

# Society for the Study of Labour History

## Archives & Resources Committee

### Where Do You Stand? The Landscape of Labour History

#### Introduction

In the past, conservation planners and architectural historians have concentrated on protecting buildings of artistic value or those associated with 'great men' and their achievements. Sites associated with the labour movement or the history of working people have been largely overlooked. This short guide has been prepared by the Archives and Resources Committee of the Society for the Study of Labour History with the assistance of English Heritage and the Ironbridge Institute. The Committee consists of representatives from the TUC, Co-operative College, Labour Heritage, museums and archives; and the guide is intended to help Labour Party branches, co-operative societies, trade unions, and local history societies in particular, to locate, identify and provide protection to buildings, monuments, and landscapes relating to the labour movement in their locality.

Awareness of the built environment is always desirable, if only as a source of interest and enjoyment in itself. In times of rapid economic and social change, and the subsequent physical changes in the landscape, it is particularly important to monitor the built environment. Important buildings should be recorded by written description, photograph and film, protected from destruction, adapted or converted where appropriate, and commemorated by public plaque or publication.

#### Which buildings do we need to protect?

The birthplace or residence of prominent labour figures, trades and labour halls, and the whole range of structures associated with the co-operative movement, are some of the more obvious buildings connected with organised labour. Even these may not always be recognised for what they are and many other categories could be added to this list - **workers' housing** (speculative, 'improved', philanthropic, local authority, including prefabricated and system-built); **model villages** created by employers (industrial or rural, such as Bournville or Thorney); **mission huts and halls** (for example, railway mission huts); **company towns** (such as Melton Constable and Woodford Halse, both former railway centres); **specialist colleges** associated with particular crafts, trades and materials; **public houses** where union or friendly society dues were collected or tramping relief paid; and the **workplace** itself, in its manifold forms, from chain-shop to cotton mill. Occasionally **church buildings** which have working class congregations have socialist decorations eg the magnificent apse paintings in St Marks, Belgrave in Leicester, now at risk. In rural areas, some nonconformist chapels were strongholds of opposition to the farmers and landowners, and were actively involved in the early days of the farmworkers' unions.

**Places of entertainment and recreation** such as sports facilities, cinemas, dance-, music- and billiard-halls are also important and should not be overlooked. This list is far from an exhaustive one, but it serves as an indication of the potential scope of the issue raised by this leaflet and the awareness it seeks to create.

However, some buildings hold a special significance for the labour movement and become commemorative 'shrines'. These might include sites where groups of workers encountered the full weight of the law (eg Dorchester County Court where the Tolpuddle Martyrs were sentenced) or even felt the coercive arm of the state (eg. the site of the Westgate Hotel in Newport, now marked by a large mural, where the Chartist rising of 1839 was crushed). Some shrines are located in buildings where working class pioneers met (eg Thomas Standfield's cottage at Tolpuddle) or even built themselves as a result of a dispute (eg the Burston Strike School in Norfolk). Sometimes these shrines are difficult to locate and take on a mythical quality (eg the "Chartist" caves of Blaenau Gwent, again associated with the Newport Rising). Working class buildings were often cheaply and poorly built, and are less likely to survive, especially where their functions have changed over the years. With some exceptions there does not seem to have been any distinctive radical or socialist building style.

There are two exceptions. Firstly, there are the buildings associated with the Owenite and Chartist movements of the 1830s. Their rural colonies have a distinctive village pattern of single storied cottages with small plots of land and associated communal buildings. The latter, including schools, 'Halls of the People' or 'Scientific Institutes', usually have high ceilings, a nod towards early Victorian theories on "Miasma" or wholesome air. These sites are usually in the countryside, (eg Snigs End, Glos. and the Chartist colony at Chorleywood, Herts) but may even be in cities or country towns (eg the Owenite Hall of the People in Wisbech, Cambs ).

Secondly, the re-emergence of the socialist movement in Britain between 1890 and 1914 gave rise to a number of socialist halls and institutes. While the architectural style itself was not distinctive (even when built by co-operative labour), the internal decoration often had a socialist flavour, usually influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. As the early evangelistic phase of the socialist movement passed, these buildings, mostly in the large Northern cities, changed their ownership or function and very few survive. Many have been lost in urban redevelopment eg the Pankhurst Hall in Hightown, Manchester, whose interior was decorated by Sylvia Pankhurst and R C Wallhead, ILP MP for Merthyr Tydfil (who could pass for Owen of "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists").

Buildings associated with the trade union movement start with the early 19th century public houses used by trade societies, where tramping journeymen could expect food, bed and a welcome from the local society. Names usually give a clue to union connections, for example the Braziers Arms in Salford was the haunt of tinsplate workers. R A Leeson's book "Travelling Brothers" has a list of such public houses. By the mid-19th century, trade unions, particularly skilled branches in urban areas, were building their own union halls or institutes. This tradition continues into the 20th century. Sadly, few of these survive and there is a need for local research and preservation. One example is the Mechanics Institute building in Manchester. This was the birthplace of the TUC and is now shared by a conference centre and the

People's History Museum (formerly known as the National Museum of Labour History). The trade union movement generated other purpose-built structures such as libraries, hospitals, convalescent homes and institutes - a rich seam for local research.

The co-operative movement has its own 'shrine' in the Rochdale Pioneers Museum at Toad Lane. It also created a whole host of buildings - shops, from urban grocers to vast department stores, pharmacies, offices, docks, farms, mills, factories, supermarkets and warehouses. The Co-op had its own architects' department who were responsible for distinguished buildings such as the recently listed Luma Lamp Factory near Glasgow built in 1939 in Art Nouveau style.

