

A 'ghastly interregnum': the struggle for architectural heritage conservation in Belfast before 1972

ANDREW G. MCCLELLAND*

National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, Social Sciences Institute,
Maynooth University, Iontas Building, North Campus, Room 2.11, Maynooth,
County Kildare, Ireland

ABSTRACT: This article explores the creation of the system for the conservation of architectural heritage in Northern Ireland, evidencing the struggle for convergence within the UK before 1972. The agency of networked individuals, close state-civil society interrelationships and the innovative actions of conservationist groups in response to legislative and practice inadequacies in the 1960s are discussed. In particular, a series of 'pre-statutory lists' are introduced, highlighting the burgeoning interest in industrial archaeology and Victorian architecture in Belfast and the prompt provided to their creation by redevelopment. The efforts of conservationists were eventually successful after the collapse of Devolution in the early 1970s.

The history of the conservation of the built environment in Northern Ireland is not well known. There is limited reference to its distinctive historical trajectory within widely cited accounts of the development of the legislative and institutional apparatus for conservation in the UK.¹ Furthermore, the 'highly significant' advances in Northern Ireland in the field of industrial archaeology, as Palmer acknowledges, are 'frequently neglected' in standard narratives of its early progression.² As the only devolved region of the UK for much of the twentieth century, and frequently considered a 'special case' and a 'place apart', such omissions

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¹ See, for example, M. Hunter, 'Introduction: the fitful rise of British preservation', in M. Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 1996), 1–16; J. Delafons, *Politics and Preservation: A Policy History of the Built Heritage, 1882–1996* (London and New York, 1997); G. Black, 'The conservation of the built environment in the UK', in A. Phelps, G.J. Ashworth and B.O.H. Johansson (eds.), *The Construction of Built Heritage: A North European Perspective on Policies, Practices and Outcomes* (Aldershot, 2002), 13–28.

² M. Palmer, 'Industrial archaeology and the archaeological community: fifty years on', *Industrial Archaeology Review*, 32 (2010), 5.

are perhaps not surprising.³ Indeed, the region is more readily associated with destruction of the built environment rather than its conservation; an impression understandably formed during the period euphemistically known as the Troubles.⁴ The primary purpose of this article, therefore, is to illuminate the Northern Ireland experience of architectural heritage conservation within the wider national context, thereby contributing towards a fuller understanding of the 'history of heritage' in the UK. In particular, attention is focused on the activities of key popularizing figures and civic associations in Belfast in the 1960s, when the struggle for governmental action intensified in response to redevelopment pressures and local legislators belatedly 'attempted to catch up with British practices'.⁵ Recent scholarship on the role of civic associations in place-making in twentieth-century Britain, and the complex interrelationship between the state and civil society in negotiating change within the built environment, informs the unfolding discussion.⁶ The peculiar political-administrative circumstances of Northern Ireland inevitably contributed towards a marked divergence with Britain, but certain commonalities in the guiding ideas and practices are explored.

The growing interest in industrial archaeology and Victorian- and Edwardian-era architecture in the 1960s provides another central focus. Belfast, as 'the only great industrial city' on the island of Ireland, was predominantly a product of the nineteenth century.⁷ The emerging concern from the mid-late twentieth century for conservation of the city's built environment shares much in common with the experience of the 'core cities' of the north of England,⁸ and the insights generated below complement the scholarly literature on the role of conservation in de-industrializing urban Britain.⁹ However, whereas heritage values were increasingly being ascribed to hitherto unremarkable places throughout

³ P. Carmichael and R. Osborne, 'The Northern Ireland civil service under direct rule and devolution', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 69 (2003), 206; D. Murphy, *A Place Apart* (London, 1978).

⁴ N. Galway and M. McEldowney, 'Place and special places: innovations in conservation practice in Northern Ireland', *Planning Theory & Practice*, 7 (2006), 397.

⁵ J. Hendry, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland', *Town Planning Review*, 48 (1977), 373.

⁶ See L.E. Hewitt, 'Associational culture and the shaping of urban space: civic societies in Britain before 1960', *Urban History*, 39 (2012), 590–606; L.E. Hewitt and J. Pendlebury, 'Local associations and participation in place: change and continuity in the relationship between state and civil society in twentieth-century Britain', *Planning Perspectives*, 29 (2014), 25–44.

⁷ J.C. Beckett, 'Belfast: a general survey', in J. C. Beckett and R.E. Glasscock (eds.), *Belfast: Origin and Growth of an Industrial City* (London, 1967), 184.

⁸ Core cities include Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle upon Tyne, as opposed to the 'jewel cities' of Bath, Chester, Canterbury and York discussed by J. Pendlebury and I. Strange, 'Urban conservation and the shaping of the English city', *Town Planning Review*, 82 (2011), 361–92.

⁹ For example, see J. Pendlebury, 'Alas Smith and Burns? Conservation in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre 1959–68', *Planning Perspectives*, 16 (2001), 115–41; M.E. Leary, 'The production of space through a shrine and vendetta in Manchester: Lefebvre's spatial triad and the regeneration of a place renamed Castlefield', *Planning Theory & Practice*, 10 (2009), 189–212.

the UK in response to actual and threatened destruction, particularly in urban centres, the situation in Northern Ireland was arguably more acute in the 1960s due to the lack of legislative and other mechanisms to secure conservation. More critically, the absence of a statutory inventorying process for architectural heritage was a notable inadequacy that conservationists sought to address through a series of 'pre-statutory lists' created in Belfast in the period 1966–70.¹⁰ These lists have not previously been examined in depth, yet the story of their production reveals much about shifting value judgments concerning the built environment, the means by which a networked group of individuals sought to influence government and public opinion and the confused institutional landscape under Devolution that ultimately frustrated many of the conservationists' efforts.

This article is structured into four principal sections. The first is necessarily contextual in nature, outlining the constitutional position of Northern Ireland prior to 1972, before setting out the divergent trajectory in the legislative and institutional basis for conservation in Northern Ireland and Britain. The narrative necessarily teases out the shifting historical relationships between a concern for ancient monuments, the developing interest in industrial archaeology and architectural heritage and the legislative home for the latter under land-use planning. The second section introduces the 'pre-statutory lists' prepared in response to the perceived inventorying inadequacies, and as part of conscious lobbying and awareness-raising activities. The third and fourth sections respectively consider state–civil society relations in driving forward practice innovations and the role of networked individuals, concluding with a brief discussion of the institutional landscape before 1972 and its impact on the capacity of campaigners to prevent the demolition of older buildings.

The changing constitutional position of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland occupied a unique position following the Partition of Ireland in the early 1920s, in that politicians in Belfast were afforded a range of executive, legislative and administrative powers that were not then devolved to the other 'nations' of the UK.¹¹ The UK parliament

¹⁰ A.G. McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage: the social construction of architectural heritage values in Belfast, circa 1960–1989', Ulster University Ph.D. thesis, 2014, 6. The first pre-statutory list in Northern Ireland concerned the city of Armagh and was published in 1964 by the London architect-planner Max Lock for the Northern Ireland Committee of the National Trust.

