

The History of the National Trust

An outline of a talk given by **John Hoare** to Tickhill & District Local History Society on 20th November 2008

ACORN SYMBOL

40 years after its foundation, the NT adopted the acorn symbol – small beginnings, large growth, long life, all appropriate to the story.

Octavia Hill, a London social worker, wanted to protect countryside for the benefit of the urban poor. In 1875 she had mounted a campaign to save an open space, Swiss Cottage fields, in north London, but failed. She turned for advice to Robert Hunter, solicitor for the Post Office and honorary solicitor for the Commons Preservation Society. They tried to find a legal framework to hold property for public benefit (wanting to save the diarist John Evelyn's old home in Deptford) but failed.

Something new was needed. Hunter suggested a land company specifically to own and protect in the public interest buildings or open spaces for recreation and instruction.

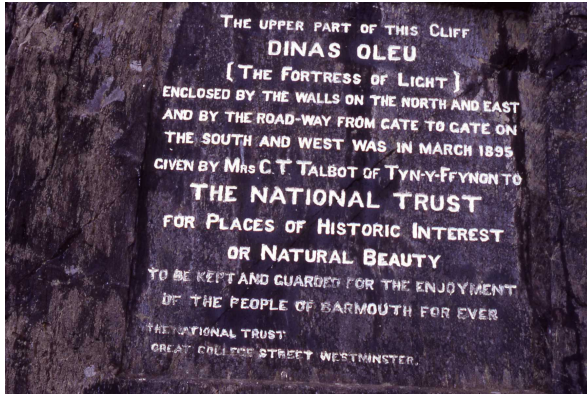
Another campaigner joined them in the person of Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, vicar of Crosthwaite and founder of the Lake District Defence Society in 1883. A threat to the Falls of Lodore brought them together.



So a momentous meeting was held in London in July 1894 to launch the project. It was chaired by the Duke of Westminster who said "Mark my words, Miss Hill, this is going to be a very big thing."

The National Trust began its legal existence in 1895.

DINAS OLEU



The first property had already been offered, a hilltop above Barmouth. It fitted well with Octavia Hill's wish to provide "open air sitting rooms for the poor". She commented that "we have got our first piece of property; I wonder if it will be our last". Clearly the

Duke of Westminster was a better prophet.

ALFRISTON CLERGY HOUSE

Two opportunities came quickly. It is interesting that, a century ago, it was the small vernacular dwellings which were vulnerable, not the grand stately homes which were still flourishing. Alfriston Clergy House was derelict, in danger of demolition, but a public



appeal raised the £10 to save it and a tenant was found.

WICKEN FEN

The other was the last significant area of fenland left in East Anglia, which was being overrun by butterfly hunters. Naturalists wanted it protected. The first purchase came in 1899 and other nature reserves followed later. Today land is being bought to extend Wicken Fen and it has already been doubled in size because we know that small isolated pockets are not enough to sustain biodiversity.

BRANDLEHOW PARK

The Lake District was an early concern. Interestingly it was the shores of the lakes which were the target because of the real fear that wealthy northern mill owners would build villas there and exclude the public. Brandlehow on Derwentwater was for sale in 1902. The Trust had 6 months to raise £6500 by public appeal and succeeded.



At the opening Octavia Hill told an audience “it belongs to you all and to every landless man, woman and child in England.”

From the outset the Trust debated how to balance acquisitions of buildings and of countryside (it still does). Modest structures were gradually purchased, because there were endangered, often with the assistance of the SPAB:

TINTAGEL OLD POST OFFICE 1904 dates back to C14

WINSTER MARKET HOUSE 1906 c.1700, ground floor open

MUCHELNEY PRIESTS HOUSE 1911, built 1308 by monks for village priest

CASTLERIGG STONE CIRCLE (Neolithic, 40 volcanic boulders)

In the meantime Rawnsley acquired the first property of archaeological importance, another string to the breadth of properties preserved “for ever, for everyone”.

BARRINGTON COURT (c. 1520 for Lord Daubeney)

This purchase in 1907 caused controversy and financial problems – a fine manor house which was in poor condition and being used as a cider store by a tenant. The drain on funds was such that it was a long time before more large houses were taken on. It was let to Colonel Lyle whose tenancy led to a beautiful garden designed by Gertrude Jekyll.

1907 was a significant year, when the first National Trust Act was passed. Drafted by Hunter, it contained the hugely significant principle of inalienability, whereby any property declared inalienable by the trustees cannot be sold by the Trust or compulsorily purchased by any authority. It remains for public benefit unless there is express approval of an act of Parliament.

The Trust was still small. Membership didn't reach 1000 until the 1920s but its portfolio grew. Rawnsley, the last of the founders to die in 1920, suggested land gifts to commemorate the war dead, The summit of Scafell Pike and other Lake District peaks were donated.

