

# delight

In an issue devoted to the creative re-use of old buildings, it seems a good moment to take stock of the campaigning work of SAVE, the conservation and pressure group dedicated to publicising the plight of the UK's often scandalously endangered historic buildings and places. Formed in 1975, SAVE was sparked into life by the then rampant destruction of British country houses and a general indifference on the part of politicians, planners and the public to the loss of built heritage. Over the next 30 years, under the doughty presidency of Marcus Binney, SAVE has become a thorn in the flesh of greedy developers, neglectful corporations and mendacious government departments. Its evangelical zeal extends from predictable high culture (country houses and churches) to the more surprising low (northern pubs and mills), but is always underpinned with admirable pragmatism. Repair and re-use are key tenets, rather than a pickled-in-aspic, preservationist approach. Refurbished buildings must earn their keep in an unforgiving world.

Notable successes include Jubilee Hall in Covent Garden, now dramatically integrated with a revived Opera House; the acquisition (by the National Trust) of Cragside, Norman Shaw's romantic pile in Northumberland; the saving of Billingsgate Fish Market, thought rotted beyond repair by the corrosive effects of fish juice; the re-use of Brunel's original Great Western Railway terminus in Bristol; and the rebirth of London's Regent Palace Hotel with its sumptuous Art Deco basement dining room and bar. Shown here is a 1935 wind tunnel at Farnborough, now Grade I listed.

SAVE's assiduous proselytising and lobbying has also resulted in the setting up of an ongoing Buildings at Risk register and, more indirectly, to the formation of organisations such as Friends of City Churches, which oversees the running of Wren's churches in the City of London. Many were threatened with closure in the mid '90s.

Three decades on, the fight continues. There are currently 900 entries on the Buildings at Risk Register and among the array of crumbling country seats and working men's institutes are more contemporary casualties such as Foster's Renault Centre (AR July 1983), empty since 1999. For Binney and his cohorts, each battle forms part of a grinding crusade against ignorance, neglect and wastefulness, conducted with no state financial support. Their efforts to remind the nation of its architectural wealth and prick the consciences of those who should know better were recently celebrated with a 30th anniversary exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum which runs until 12 February. CATHERINE SLESSOR

[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk); [www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)