¹¹ Carmichael identifies three distinct phases of government in Northern Ireland in the twentieth century: 'Devolution' during the period 1921–72; 'Direct Rule' from 1972 to 1999; and, 'Devolution-plus' following the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998. See P. Carmichael, 'The Northern Ireland civil service: characteristics and trends since 1970', *Public Administration*, 80 (2002), 23–49.

retained sovereignty and decision-making authority over a range of 'excepted' and 'reserved' powers, including the armed forces, external trade, foreign relations and taxation. Nonetheless, in the period 1921–72, the devolved Northern Ireland government at Stormont enjoyed considerable leeway in managing the affairs of the region, albeit subject to policy and financial limitations emanating from Westminster.¹² Other than regional decision-making autonomy, however, the two principal defining characteristics of the political system in Northern Ireland during this initial period of devolution were the dominance of the Unionist Party, which remained in continuous power, and the pronounced ideological basis upon which many actions (or non-actions) were predicated, largely predetermined by religious affiliation.¹³ In short, the Unionist Party ensured Protestant hegemony over the political sphere, with other political parties representing a variety of constitutional positions unable to garner sufficient strength to mount a significant challenge. The development of the legislative and institutional apparatus for architectural heritage conservation was inevitably impacted by these local political realities. The failure of the Northern Irish authorities to maintain legislative 'parity' with Britain before 1972 was often critiqued.¹⁴ Table 1 provides a useful reference point and comparator in tracing the key legislative and institutional developments in Northern Ireland and England up to the 1970s. The widening divergence in practice as the twentieth century progressed is subsequently discussed.

Post-Partition ancient monument legislation, 1926–40

Following the Partition of Ireland, conservation in Northern Ireland was formally legislated for by the Stormont authorities under the Ancient Monuments Act of 1926. The 1926 Act incorporated several important provisions from the 1913 Ancient Monument Consolidation and Amendment Act in Britain, including the power to schedule privately owned monuments, and also the creation of an advisory body known as the Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee (AMAC).¹⁵ These provisions appealed to the Ministry of Finance for principally financial reasons.¹⁶ First, scheduling allowed the sidestepping of the costly practice

¹² M. Connolly and A. Erridge, 'Central government in Northern Ireland', in M. Connolly and A. Erridge (eds.), *Public Policy in Northern Ireland: Adoption or Adaptation?* (Belfast, 1990), 19–33.

¹³ D. Birrell and A. Murie, *Policy and Government in Northern Ireland: Lessons of Devolution* (Dublin, 1980), 90.

¹⁴ See, for example, C.E.B. Brett, 'The lessons of devolution in Northern Ireland', *Political Quarterly*, 41 (1970), 261–80.

¹⁵ The AMAC was initially known as a Committee under the 1926 Act, but this was changed to Council following the 1937 Ancient Monuments Act in Northern Ireland.

¹⁶ M.F. Fry, 'Preserving ancient and historic monuments and sites in State Care in Northern Ireland, c. 1921 to c. 1955. Part one: establishing a system of care', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 62 (2002), 161–75.

Table 1: *Selective chronology of legislative and institutional developments in conservation and planning in England and Northern Ireland*

Year	England	Northern Ireland
1869		Irish Church Act
1882	Ancient Monuments Protection Act	Ancient Monuments Protection Act
1892		Ancient Monuments Protection (Ireland) Act
1908	Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments established	
1913	Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act	
1921		Devolved government in Northern Ireland established; Ministry of Finance oversees ancient monuments
1926		Ancient Monuments Act; Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee (later Council) established
1931		Planning and Housing Act
1932	Town and Country Planning Act	
1937	National Trust Act	Ancient Monuments Act
1940	National Buildings Record established	
1944	Town and Country Planning Act	Planning (Interim Development) Act
1947	Town and Country Planning Act	<i>Report on Amenities in the Countryside</i>
1950	<i>Gowers Report</i>	Archaeological Survey established
1953	Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act	
1954		<i>Nugent Report</i>
1962	Local Authorities (Historic Buildings) Act	
1963		<i>Matthew Plan</i>
1965		Ministry of Development oversees planning
1967	Civic Amenities Act	
1968	Town and Country Planning Act	
1970	Department of the Environment established	

Table 1: *Continued*

Year	England	Northern Ireland
1971		Historic Monuments Act; Historic Monuments Council established
1972	Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act	Planning Order; Local Government Act; Department/Ministry of Finance continues to oversee historic monuments; Direct Rule from Westminster introduced

Source: Adapted from McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 94.

of taking structures into State Care; and secondly, the voluntary input of AMAC members would negate the necessity to recruit, and remunerate, professional archaeologists and other experts. Indeed, it was not until 1950, with the setting up of the Northern Ireland Archaeological Survey, that the first professional staff specifically charged with recording ancient monuments were finally employed in the region.¹⁷ Prior to this, the deputy keeper of the records – a position held by David Chart from 1924 to 1948 – 'to all intents and purposes' constituted the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Finance.¹⁸ The Ministry's tendency towards parsimony in its sponsorship of ancient monuments was also evident in later discussions over its reluctance to act on industrial archaeology and architectural heritage in the 1960s.

Legislative and institutional divergence with Britain, 1941–58

The divergence in the legislative and institutional basis for conservation in Northern Ireland markedly accelerated in the 1940s and 1950s when a series of initiatives in Britain advanced 'the process of establishing the system of conservation'.¹⁹ The effect of war, in particular, provided a 'substantial impetus to the concept of urban conservation', prompting, amongst other things, the creation of National Buildings Records in England and Scotland in the early 1940s.²⁰ Although Belfast suffered

¹⁷ J. O'Neill, 'Archaeology in Northern Ireland: public policy, fieldwork and research', *Historic Monuments Council Northern Ireland Report, 2003–2009* (Belfast, 2010), 31–2.

¹⁸ M.F. Fry, 'Preserving ancient and historic monuments and sites in State Care in Northern Ireland, c. 1921 to c. 1955. Part two: developing a system of care', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 64 (2005), 161.

¹⁹ Delafons, *Politics and Preservation*, 56.

