and to Joseph Nash's *Mansions of England in the Olden Time*, as in the note attached to the entry for Speke Hall: 'Illustrated in Nash's *Mansions*. See plan, *VCH* Vol III'.

Many of the 244 'Early Renaissance' entries are for minor gentry houses on the polite/vernacular threshold. Lancashire and Cheshire were rich in such buildings which have perhaps suffered disproportionately in the losses of the last century. That at least shows that inventories such as this pioneer document were necessary and that Swarbrick was ahead of his time in compiling one. But equally interesting to those interested in the growth of the conservation movement in the 20th century is the inclusion of 'Late Renaissance and Neo-classic'. Entries for 18th century country houses include Heaton Hall, Alkington Hall, Platt Hall, Lytham Hall, Bold Hall in Lancashire and Doddington Hall, Hooton Hall and Tabley Hall in Cheshire. Swarbrick is known to have been distressed by the loss of Leoni's Lathom House. Other 18th century inclusions are Lancaster Custom House, Skerton Bridge and Liverpool Town Hall. For the 19th century entries are concentrated, perhaps not surprisingly, in the Manchester area, where Barry's Art Gallery and Athenaeum are included with the Free Trade Hall, Thomas Harrison's Portico Library, and banks by Gregan and Walters. In Liverpool St George's Hall, The Lyceum and the Athenaeum are there, the last with a note 'to be demolished'. The most surprising exclusions from this litany of 19th century classical buildings are Cockerell's Bank of England buildings in both Liverpool and Manchester. Significantly, Gothic revival was clearly thought beyond the pale, with one notable exception, Scarisbrick Hall, which does not have a period classification at all.

Not surprisingly the inventory excludes most minor domestic architecture and industrial buildings. But two adjacent entries for buildings in Manchester ('E.R' and 'L.R' respectively) read "'Rovers Return" Inn, Shude Hill... Timber framing' and 'Warehouse, Meal Street... Stone, Sir Chas Barry archt.' The former may be the inspiration for *Coronation Street's* local, the latter is a reference to a building by a major architect which, if the attribution is right, seems hitherto unrecorded. These may be small treasures from a document which is nevertheless important to the Society for the light it throws on its early history, the role which the Society played in the emerging building preservation movement and its interest, ever maintained, in the preservation of good buildings of all periods.

NOTES

1. The document was acquired by Kathy Fishwick, the Society's Honorary Secretary, from a Lancashire book dealer. A stamp shows that the document was a gift in 1964 to Manchester Public Libraries from an unidentified source. It seems to have lain unnoticed for 50 years until recently disposed of by the library. The dealer's pencilled comment is 'Very scarce' which may be an understatement; although it is in duplicated form the copy found by Kathy Fishwick may well now be unique. It has been placed with recent records at the Society's office.

2. The Society's early records have not survived. This account, where not derived from the document itself, is based on three published sources: L. M. Angus-Butterworth, 'The Early History of the Ancient Monuments Society', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 20, 1973, 55-61; R. W. Brunskill, 'The Ancient Monuments Society: The First Seventy Years', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 39, 1975, 3-5; and F. Kelsall, 'John Swarbrick: architect and antiquary', in C. Hartwell and T. Wyke (ed), *Making Manchester: Aspects of the History of Architecture in the City and Region since 1800*, Essays in honour of John H. G. Archer, Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 2007, 177-201.