CHAIRMAN’S COLUMN
Philip Belchere
CLIMATE CHANGE

Whether you follow the ‘Clarkson School’ or ‘Gore School’ of thought regarding Global Warming, one must admit that there are changes afoot in our weather patterns. Clearly the weather is a major factor in caring for our historic assets, from small stitches, clearing gutters and removing buddleia to holding back the dam against a tidal flood. We can prepare for some events, but there are the unexpected which come as a wakeup call.

We have in Ludlow one of the most complete medieval town walls in Europe, the walls are under constant maintenance and repair as one would expect of a major tourist attraction. Last year we completed a major restoration and consolidation of a 60m stretch utilising modern techniques and traditional methods to preserve this 10m high structure perched on the bedrock overlooking those blue remembered hills. To ensure the preservation of the walls an HLF bid was made, unfortunately for reasons too annoying to mention this bid was unsuccessful. However, we were encouraged to make a further bid but on the eve of the submission, while Colin was burning the midnight oil making the finishing touches to the bid, a 7m high portion of the wall in front of St Laurence’s, the largest parish church in England, decided to give up! Sadly this was one of the more stable sections of the wall and its demise, was a total surprise.

The failure of the wall couldn’t be more of a text book case though. Extensive and torrential rain built up behind the wall, which created voids through removal of fines, followed by a body-numbing frost resulted in extreme pressure on the wall. Added to this the good intentions of ill-informed town council maintenance teams and several bags of OPC there was only one direction this could go. You might have seen this on the TV; I’m considering entering the wall into the Guinness Book of Records for the world’s largest sample panel.

Whether environmental change is down to manmade global warming or life’s rich tapestry we are facing the same challenges whichever is to blame. Steps to be taken must be wide ranging from major strategic flood alleviation projects to detail level ensuring our buildings are sufficiently permeable but weather tight. The Green Deal is a strategic reaction to Climate Change but the potential damage to traditionally built structures may be catastrophic, leading to irreparable damage by the ill-informed. Our constant banging on about the magical qualities of lime have paid dividends, there are few who have not heard the word. We need to talk up the benefits of the Green Deal, providing they consult a specialist in historic buildings. Keep spreading the word.

EDITORIAL

Fortification – from Ludlow to Malta. Our Chairman’s column illustrates the vulnerability of medieval fortress masonry to assault by rain and frost. The Baroque fortifications of Malta were powerful enough to resist almost all human assault, but are now undergoing intervention by EEC-funded repair. See my item on ‘Fortress Malta’.

The Editor

BRANCH MEETING

Day Theme : Pugin & Regeneration
26th November 2012

The 26th September Branch Meeting took place at the Pugin Centre, Cheadle, hosted by Hannah Barter, Director of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC, to whom much appreciation and thanks. There was a feature introduction to management problems at Alton Towers by Gill Baylis, and guided tours of St Giles Cheadle and the display within the Pugin Centre by David Slade. Most of us took the opportunity to take lunch at the newly-opened Weatherspoon premises in the Wheatsheaf PH immediately next door to the Pugin Centre.
INTRODUCING PUGIN
The Editor

‘Pugin’ of course means Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, born 1812, died 1852. However, the architectural practice founded by him continued under his sons Edward Welby Pugin (1834-75) and Peter Paul Pugin (1851-1904). Edward Pugin was a significant architect in his own right, too.

A W N Pugin became one of the principal pioneers of the European Gothic Revival, a development from the Romantic Movement, in art and literature, of the late C18 and early C19. For this reason, his surviving architectural output is of international interest as well as being the exemplar for the astounding creativity of the English Gothic Revival itself.

Cheadle is special because it contains Pugin’s finest surviving church - St Giles (RC). And not only St Giles but an extended group of Pugin-designed buildings as well. Moreover, Cheadle is sited in north Staffordshire close to another group of very significant Pugin buildings in and around Alton Towers. The Towers was one of the seats of Pugin’s principal patron, John Talbot, 16th Earl of Shrewsbury (1791-1852).

Short Bibliography
Perfect Cheadle. Michael Fisher (Author and Publisher). ISBN 0-9526855-4-X.

VIEW OUT OF THE WINDOW
26th November 2012

The Pugin Centre is an interesting building in its own right, dating from the early C19, a large stone-fronted town house in a provincial Neo-Classical style with a curiously institutional-looking front gable pediment. The Neo-Classical appearance almost qualified it for an appearance in Pugin’s Contrasts as an example of architectural bad practice devoid of the signs of Faith. It had had a chequered history as a doctor’s house and consulting rooms and, most recently, as the town Police Station. The lower part of the building had been subdivided with partitions and suspended ceilings for police use, but these had stripped out to reveal most of the original finishes and detailing intact.