²⁰ P. Larkham, 'The place of urban conservation in the UK reconstruction plans of 1942–1952', *Planning Perspectives*, 18 (2003), 295.

extensive damage during the Blitz of 1941, no equivalent inventorying organization was created to record local architecture.²¹ However, a clear pattern was emerging and the decade following World War II witnessed the introduction of various legislative measures that were likewise ignored in Northern Ireland. This includes the 1953 Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act, which led to further institutional advances in the guise of the new Historic Buildings Councils (HBC) in England, Scotland and Wales, and also introduced financial support for 'listed' building owners for the first time.²² Ministry of Finance officials were well aware of the various contemporaneous innovations occurring in the rest of the UK. For example, the *Nugent Report* of 1954, based on the findings of an AMAC Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Roland Nugent, positively referenced the 1953 Act and the key provisions flowing from it.²³ Nonetheless, the report remained unpublished and no further action was taken.²⁴

The most significant deviation from British practice in this period concerns the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947. The importance of land-use planning to architectural heritage conservation in the UK, and its emergence from the shadow of ancient monuments, is underlined in the literature. Pendlebury, for instance, talks of the development of a 'conservation-planning assemblage' in the twentieth century,²⁵ while Hobson acknowledges that planning provided 'the means and muscle previously lacking to prevent the last late lamented demolition of a valuable historic feature'.²⁶ Conservation may have remained somewhat at the margins of planning until the late 1960s, but the duty placed on the government by the 1947 Act to compile lists of buildings of special architectural and historic interest was a crucial departure from previous practice.²⁷ A 1947 report of the Planning Advisory Board's Committee on Amenities explicitly recommended that powers to list buildings of architectural and historic interest should be introduced to Northern Ireland, but no further action was taken in pursuit of this

²¹ See B. Barton, *The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years* (Belfast, 1989), for a sense of the damage caused.

²² P. Mandler, 'Nationalizing the country house', in Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past*, 99–114.

²³ See McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 108–9. The *Houses of Historic and Architectural Interest in Northern Ireland (Nugent Report)* report is available in Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Historic Monuments Council files (HMC) 2/1, 1954.

²⁴ Hendry, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland', 374–5.

²⁵ J. Pendlebury, 'Conservation values, the authorised heritage discourse and the conservation-planning assemblage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19 (2013), 709–27.

²⁶ E. Hobson, *Conservation and Planning: Changing Values in Policy and Practice* (London, 2004), 59.

²⁷ Delafons, *Politics and Preservation*, 60–1; A. Dobby, *Conservation and Planning* (London, 1978).

advice.²⁸ The non-introduction of a comprehensive system of planning in Northern Ireland is largely attributed to the antipathy of the ruling Unionist Party. In part, as Sayers notes, their aversion stemmed from the 'Unionist's belief in the rights of property'.²⁹ More critically, the fact that Lord Brookeborough, the Northern Ireland prime minister from 1943 to 1963, considered planning to represent a 'socialist menace', further inhibited progress.³⁰ The region was markedly out of step in its approach to land-use planning by the late 1950s and lagged even further behind Britain in the recording of, and status afforded to, architectural heritage.

Progress towards legislative breakthrough, 1959–72

The 'four decades of policy inertia' that characterized land-use planning since Partition was swept aside in the 1960s under government proposals for the modernization of the economy and the built environment.³¹ Prompted by a 'reformist faction within government and [the] civil service', this period, for Glendinning, represents a 'Forgotten Revolution' of modern reconstruction.³² The appointment of the Scottish architect-planner, Robert Matthew, and the publication of his *Belfast Regional Survey and Plan* (the *Matthew Plan*), were critical to subsequent interventions by the state.³³ Amongst Matthew's recommendations were the imposition of a 'stop-line' around Belfast to limit its further expansion and the development of a 'New City' in County Armagh to 'de-magnetize' its economic and social pull within the region. To achieve these ambitions, a single planning authority under a new government ministry was proposed, as was legislation akin to the Town and Country Planning Acts of the 1940s. Thus, by 1965, the *Matthew Plan*, supplemented by the *Wilson Report*,³⁴ provided the 'blue-print of the government's regional, physical and economic policy'.³⁵ The dissipation of the acrimony previously shown by the leadership of the Unionist Party towards the idea of planning was crucial to progressing these endeavours, as was the underlying strategic intention of extracting 'resources from the British exchequer' in light of the continuing precarious financial position of the region.³⁶

²⁸ Planning Advisory Board, *The Ulster Countryside: Report on Amenities in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1947).

²⁹ Cited in M. Murray, *The Politics and Pragmatism of Urban Containment: Belfast since 1940* (Aldershot, 1991), 95.

³⁰ T. O'Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O'Neill* (London, 1972), 47.

³¹ Murray, *Politics and Pragmatism*, 65.

³² M. Glendinning, "'The forgotten revolution": Northern Ireland's heritage of modern reconstruction', *Journal of Architecture*, 15 (2010), 622.

³³ R.H. Matthew, *Belfast Regional Survey and Plan 1962* (Belfast, 1964).

³⁴ T. Wilson, *Economic Development in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1965).

³⁵ Murray, *Politics and Pragmatism*, 105.

³⁶ M. Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O'Neill Years, 1960–9* (Basingstoke, 2000).

In contrast to his predecessor, the Northern Ireland prime minister from 1963, Terence O'Neill, was an enthusiastic supporter of planning and 'pressed the accelerator pedal down' on reform proposals from the mid-1960s.³⁷ To this end, a new Ministry of Development was established in 1965, and a suite of legislation was introduced that same year, including the New Towns Act, Amenity Lands Act and Land Development Values (Compensation) Act. Preliminary work on the location and design of the proposed New City began in 1963, albeit the initial head designer, Geoffrey Copcutt, abruptly resigned from the project in 1964, and it was soon dogged with other controversy including over its proposed name (Craigavon).³⁸ More politically difficult was the necessity to introduce town and county planning legislation akin to the 1947 Act, as it necessitated the fundamental reorganization of local government structures.³⁹ The threat that such reforms represented to Unionist hegemony at local government level, however, ensured that they were 'opposed by the traditional supporters of the Northern Ireland Government' and legislative proposals published in 1964 and 1966 were not progressed due to stern opposition.⁴⁰

The collapse of Devolution in 1972 in the face of escalating violence meant that the requisite planning legislation, in the form of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, was introduced under Direct Rule as an Order in Council at Westminster. Nonetheless, the assessment of structures for listing only began in 1974 with the newly established HBC for Northern Ireland working on a district-by-district basis, making provision for 'spot-listing' in urgent cases and for the early consideration of the 'best buildings'.⁴¹ In addition to planning legislation, the fundamental reshaping of local government was also imposed by the British government under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, creating a single tier of 26 district councils devoid of many former functions including planning, and essentially confining them to the management of 'bogs, bins and bodies'.⁴² It is somewhat ironic that just as Northern Ireland caught up with Britain in the legislative basis for planning and conservation under the 1972 Order, the practical delivery

³⁷ M. Glendinning, *Modern Architect: The Life and Times of Robert Matthew* (London, 2008), 335.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 331–8; M.J. McCleery, 'The creation of the "new city" of Craigavon: a case study of politics, planning and modernisation in Northern Ireland in the early 1960s', *Irish Political Studies*, 27 (2012), 89–109.