Under the chairmanship of John Bailey from 1923 and with new leadership, including historian G M Trevelyan, objectives were clarified. Lord Curzon, who has restored them, left 2 castles to the Trust, which dented the acquisitions policy a bit!

BODIAM CASTLE (1385 for Sir Edward Dalyngrigge)

TATTERSHALL CASTLE begun 1434 for Ralph, Lord Cromwell

FARNE ISLANDS

Viscount Grey, former foreign secretary, led the campaign to purchase the Farne Islands for £2200 in 1925.



Meanwhile the Trevelyan family gradually brought important areas of countryside into the Trust's ownership, including the **LONGSHAW ESTATE** (Picture of BURBAGE BROOK)

Back to the Lake District, and back in time.



In 1905 Beatrix Potter had purchased her home there, Hill Top, Sawrey, and became friendly with Hardwicke Rawnsley. She became an increasing benefactor of the Trust and, following her death in 1943 and that of her husband, Wm Heelis, in 1945, all her cottages, farms and another 4000 acres of land passed to the Trust.

Although membership remained small, there were friends in high places. At the 1934 AGM, Lord Lothian made a stirring speech calling attention to the changing times; it was the stately homes which were now under threat, the old labour force needed to maintain them never returned after the Great War, and economy and society were very different. Suggestions to Government to moderate death duties had fallen on deaf ears.

Lengthy debate led to the second National Trust Act (1937) which enabled the Trust to acquire great houses with land or investments to act as endowments, and no further tax would be payable. Thus house, contents and estate could stay as a unit (with the former owners as tenants – which in itself still creates problems on occasion).

BLICKLING HALL Robert Lyminge for LCJ Sir Henry Hobart
1616-27



Lord Lothian, British Ambassador in Washington from 1938, died suddenly in 1940 and his magnificent Norfolk estate passed to the Trust. Its 4700 acres of Norfolk farmland today no longer raise enough income to support the house!

A period of intense expansion followed, especially after the war with the Country Houses Scheme assisted by the National Land

Fund, established by the Government in 1946. The impact of the war was immense, on finances, on the physical condition of property and on social attitudes. These are some of the varied properties acquired:

LINDISFARNE CASTLE (Edwin Lutyens 1902 from shell of Tudor fort on dolerite crag)

LACOCK ABBEY (Converted to house by Wm Sharington 1539, front made Gothick by Sanderson Miller c.1750)

LYME PARK (S. front of Tudor house by Giacomo Leoni 1720s)

HAM HOUSE (North front 1610, altered 1673-5)

OSTERLEY PARK (Thomas Gresham's Elizabethan mansion transformed by Robert Adam post 1761)

Another area of concern after WW2 was the future of great gardens. Building on some earlier work, a joint Gardens Committee between NT and Royal Horticultural Society (1947) sought to protect gardens of outstanding beauty, design or historical interest.



These are two outstanding C20 creations which came to the Trust as a result. **HIDCOTE** was creation of Lawrence Johnston, American, purchased 1907. He created garden of rooms.

BODNANT, home of the Lord Aberconwaysway. This garden is on the side of the Conway Valley, with views towards Snowdonia, famous for terraces.

CONWAY BRIDGE 1903 (Thomas Telford 1826)

New directions continued to appear! A new national committee member, John Smith (who later moved on to develop the Landmark Trust), took a wider view of historic interest and encouraged acquisitions illustrative of the Industrial Revolution.



CORNISH WINDING ENGINE – Levant Mine, oldest surviving beam engine in Cornwall in tiny house (1846)

STYAL, QUARRY BANK MILL (Samuel Greg 1784)

The Trust had its problems in the 1960s; it needed to decentralise, which took time to achieve. It also needed to transform itself from a small elitist body to the mass membership with popular appeal which it has today, with good facilities, provision for all age groups and community involvement. Styal illustrates this – donated in 1939, little had been done to the estate when a resident was very critical at an Extraordinary General Meeting in 1967. What has changed?

The mill is now a museum to the cotton industry, producing cotton goods for the Trust, Heritage Education Awards have been won for work with schools, and

QUARRY BANK VILLAGE Tenants are being properly looked after.

COAST – NORTH YORKSHIRE

The 1960s also saw an important study of the coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which suggested that, of about 3000 miles, one third was developed, one third was of little interest and one third was worthy of preservation for its beauty. Caravan parks were a particular threat. Enterprise Neptune was launched in 1965, relaunched as the Neptune Coastline Campaign to commemorate the bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar, and over 700 miles of those 1000 are now saved for the nation.



