

# THE VALUE OF HISTORIC PLACES

## Introduction by Simon Thurley

The historic environment gives resonance to the places where people live and work. English Heritage is developing new ways of thinking about, conserving and managing those places that matter to everyone

The economic and social value of Bath or York, Lincoln or Chester is more obvious today than it was forty years ago. Thriving centres of commerce and tourism, these are places people want to visit and live in, and as a result, they enjoy a relative degree of prosperity and social harmony. These successes may, however, bring with them the danger that we neglect the potential for social and economic regeneration in other places that do not meet the more conventional criteria by which we judge significance and importance.

This issue of *Conservation Bulletin* seeks to describe and reclaim some of these neglected places. It considers the reasons why people value historic places – whether national or local, familiar or little known, old or comparatively new. Everyone has a stake in the historic environment, and many contribute to its understanding and enjoyment, not just those communities conventionally seen as supporters but also those who may seem indifferent or even antipathetic to the idea of historic places. We have too often failed to understand the wide commitment to the places where people live and work.

Historic places can also contribute to creating and maintaining economic value, and this issue focuses on micro-scale projects – small developments generating local improvements for everyday historic places.

I am determined that English Heritage should play its full part in developing new ways of thinking about, conserving and managing historic places that matter to everybody. I want us to explore new types of significance as we have begun to do in our characterisation projects in Birmingham and Sheffield, Cornwall and Liverpool. We want to direct more of our funding into maintenance and enhancement of the historic environment as a whole, building on the success of our CAPS and HERS schemes. We need to do more to build capacity in the sector, whether by securing additional resources for local authority conservation staff, providing improved access to a wider range of heritage information, supporting the development of building preservation trusts and other partners through grant aid, or working better with local and national partners on casework and policy development.

*The Historic Environment: A Force for our Future* (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, December 2001) set out this Government's agenda and priorities for the historic environment. It is a bold vision and one we support. This issue of *Conservation Bulletin* describes what is happening on the ground to develop, preserve and enhance local historic places. I hope it will both encourage and inspire many new projects in the years to come. □

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Before taking up his post in April 2002, Dr Thurley was the Director of the Museum of London, the world's largest and most comprehensive urban history museum. A dynamic exhibition programme led to an increase in visitors from 250,000 to nearly 400,000 a year. The museum's 300 strong Archaeological Unit made major archaeological discoveries. In February 2002 the museum opened a £5 million archaeological research centre in Hackney, and in 2003 it will open a £11 million new extension and entrance.

In 1989 Dr Thurley was appointed the first Curator of Historic Royal Palaces, responsible for the presentation, archaeology, building maintenance and display of Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace, the Tower of London, the Banqueting House, Whitehall and Kew Palace. During the eight years he

held the post, he was responsible for some of the largest restoration projects undertaken in the UK, including the repair of the fire-damaged wing at Hampton Court, the restoration of the King's Privy Garden there and the building of the new Jewel House for the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London.

Dr Thurley has written extensively on Royal Palaces, the English Court and heritage issues. His publications include a best-selling book, *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England* (Yale University Press, 1993,) and, with others, *Whitehall Palace* (Yale University Press, 1999). He is a regular contributor to academic journals, newspapers and magazines. In addition to lecturing world-wide on the Royal Court and Royal Palaces, Dr Thurley is a regular television presenter and for four years had a London history slot on BBC London.



A project on Victoria Baths, Manchester, by Plymouth Grove Primary School and English Heritage Education demonstrates how historic sports venues can stimulate work across the curriculum – art, history, English and citizenship. Expensively built in 1906 with mosaic floors, stained glass windows and ornamental ironwork, the Victoria Baths was used by local residents including many schoolchildren until the early 1990s. Listed Grade II\* but now closed to the public and in poor condition, the building has been grant-aided by English Heritage, and its Trust hopes to raise further funds to redevelop and reopen the site for community use (see also page 7)