³⁹ The patchwork of 73 separate local authorities in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, including two county boroughs (Belfast and Londonderry), was criticized by Matthew as being 'neither administratively nor financially viable', see C. Knox, 'Local government in Northern Ireland – adoption or adaptation?', in Connolly and Erridge (eds.), *Public Policy in Northern Ireland*, 36.

⁴⁰ A. Murie, 'Planning in Northern Ireland: a survey', *Town Planning Review*, 44 (1973), 340.

⁴¹ HBC, *Annual Report, 1974–75* (Belfast, 1975), 6.

⁴² J. Bardon, 'Governing the city', in F.W. Boal and S.A. Royle (eds.), *Enduring City: Belfast in the Twentieth Century* (Belfast, 2006), 137.

of many functions would no longer occur through local government.⁴³ Moreover, historic monument and architectural heritage functions initially sat within separate government departments (the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Development respectively), that is until their amalgamation under the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment (DOE) in 1976.⁴⁴

A comparative story was unfolding in the Republic of Ireland in the 1960s. In particular, modernization projects in Dublin were increasingly contested by civil society, leading to conceptual shifts over what was considered worthy of conservation in the urban environment.⁴⁵ As Hanna examines, contestation revolved around differing notions of national identity, 'multiple conceptions of modernization and tradition' and the 'competing demands of change and conservation'.⁴⁶ Although the 'symbolic power' of eighteenth-century buildings and alternative 'constructions of the colonial past' were debated over Dublin's transformation, such discourses were not prevalent in Northern Ireland. Rather, contrasting Unionist and Nationalist visions for the built environment commonly played out over perceived biases towards the Belfast region as opposed to 'west of the Bann', political tensions over development in the 'rural' heart of Ulster and the propensity to appoint consultants from 'across the water' rather than engaging 'an Irishman'.⁴⁷ However, a common motivation linking proponents in both Irish jurisdictions was the desirability of introducing conservation legislation and practices akin to those well established in Britain. Thus, An Taisce compiled its own pre-statutory list in Dublin in 1967, which subsequently informed the first official inventory under the *Dublin City Development Plan* of 1971.⁴⁸ Although civil society in Northern Ireland was keenly aware of developments in the Republic,⁴⁹ the logic of parity dictated Unionist thinking and shaped the inclination of departmental officials at Stormont to first seek out innovative practices in Britain.

⁴³ This included the power to designate conservation areas.

⁴⁴ Such an amalgamation had already occurred in England in 1970 with the setting up of the DOE there, Delafons, *Politics and Preservation*, 104.

⁴⁵ E. Negussie, 'The evolution of urban conservation in Ireland: evidence from Dublin city', *Journal of Irish Urban Studies*, 2 (2003), 15–35; E. Negussie, 'What is worth conserving in the urban environment? Temporal shifts in cultural attitudes towards the built heritage in Ireland', *Irish Geography*, 37 (2004), 202–22.

⁴⁶ E. Hanna, *Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957–1973* (Oxford, 2013), 17–18.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*; Glendinning, *Modern Architect*, 332; McCleery, 'Creation of the "new city"'.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Hanna, *Modern Dublin*, 201.

⁴⁹ *The Future of Ulster's Past*, a pamphlet published by the Northern Ireland Committee of the National Trust in 1963, was largely written by Charles Brett and was based on a comparative survey of legislation in Northern Ireland and Britain. However, reference to the Republic of Ireland was made within the survey, including to the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963. See PRONI, D3839/A/1/6, National Trust Northern Ireland Committee minutes, 15 Jan. 1963.

Towards pre-statutory lists in Belfast

In addition to lobbying for appropriate legislation, a primary cause of concern for conservationists in the early 1960s was the absence of official architectural heritage inventorying processes. In Belfast, for instance, 'No County History, no local authority list of buildings, no Ancient Monuments Survey, no Pevsner Guide' then existed,⁵⁰ and the Archaeological Survey had limited interest in architectural heritage.⁵¹ Towards the end of 1960, the AMAC established a Sub-Committee to 'put forward co-ordinated proposals for the preservation of a representative series of structures of the 18th and 19th century communications and industrial activities of the Province'.⁵² The emergence of industrial archaeology as a field of study was instrumental in awakening an interest in the predominantly Victorian- and Edwardian-era built environment of the city. The first UK national conference on industrial archaeology was held in 1959 under the auspices of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA).⁵³ Somewhat fortuitously, an academic at Manchester University, Rodney Green, who was originally from Northern Ireland, was influential in both the CBA's and the AMAC's industrial archaeology committees.⁵⁴ Although the AMAC unsuccessfully pressed the Ministry of Finance to protect a number of structures at this time, two related initiatives emerged from these discussions. First, the sponsorship of what for many years remained the 'most comprehensive regional survey of industrial archaeology' in the UK.⁵⁵ Secondly, a series of pre-statutory lists in Belfast were produced by the AMAC and others between 1966 and 1970. The urgency for action on inventorying the city's built environment was articulated by Green in a memorandum to the AMAC in 1963, in which he stated:

A Belfast Survey...merits consideration as a matter of urgency. If present rates of growth in the economy can be maintained many old buildings will disappear from the city within a short number of years. It is paradoxical...that the part of the Province where the most rapid changes are taking place should be precisely the one for which no plans for survey and recording exist...It seems unlikely that the argument could be seriously raised nowadays that Belfast contains no

⁵⁰ Cited in C.E.B. Brett, *Buildings of Belfast, 1700–1914* (Belfast, 1985), xix.

⁵¹ The National Trust, for instance, wrote to the Archaeological Survey asking them to speed up their inventorying processes, and also for their surveys to be 'completed on the lines of that undertaken by local authorities in Britain under the Town and Country Planning Act (1947)', as recorded in PRONI, Armstrong papers, D3727/H/4/1, National Trust Northern Ireland Committee minutes, 11 Nov. 1961.

⁵² Historic Environment Division (HED), Ministry of Finance B-files (FIN) 842/1959, AMAC minutes, 9 Nov. 1960.

⁵³ R. Madgin, 'Reconceptualising the historic urban environment: conservation and regeneration in Castlefield, Manchester, 1960–2009', *Planning Perspectives*, 25 (2010), 31.

⁵⁴ See Green's account of the 1959 CBA conference in 'Industrial archaeology', *Antiquity*, 34 (1960), 43–8.

⁵⁵ W.A. McCutcheon, 'Industrial archaeology: a case study in Northern Ireland', *World Archaeology*, 15 (1983), 161.

Table 2: 'Pre-statutory lists' completed in Belfast, 1966–70

Author	Year	Title
BDP	1966	Provisional list of buildings of architectural and historic importance
W.A. McCutcheon, for the AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee	1966	Belfast Survey, Report prepared by Dr W.A. McCutcheon for Council's Sub-Committee
AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee	1967	Belfast Survey, Interim Report by Sub-Committee
AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee	1970	Belfast Survey

Source: McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 113.

buildings worth recording...the city [has] a particularly rich concentration of Victorian churches, banks, warehouses, shops and domestic buildings.⁵⁶

The lists are identified in Table 2 and an account of their scope, content and production is elaborated below.