While most surviving and often unidentified buildings are in cities, examples are often to be found in country towns, rural areas, or on the coast. Socialist holiday camps or Clarion Clubhouses associated with the socialist cycling movement are particularly under-researched.

## **The criteria for listing historic buildings**

To be listed, a building must be of "special architectural or historic interest".

In England, it is the Secretary of State for National Heritage who lists buildings, usually on the advice of English Heritage, although guidance may be sought from any expert source. Grand and polite architecture are not the only criteria. Over the last few years substantial numbers of industrial and agricultural buildings have been added to the lists, along with modest but well-preserved buildings that reflect important social and economic developments. While the historic interest of a building can be taken into account in its own right, it is normal to expect the building itself to illustrate, through its design or construction, what it is that makes it important. English Heritage is revising its criteria for the listing of 19th and 20th century buildings and the first of a series of helpful guidelines on individual building types is being prepared. The leaflet on public houses appeared in April 1994.

The criteria for listing historic buildings elsewhere in the United Kingdom are broadly similar to those prevailing in England. The bodies responsible for advising on listing are CADW (in Wales), Historic Scotland (in Scotland) and the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland. Contact addresses for these bodies are given at the end of this leaflet.

Listing is one method of preserving our historic buildings but it is not always the most appropriate one. Where large numbers of buildings survive close together and which graphically illustrate working-class communities (for instance areas of housing with associated mills or factories, institutes, pubs etc), it might be best to try and persuade the local authority to designate a Conservation Area. This should lead to the historic and architectural character of the area as a whole being sympathetically conserved and enhanced.

## How to prepare a case for listing a historic building

- It is always worthwhile discussing the case informally with your local authority Conservation Officer or Historic Buildings Officer.
- Find out as much as possible about the building or site -the date of construction and details of the people, organisations or historic event, etc with which it is connected. Contact local record offices and public library local history collections to check what research has already been done. The local reference library will also help you find any local history or industrial archaeology societies covering the area. Other useful addresses are listed below.
- Requests to have a building listed should be sent to the Listing Branch, Department of National Heritage, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5DH. Wherever possible a letter describing the building's background and historic importance should be accompanied by photographs (enough to give a clear impression of both the interior and exterior, and the building's setting) and a location map.
- Keep the local media and other relevant groups informed of the project so that support for a listing campaign can be developed.

### Useful addresses

#### **Victorian Society**

1 Priory Gardens  
Bedford Park  
London W4 1TT  
URL <http://www.victorian-society.org.uk/>  
Tel 020 89941019

#### **Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England**

National Monuments Record Centre,  
Kemble Drive  
Churchward  
Swindon, SN2 2GZ  
Email [info@rchme.co.uk](mailto:info@rchme.co.uk)  
URL [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)  
Tel 01793 414600

#### **Twentieth Century Society**

70 Cowcross Street, London,  
EC1M 6EJ  
Email [coordinator@c20society.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@c20society.org.uk)  
URL <http://www.c20society.demon.co.uk/>  
Tel 020 7250 3857

#### **English Heritage**

Customer Services Department  
PO Box 569

Swindon  
SN2 2YP  
Email [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk)  
URL <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/default.asp>  
Tel 0870 333 1181

### **Association for Industrial Archaeology**

Liaison Officer  
School of Archaeological Studies  
University of Leicester  
Leicester  
LE1 7RH  
Email: [aia@le.ac.uk](mailto:aia@le.ac.uk)  
URL <http://www.industrial-archaeology.org.uk/>  
Tel 0116 252 5337,

### **Historic Scotland**

Longmore House  
Salisbury Place  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1SH  
URL <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index.htm>  
Tel 0131 6688600

### **CADW**

#### **Welsh Historic Monuments**

Welsh Assembly Government,  
Cathays Park,  
Cardiff, CF10 3NQ  
Email [cadw@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cadw@wales.gsi.gov.uk)  
URL <http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk/>  
Tel 029 2050 0200

### **For general information on labour movement history contact**

#### **National Co-operative Archive**

Co-operative College  
Holyoake House  
Hanover Street  
Manchester M60 0AS  
Email [archive@co-op.ac.uk](mailto:archive@co-op.ac.uk),  
URL <http://archive.co-op.ac.uk/>,  
Tel 0161 246 2925

#### **The Labour History Archive and Study Centre,**

103 Princess Street,  
Manchester, M1 6DD.  
Email [lhasc@fs1.li.man.ac.uk](mailto:lhasc@fs1.li.man.ac.uk),

URL <http://www.peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk>,  
Tel. 0161-228 7212

**The People's History Museum,**

103 Princess Street,  
Manchester, M1 6DD.

Email [admin@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk](mailto:admin@peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk)

URL <http://www.peopleshistorymuseum.org.uk>,

Tel. 0161-228 7212

**London Metropolitan University: Trades Union Congress Library Collections**

The Learning Centre 236-250 Holloway Road,  
London, N7 6PP

Email [tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk),

URL [www.londonmet.ac.uk/libraries/tuc](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/libraries/tuc)

Tel. 020 7133 2260

**Modern Records Centre,**

University of Warwick Library,  
Coventry, CV4 7AL,

Email [archives@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:archives@warwick.ac.uk),

URL <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/>,

Tel. 024 76 524219