RAVENSCAR, looking towards Robin Hood's Bay, the first Yorkshire coastline purchased under Enterprise Neptune in 1977.

WORMS HEAD, GOWER

BISSETS COVE, CORNWALL

GOLDEN CAP, DORSET

BRANSCOMBE MOUTH, DEVON

ST.AGNES HEAD, CORNWALL (A recent acquisition)

ACORN CAMP CLEARING UNDERGROWTH (St. Michael's Hill, Montacute)

This was also the decade of the first Acorn Camps, involving young (and not only young) people in active conservation work.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund played a major role after 1980 in assisting the purchase and restoration of significant properties. One such is STOWE with its C18 landscape of international importance, which had deteriorated since the house became a school in 1923.

- CASCADE (probably William Kent pre-1738)

Capability Brown began his career as Head Gardener at Stowe (1741-51) and virtually every famous architect in the mid C18 was responsible for a garden building. Restoration commenced in 1991.

- TEMPLE OF BRITISH WORTHIES (in Elysian Fields, by Kent c.1734, a pantheon of Whig heroes, a political statement)

UPPER WHARFEDALE

The Trust has also had pleasant surprises, like the gift of over 5500 acres of Upper Wharfedale by the Watson brothers in 1989, land assembled by them over a 50 year period.

ERDDIG (Centre late C17, wings 1721-4)

It has also acquired properties which have changed perceptions, like Erddig, in the possession of one family for over 250 years, last lived in by an elderly bachelor with water pouring through the roof, an overgrown garden and severe mining subsidence.



When the property was sufficiently restored for the public to come in (1977), it was 'below stairs' and the outbuildings which the public most enjoyed. The social history of the estate had now become more significant and conservation became a wider exercise.

NOSTELL PRIORY

Another house near to urban areas is Nostell Priory, now virtually in a country park, with a children's play area and nature trails. The C18 house, externally the work of James Paine, contains an amazing collection of CHIPPENDALE FURNISHINGS.

The house came to the Trust without its park in 1952 but was managed by the Winn family until 1997. In 2002 over 300 acres of parkland was purchased with the help of Heritage Lottery Fund – BLUEBELLS IN WOOD.

The OBELISK LODGE was restored and walks created with aid of young people from a residential institution doing their NVQs.

WASHINGTON OLD HALL – JULY 4th

As the Trust moves into its second century, its strategy is deeply rooted in effective communication with members and visitors, in working with local communities, in encouraging volunteering and in appealing to all age groups. Here local schools lead an annual celebration of American Independence Day.

The range of properties continues to extend into new territory, such as the boyhood home of Paul McCartney in Liverpool (which I haven't seen) and;

SOUTHWELL WORKHOUSE (1824)

MR. STRAW'S HOUSE (Edwardian villa, 1920s interior)

ORFORD NESS (huge desolate shingle spit, long the site of secret military research station. You still have to be careful where you walk. 5 miles of southern end acquired in 1993. Black Beacon 1928, lighthouse of 1792)

Conservation has to keep pace with preservation as we encourage more people to enjoy our countryside and our history.

MAM TOR – PATH RESTORATION In the Peak District, RAF helicopters have been used to drop paving to create proper paths over Mam Tor and Kinder Scout.

KINDER FROM MAM TOR

Kinder Scout, scene of the famous mass trespass in 1932, came on the market in 1982, and was purchased. Patchwork additions (as, for example, in the Lake District) extend the High Peak estate to meet the need for green spaces for all to enjoy, which is at least as important now as in 1895. The restoration of peat is now also a priority in the campaign to tackle climate change, as it is a huge store of carbon. Restored uplands also retain water and reduce the risk of flooding in the valleys below. So much comes together in the environment and this is where the Trust now plays a major role.

FOUNTAINS ABBEY – SURPRISE VIEW.

The most visited paying property of all is Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal. **STUDLEY ROYAL – THE LAKE** Here a major project will shortly begin to drain and dredge the lake for the first time since Victorian times, in the process an island then created with dredgings will be removed, the original view into the formal garden restored and wildlife enhance.

But, however much planning goes on, the NT has to be ready to respond to opportunities. So I will finish with the current appeal, to which I shall send your donation for this talk –

SEATON DELAVAL



The smallest of Sir John Vanbrugh's great houses, was built 1719-26, The main block was gutted by fire in 1822 and remains a shell, although subsequently re-roofed. The stables are superb, the gardens a modern delight, and the estate, extending to the coast, offers real opportunities for recreation close to the Tyneside built up area. Unfortunately grant-aiding bodies are strapped for cash so this appeal could fail but Seaton Delaval ticks all the right boxes. It exemplifies the purpose of the Trust – to preserve the best of our built and natural environment, for ever, for everyone.