Socio-economic pressures for the modernization of Belfast were emerging from the late 1950s. Two issues stand out. First, the lack of investment in housing was politically contentious yet required urgent governmental action, with Belfast Corporation deeming 18,440 houses unfit for human habitation under the terms of the 1956 Housing Act.⁵⁷ In response, the Corporation declared the first inner-city redevelopment area in 1959 and considered a series of others the following year.⁵⁸ However, the Corporation's inadequate housing response was implicated in the decision of the Ministry of Health and Local Government to employ Matthew to create a planning framework for the city, 'Just as Abercrombie had linked Glasgow slum redevelopment with "regional" planning.'⁵⁹ Secondly, the industries that fuelled the city's growth were in marked decline, leaving many buildings functionally redundant and ripe for replacement. By way of illustration, one third of the linen mills in Northern Ireland closed in the years 1958–64, while the number of linen workers in Belfast alone fell from 31,000 in 1951 to approximately 8,000 by 1971.⁶⁰ Civic expansionism and service sector growth caused a burgeoning demand for office accommodation, partially counteracting these trends, with the

⁵⁶ PRONI, FIN 17/1F/20/2, AMAC minutes, 16 Oct. 1963.

⁵⁷ City Surveyor and Town Planning Officer, *County Borough of Belfast: Report on Clearance, Housing and Redevelopment* (Belfast, 1959), 2.

⁵⁸ See Belfast Corporation, *Re-development Scheme for the Upper Library Street Area* (Belfast, 1959); PRONI, Belfast Corporation files LA/7/3/E/13/7, County Borough of Belfast Redevelopment Areas map.

⁵⁹ M. Glendinning and S. Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven, 1994), 295.

⁶⁰ W.A. Maguire, *Belfast* (Keele, 1993), 160.

former warehouse district to the south of City Hall ‘one of the most favoured locations for new office development’.⁶¹ Thus, the construction of modern speculative offices, often replacing older buildings, was one manifestation of change in the built environment that so concerned the nascent conservation movement in the city.

The pre-statutory lists – contents, use and limitations

Building Design Partnership (BDP) was employed by Belfast Corporation in the mid-1960s to prepare a development plan for the city.⁶² A *Provisional List of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Importance* featured in the first of a suite of published reports culminating in the *Belfast Urban Area Plan 1969*.⁶³ The report, *Belfast Development Plan: Report to the City Corporation of Belfast on a Building Preservation Policy*, lists 102 individual buildings and groups of buildings that ‘should be preserved, at all costs, those which should be preserved if possible and those which should be recorded in detail before demolition is allowed’.⁶⁴ None of the list entries were graded as to their importance, but the report considered that ‘every opportunity should be taken, by redevelopment, road improvements or rehabilitation to improve the setting of individual buildings, or groups of buildings, and to create wider special relationships between them’.⁶⁵ In addition to its ‘immediate use’ by Belfast Corporation insofar as planning applications were concerned, the list was subsequently promoted by BDP in articulating the preferred urban design vision for the redeveloped city centre.⁶⁶ For example, the *Belfast Central Area* report paid particular attention to ‘buildings of outstanding architectural or historic interest’ and ‘groups of buildings of special civic design value’.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it was clear that certain buildings identified did not fall ‘into the category of being indispensable’, with, for example, Victoria College, 1–12 Lower Crescent and the Ormeau Road Methodist Church liable for demolition under a proposed urban motorway.⁶⁸

In the summer of 1966, an emergency photographic survey of Belfast was undertaken by McCutcheon as an offshoot of the Northern Ireland

⁶¹ BDP, *Belfast Central Area: A Report to Belfast Corporation on Planning Policy in the City Centre* (Belfast, 1969), 26.

⁶² See BDP, *Belfast Development Plan: Report to the City Corporation of Belfast on a Building Preservation Policy* (Belfast, 1966). The *Belfast Urban Area Plan 1969* was described as the ‘last example in the UK of a particular type of...complex technical physical development plan that exemplified the optimism of the 1960s’, J. Hendry, ‘Plans and planning policy for Belfast: a review article’, *Town Planning Review*, 63 (1992), 81.

⁶³ BDP, *Belfast Urban Area Plan 1969* (Belfast, 1969).

⁶⁴ BDP, *Belfast Development Plan*, para 6.1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para 5.4.

⁶⁶ BDP proposed that one third of the city centre would be rebuilt over a 20-year period, *Belfast Central Area*, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁸ BDP, *Planning Aspects of the Belfast Urban Motorway* (Belfast, 1968), 23.

Industrial Archaeology Survey.⁶⁹ The Belfast Survey Sub-Committee of the AMAC, to which McCutcheon reported, initially considered a target list of 90 buildings and groups of buildings prior to the survey commencing, which provided a preliminary assessment as to future priority actions.⁷⁰ The McCutcheon survey was focused on identifying the most important buildings 'under threat' with a view to their immediate protection or recording for posterity, in contrast to the urban design orientation of the BDP list as part of a broader vision for the city. The completed report consisted of a list of buildings sub-divided into four principal groupings: churches etc.; public buildings, including retail stores and shops; industrial and commercial buildings; and private dwellings. Particular priority was afforded to identifying 'buildings of outstanding importance on which some specific course of action can be recommended...and to buildings which...are in some danger and on which attention should be focused now'.⁷¹ Each of the entries were graded A–D, with recommendations made as to the desirability of scheduling 30 under the Ancient Monuments Act, 11 of which were also deemed worthy of State Care.⁷²

The McCutcheon survey provided a stepping-stone for the AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee to advance its own recommendations in two stages.⁷³ In the interim report of 1967, McCutcheon's recommendations were broadly endorsed, although additional entries were considered worthy of scheduling, with fewer than seven structures identified for State Care. In the final report of 1970, the Sub-Committee sought to review the earlier recommendations, including those emanating from BDP. Furthermore, concerns were also expressed that its final recommendations be consistent with the standards then guiding the two Ministry of Development officials employed in 1969 to draw up the preliminary statutory list in advance of legislation. To this end, individual entries were considered Outstanding (A), Special (B) or Good in its context (C), with those given the latter grading not deemed worthy of statutory protection.

In terms of their content, a considerable degree of overlap is apparent in the pre-statutory lists, with 80 entries featured on the AMAC's interim list also indicated in 1970, albeit the same grading did not necessarily carry across. Prominent amongst these were the Belfast Charitable Institution, the front block of Queen's University and the City Hall. On the interim

⁶⁹ McCutcheon, 'Industrial archaeology', 161–72. Report available in HED, FIN 645/1963, W.A. McCutcheon, 9 Sep. 1966.

⁷⁰ Abbreviations indicated future actions, including: A – save at all costs; B – try to save; C – worthy of recording in some way; D – measured drawings required; RM – rough measurements to be recorded; PO – photographs only, as recorded in HED, FIN 645/1963, AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee minutes, 12 Apr. 1966.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² The grades represented the following: A – outstanding; B – outstanding in a local context; C – of some importance and interest architecturally or historically, either of itself or as part of a distinctive townscape zone; D – worth noting but not of great interest. *Ibid.*

⁷³ The 1967 report is available in HED, FIN 143/1970. The 1970 report is available in HED, FIN 77/1970.

list, 10 buildings or groups of buildings did not feature in 1970, including several that were demolished (or due to be demolished) in the interim period, including 56–60 Great Patrick Street and Matier's Building at 1 May Street. In contrast, a further 36 entries not recorded in 1967, do feature in 1970, although many of these are graded B and C or are simply earmarked for recording only.⁷⁴ The 1970 list contained no recommendations in relation to scheduling or taking any of the entries into State Care. The precise reason for this is unclear, but it was presumably due to the impending introduction of the 1971 Historic Monuments Act (Northern Ireland), which would provide a new legislative footing for historic monuments and lead to the imminent dissolution of the AMAC in favour of a newly created Historic Monuments Council.

The pre-statutory lists represent the first attempts at inventorying architectural heritage in Belfast and underline the increasing recognition of the merits of its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century built environment. The structures identified were in multiple ownerships, public and private, and were for the most part still in use. Nonetheless, the lists were relatively modest in their coverage and were predominantly confined to the monumental and canonic heritage represented by the institutional, ecclesiastical and commercial properties comprising the bulk of the entries, particularly located in the centre and leafier southern suburbs close to Queen's University. The limited identification of residential property was acknowledged at the time and this omission was expected to be addressed once statutory listing processes began.⁷⁵ Moreover, although the AMAC's involvement emerged from an interest in industrial archaeology, it is notable that the large mill buildings and other industrial structures identified were not recommended for scheduling or taking into State Care, and were consistently earmarked for recording only. In hindsight, of course, it is possible to criticize the modest numbers of buildings identified for protection, but a limited focus on the preservation of individual buildings and 'monuments' was commonplace in the UK in the 1960s.⁷⁶ As such, it would be churlish to overemphasize the apparent limitations of what were then pioneering efforts at an extremely difficult time in the city's history.

Networked individuals and state–civil society relations

In common with experience in Britain in the twentieth century, networked individuals operating within civic associations and civil society were

⁷⁴ Many of those entries appearing for the first time in the 1970 list were initially identified by BDP, but subsequently overlooked by McCutcheon and in the 1967 AMAC list.

⁷⁵ PRONI, HMC 1/2, AMAC minutes, 22 Sep. 1970.

⁷⁶ Pendlebury, 'Alas Smith and Burns?', 134–7; A. Mageean, 'Assessing the impact of urban conservation policy and practice: the Chester experience 1955–96', *Planning Perspectives*, 14 (1999), 71.

critical to driving forward the conservation agenda in Belfast in the 1960s.⁷⁷ To the fore were the Northern Ireland Committee of the National Trust and the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS), which were widely credited with securing action on conservation in the 1970s.⁷⁸ A number of features of their operation resonates with contemporary experience in Britain, including their 'responsible style' of campaigning, secured by 'the advocacy of some high-profile figures'.⁷⁹ For instance, the inaugural meeting of the UAHS was presided over by Robert Matthew, who also became its first vice-president.⁸⁰ Furthermore, a certain porosity in the boundaries between the state and civil society is also evident in Northern Ireland. The position of chairman of the AMAC, until 1967, was held by a succession of members of the Northern Ireland government (both ministers and senators),⁸¹ while further 'official' involvement came under the guise of the deputy keeper of the records, who, as a civil servant, was appointed as a statutory committee member.⁸² The National Trust also had close government connections, with Richard Rogers, the official 'responsible for preparing and implementing Northern Ireland's first conservation legislation...as well as establishing the government's first conservation administrative unit', serving on the local committee for some 40 years.⁸³ In spite of the frustrations noted below, this 'handful of devoted adherents to the cause of conservation' was able to achieve notable successes that might not have been possible elsewhere.⁸⁴

The sometimes oppositional, and often collaborative, dual role performed by these associations clearly required tactical diplomacy and delicate management given the interconnections. By way of illustration, the Belfast Survey instigated by the AMAC can be seen as an innovative practice aimed at filling an inventorying void and involving representatives of central and local government as co-creators.⁸⁵ At the same time, the survey also had an activist agenda in recommending the immediate protection for certain structures under the Ancient Monuments Act, while also coalescing as part of wider efforts aimed at achieving

⁷⁷ See Hewitt, 'Associational culture and the shaping of urban space', 590–606; Hewitt and Pendlebury, 'Local associations and participation in place', 25–44; M. Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation* (London and New York, 2013).

⁷⁸ HBC, *Annual Report*, 5; Hendry, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland', 378–9.

⁷⁹ Hewitt, 'Associational culture and the shaping of urban space', 605.

⁸⁰ UAHS, *Ulster Architectural Heritage Society: Inaugural Meeting* (Belfast, 1967).

⁸¹ E.E. Evans, 'Foreword', in W.A. McCutcheon, *The Industrial Archaeology of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1980), xxxi.

⁸² Fry, 'Preserving ancient and historic monuments and sites in State Care in Northern Ireland, c. 1921 to c. 1955. Part one', 173.

⁸³ R. Buchanan, 'Foreword', in L. Gallagher and D. Rogers, *Castle, Coast and Cottage: The National Trust in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1992), ix.

⁸⁴ Hendry, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland', 373.

⁸⁵ Two officials from the Ministry of Development, in addition to the chairman of Belfast Corporation's Town Planning Committee, were co-opted onto the AMAC's Belfast Survey Sub-Committee in 1970.



Figure 1: (Colour online) Former School for the Deaf and Dumb on the Lisburn Road. Image courtesy of the UAHS.

legislative change. However, there was evidently a growing desire for a more assertive approach to lobbying efforts in the late 1960s and the establishment of the UAHS immediately brought a new dynamic to bear that had previously been absent. Initially, the formation of a regional branch of the Victorian Society seemed likely following a visit by its secretary, Jane Fawcett, in 1966 to advise BDP on the creation of its provisional list.⁸⁶ The locally based UAHS was created instead, immediately concerning itself with buildings of all periods to avoid competition for membership and support, thereby avoiding the ‘chronological succession’ of amenity societies that emerged in Britain over the twentieth century.⁸⁷ Unlike in England, where oppositional politics was exemplified by the Euston Arch and Coal Exchange cases in London, nothing in Northern Ireland rivalled the attention that they received. Nonetheless, the demolition of the School for the Deaf and Dumb and the Queen’s Elms (see [Figures 1](#) and [2](#)) strongly influenced the founder members of the UAHS.⁸⁸ One person in particular, Charles Brett, stands out as a prominent ‘lay citizen’ in Belfast who was central to many of the initiatives discussed. Indeed, Brett is considered ‘the greatest influence on historic buildings in the province’, as the first chairman of the UAHS and a prolific author on local architectural history, including publication

⁸⁶ McClelland, ‘Contesting destruction, constructing heritage’, 129.

⁸⁷ Pendlebury, ‘Conservation values’, 713.

⁸⁸ Brett, *Buildings of Belfast*, 31. It is no coincidence that the UAHS’ first publication concerned *Historic Buildings, Groups of Buildings and Areas of Importance in the Vicinity of the Queen’s University of Belfast*.



Figure 2: (Colour online) Queen's Elms on the University Road. Image courtesy of the UAHS.

of the 'ground-breaking *Buildings of Belfast*' in 1967.⁸⁹ This book was instrumental in awakening public interest in the older buildings of the city, with Patton, for example, suggesting that it planted 'the idea that there might be...architecture in grimy old Belfast'.⁹⁰ As an active member of the Northern Ireland Committee of the National Trust from the late 1950s, Brett instigated membership and other campaigns, including drafting advocacy material calling for the introduction of enhanced protection for architectural heritage.⁹¹ His research subsequently informed the content of the pre-statutory lists in Belfast, with his advice acknowledged by BDP and McCutcheon, and his views more directly expressed as a co-opted member of the AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee in 1967.⁹² As the chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party from the early 1960s, Brett's oppositional activities had a distinctly political flavour, at least until his resignation from party politics in 1970.⁹³ Although Brett's literary ambitions were evident from his time as president of the Poetry Society at New College, Oxford, and a brief period working as a journalist in

⁸⁹ M. Patton, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland since 1969', *Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings Transactions*, 23 (1998), 6; Brett, *Buildings of Belfast*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹¹ McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 127.

⁹² Interestingly, Brett was not co-opted onto the 1970 AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee.

⁹³ See C.E.B. Brett, *Long Shadows Cast Before: Nine Lives in Ulster, 1625–1977* (Edinburgh, 1978), 126; A. Edwards, '“Unionist Derry is Ulster's Panama”: the Northern Ireland Labour Party and the Civil Rights Issue', *Irish Political Studies*, 23 (2008), 363–85.

post-war Paris, his interest in Irish architecture stemmed from the fact that few published resources existed on the subject so 'he resolved to write them himself'.⁹⁴

Confused institutional landscape and unchecked demolition

The confused institutional landscape in relation to 'ownership' of architectural heritage in Northern Ireland in the 1960s was a product of its drawn-out functional separation from ancient monuments, with the conservation of the former flowing from land-use planning legislation. In essence, two parallel systems were shadowing each other for much of the decade, nominally backed by two separate government ministries, neither of which was enamoured with acquiring the new architectural heritage conservation responsibilities. The Ministry of Finance's involvement in conservation, of course, was already constituted under existing ancient monuments legislation, whereas the Ministry of Development (and its predecessor before 1965) was hypothetically responsible for the architectural heritage conservation powers expected under future planning legislation. The financial stringencies applied by the Ministry of Finance to ancient monuments were noted above. However, the Ministry of Development was understandably hesitant to resource activities relating to powers it did not yet have, particularly in light of difficulties recruiting planners to work on existing activities and its crowded legislative programme.⁹⁵ The sponsorship of the AMAC's Belfast Survey by the Ministry of Finance and Belfast Corporation was only confirmed after several years' negotiations that essentially hinged on the question of 'who pays'.⁹⁶ The intervention of the prime minister, Terence O'Neill, was subsequently critical to instigating the first inventorying foray by the Ministry of Development from 1969, and to overcoming wrangling between the two departments in the context of an ever more vociferous external lobby for action.⁹⁷

The ascription of heritage values to the built environment in the midst of institutional uncertainty over fuzzily delineated functional responsibilities for conservation added to the confusion. This was brought into sharper focus from 1969 with the Ministry of Development's more active engagement with inventorying processes. In short, the proliferation

⁹⁴ K. Latimer, 'Two kinds of knowledge: some information resources for Ulster architect use', in T. Reeves-Smyth and R. Oram (eds.), *Avenues to the Past: Essays Presented to Sir Charles Brett on his 75th Year* (Belfast, 2003), 353.

⁹⁵ The lack of planning expertise in Northern Ireland in the mid-1960s was a serious concern for the Stormont authorities, as discussed by C.F.S. Newman, 'A short history of planning in Northern Ireland', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, 52 (1965), 47–53.

⁹⁶ For a detailed discussion, see McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 133–9.

⁹⁷ A.G. McClelland, 'Conservation at the crossroads in Northern Ireland: Terence O'Neill and the growing concern for architectural heritage 1956–1969', *Irish Political Studies* (2016), 1–22.

of surveys, either completed or underway, and their divergent interests in terms of the broadening scope of what they recorded in the built environment, led to what one AMAC committee member described as a 'state of listing confusion'.⁹⁸ To further complicate matters, the Belfast Corporation Planning Department was reported to be predominantly informed by Brett's *Buildings of Belfast*,⁹⁹ while the UAHS was busily creating what Stamp referred to as its 'admirable series of publications'.¹⁰⁰ According to a Ministry of Finance official, however, the AMAC's 1970 Belfast Survey was determined to be 'authoritative' by both the Ministry of Development and Ministry of Finance, at least until the former 'had its own advisory body' under promised legislation.¹⁰¹ Such assertions of central government authority in architectural heritage inventorying matters inevitably rang hollow in the continued absence of legislation to protect the very structures being recorded.

By 1970, discussions were taking place in a rapidly changing physical and political landscape in Belfast, given the outworking of planned redevelopment 'on the ground' and the eruption of civil unrest in late 1968. As McCutcheon underlined, the 'pace of change and replacement' of former industrial premises in the city was such 'that little time elapses from the end of functional use to demolition or drastic adaptation to other uses'.¹⁰² The introduction of legislation also appeared some way off as the authorities struggled to cope with violence and the necessity to push through local government reform. The frustration generated by this hiatus was articulated by Brett in his address to the UAHS Annual General Meeting of January 1970, at which he stated:

But I am afraid legislation is not just around the corner. The new framework for planning and conservation is not at the top of the Governments list of priorities – understandably; and it is going to have to await the outcome of the review of the structure of local government. This is a serious matter: it may mean two or three years, or even more, before new legislation will be effective. The mind boggles at what irreplaceable buildings may have disappeared in that time. There is clearly going to be a ghastly interregnum during which demolition and redevelopment proceed at ever-increasing speed, yet during which there is no effective machinery for conservation or preservation.¹⁰³

The pessimistic tone pervading this address was seen to be merited soon after following the failed attempt to protect a former linen warehouse in Belfast city centre under the Ancient Monuments Act – see [Figure 3](#). The warehouse, at 9–15 Bedford Street, featured in each of the

⁹⁸ PRONI/HMC 1/2, AMAC minutes, 15 Jul. 1970.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ G. Stamp, 'The art of keeping one jump ahead: conservation societies in the twentieth century', in Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past*, 97.

¹⁰¹ PRONI/HMC 1/2, AMAC minutes, 15 Jul. 1970.

¹⁰² McCutcheon, *Industrial Archaeology*, 317.

¹⁰³ UAHS, Annual General Meeting minutes, 28 Jan. 1970.



Figure 3: Warehouse at 9–15 Bedford Street. Image courtesy of the UAHS.

pre-statutory lists with the exception of the last in 1970, when permission had already been given by Belfast Corporation for its demolition and replacement (see [Table 3](#)). This unsuccessful ‘test case’ hinged on the payment of compensation to the owner and what Ministry of Finance officials deemed potentially prohibitive costs to the public purse to conserve the building ‘in use’ (and/or taking into State Care) in light of its poor structural condition.¹⁰⁴ To make matters worse, it was replaced by the 23-storey Windsor House, the tallest building on the island of Ireland at the time, whose height dramatically contravened the Corporation’s policy on tall buildings.¹⁰⁵ Although a chastening experience, the UAHS was undeterred from pressing for interim protection for architectural heritage, continuing their inventorying activities, and campaigning to save individual buildings under threat. However, a further two years would elapse before the appropriate legislation was in place, and a further two subsequently before the first listed buildings and conservation areas were designated in 1974. Hendry observed how the gradual process through which conservation powers were accumulated in Britain contrasted with the experience in Northern Ireland, where kick-starting the inventorying of architectural heritage, the emergence of campaigning groups and the creation of the legislative and institutional apparatus was effectively

¹⁰⁴ See McClelland, ‘Contesting destruction, constructing heritage’, 155–86.

¹⁰⁵ BDP, *High Buildings Policy: Presented to Belfast Corporation* (Belfast, 1968).

Table 3: Recommendations from pre-statutory lists concerning 9–15 Bedford Street

Author	Year	Grading	Description	Other recommendations
BDP	1966	N/A	Office bldg., 4st. continuous ent. at 1st and 2nd fls. Deep bracketed cornice. Windows at 2nd and 3rd fls. Combined vertically in s-cir headed recesses. Main central entrance, with balcony supported on brackets over. 1855, Charles Lanyon.	N/A
W.A. McCutcheon	1966	C	Of some importance and interest architecturally or historically, either of itself or as part of a distinctive townscape zone	Scheduling
AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee	1967	B	Outstanding in a local context	Scheduling
AMAC Belfast Survey Sub-Committee	1970	N/A	Not included	N/A

Source: McClelland, 'Contesting destruction, constructing heritage', 171.

condensed into a single decade.¹⁰⁶ The 'ghastly interregnum' in the quotation above may have referenced the then indeterminate future wait for long-delayed planning legislation, but it could equally have been used to characterize the entire period of conservation under Devolution up to that point.

The shifting temporal dimension to the recording and revalorization of former industrial buildings as a heritage worth conserving was eloquently summarized by McCutcheon at a Council for British Archaeology conference in March 1964, who emphasized

the need to observe, study and record sites and features which have been robbed of their functional justification and which, for the time being, maintain a precarious

¹⁰⁶ Hendry, 'Conservation in Northern Ireland', 373.

existence in the present day landscape simply because there has hitherto been nothing much to be gained by their removal. They have no practical grounds for survival and unless studied and recorded now, many of them will disappear before the general concept of industrial archaeology is accepted by the public conscious.¹⁰⁷

What the UAHS and those responsible for the pre-statutory lists essentially understood, in the words of Graham *et al.*, was that by stimulating an historical awareness of structures which ‘previously had no such ascribed value’, the conservation movement aimed to ‘create the resources it conserves’.¹⁰⁸ The majority of buildings identified in the pre-statutory lists were statutorily protected from 1974 (including 27 as grade A), and numerous conservation successes would subsequently be achieved in the face of the significant challenges posed by the Troubles.¹⁰⁹ However, Hendry’s concerns regarding the determination within government to make the newly acquired conservation controls work proved rather prescient, particularly in Belfast where ‘virtually the only architecture of any distinction dates from the late nineteenth century’.¹¹⁰ The city’s first conservation area (Queen’s), for example, was belatedly designated in 1987, while Belfast was amongst the last districts considered for protection during the DOE’s First Survey of listed buildings. More seriously, the demolition of Victorian-era buildings for the Castlecourt development exposed the ambiguous place of architectural heritage in the reconstructing city and propelled the policy and governance critiques of civil society higher up the political agenda.¹¹¹ Although the conservation of historic buildings was firmly embedded within planning and urban regeneration processes in England by the 1980s, other interests more frequently prevailed over conservation in Northern Ireland.¹¹² The pre-statutory lists may have been pioneering efforts in revaluing aspects of Belfast’s built environment on the cusp of radical change, but they represented mere staging posts in the unfolding struggle for architectural heritage conservation within the city.

¹⁰⁷ The conference at the Royal Geographical Society in London was entitled ‘Sites of Early Industry: The Problem of Recording and Preservation’. McCutcheon’s quotation was taken from an unattributed conference summary, see PRONI, papers of Prof. E.R.R. Green (D3561/C/5) (box B.52095).

¹⁰⁸ B. Graham, G.J. Ashworth and J.E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy* (London, 2000), 146.

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, R. Pierce and A. Coey, *Taken for Granted: A Celebration of 10 Years of Historic Building Conservation* (Belfast, 1984); J. Cornforth, ‘A quickening pace: conservation in Northern Ireland – I’, *Country Life*, 13 Dec. 1984, 1852–3; Patton, ‘Conservation in Northern Ireland’.

¹¹⁰ Hendry, ‘Conservation in Northern Ireland’, 386.

¹¹¹ A.G. McClelland, ‘“More construction than destruction”: the ambiguous place of architectural heritage in a reconstructing Belfast circa 1972–89’, in C. Hein (ed.), *International Planning History Society Proceedings*, 17th IPHS Conference, History-Urbanism-Resilience, TU Delft 17–21 July (TU Delft Open, 2016), 4, 365–76.

¹¹² See Pendlebury and Strange, ‘Urban conservation’; Brett, *Buildings of Belfast*, xv; J. Hendry, M. McEldowney, D. McNeill, P. Larmour and P. Braniff, *Conservation in Belfast* (Belfast, 1987); D. Phillips, *Legislative and Functional Review of Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1988).