Access was through the front door into a display and interpretation area. The meeting room was at the back of the house, lit by a large three-sash bow window. Part of the view was of car parking, but there was a conspicuous outbuilding with a tiled roof suffering movement and slippage without any actual tile loss or collapse. However, turning right a few degrees there was an unexpected view of the (liturgical) north side of St Giles RC Church and its dramatically tall spire silhouetted against a grey sky full of drizzle.

A replica of Pugin’s Ramsgate tomb effigy stood in the corner of the display area. It had been commissioned for a London exhibition but had found its way to the Pugin Centre by way of Alton Towers, where it had featured, suitably ill-lit, in a ‘spook’ tour. The bulk of the exhibits had been supplied on loan from the famous firm of John Hardman and Son, still commercially operational at new premises in Birmingham. Hardman’s of course being Pugin’s principal glass and metalwork suppliers. There were Pugin and Hardman autograph drawings to be seen as well as ‘architectural salvage’ from the House of Commons, which had been blitzed in World War II.

ALTON TOWERS
Introduction by Gill Baylis
26th November 2012

Alton Towers mansion is Listed Grade II*. It stands in a Grade I Registered landscape. The house was extensively altered, and extended and fitted out according to the designs of A W N Pugin. Following the early death of the 17th Earl of Shrewsbury, there was a dispute over the succession to the title and the
estates involving extensive litigation. The 18th Earl recouped the cost of the litigation by selling most of the furnishings, art works, fixtures and fittings at auction. The house survived World War II intact but, during the 1950s, suffered massive stripping out and sales of materials, leaving a partially roofless shell with tantalising survivals here and there.

Current ownership of the house and park vests in the Merlin Group, a multi-national operator of amusement venues, including many SeaLife Centres, Madame Tussauds and Warwick Castle. Primary objective of the Group is to operate Alton Towers for ‘bare knuckle’ rides and amusements of various kinds, marketed mainly for young people with an all-in entrance charge of almost £40 – before concessions and special offers. The layout of these ‘amusements’ is in two separate zones, linked across the Registered Park by a breakdown-prone cable-car.

From the early C19 the park was extensively developed as a picturesque amenity for the mansion, with an array of park buildings and structures including 28 listed items, terraced up and along steep hillsides. There is a Greek Revival replica of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, a very fake ‘Stonehenge’ and some very splendid Neo-Classical greenhouses, together with terraces, steps, urns and statues. All of these buildings have not received adequate maintenance, and are in need of repair and reinstatement.

Whilst parts of the mansion have been reinstated with new roofs, and a Pugin stained glass window is under conservation for re-installation, Merlin Group only make modest use of it, including a sort of ‘Ghost tour’. The operation is classified as a ‘Theme Park’. There is a special category for theme parks within the Planning legislation, allowing a very significant amount of ‘permitted development’. For this reason, when new features have come up for Planning Permission, the Local Planning Authority has been constrained to use a whole raft of Section 106 agreements to secure Merlin investment in the repair and consolidation of the house and garden buildings and features. The Registered Park is not promoted or interpreted to visitors as such, it is just a part of the land accessible to ‘pay entry’ visitors.

Since the cable-car service between the two theme park ‘nodes’ is not 100% available, visitors wishing to change ‘nodes’ at times when the cable car is u/s naturally choose to take the shortest pedestrian route between them. Which is through the terraces and buildings of the Registered Garden. To most visitors the Garden is an obstacle course of little significance, and vandalism is known to occur. However, a recent event at another Merlin Group property has changed the operators’ perspective on the historic landscape.

Following a fatal accident at Warwick Castle, Merlin were fined £350,000 following a successful prosecution by Warwick District Council. The District Council had repeatedly warned Merlin about the vulnerability to an accident of a very heavy-footfall access bridge. This bridge had vestigial parapets only a few inches high. Merlin did not respond to the warnings and an elderly visitor fell over one of the bridge parapets, receiving fatal injuries.

The successful prosecution has led Merlin to consider the potential vulnerability to accident of the historic gardens at Alton Towers. They are in discussion with the District Council over their proposal to erect metal railings at and around numerous locations. Of course, any such railings would materially damage the historic value of the landscape.

In Discussion a number of points were made.

Promoting the Historic Park and Towers as a separate visitor attraction. This Merlin did not do, despite the considerable potential to attract visits from the same clientele as visit National Trust properties. Current theme park patrons are young people out for excitement and entertainment of a very different kind. It would be relatively easy to issue separate tickets that excluded purchasers from the rides and attractions of the theme park but gave access to the ‘heritage’ portions. Visitors to the Park and to The Towers would increase visitor footfall and generate income that could be reinvested in repair and refurbishment.

Way-marked Route. That is, Merlin should devise and implement a way-marked route between the two Theme Park nodes for use when the cable car was u/s. This would be based on a safety audit and include a mix of surfacing, signage and limited fencing at sensitive locations identified by the audit. It would take visitors through the terraces of the historic garden in a way that did not impact significantly on the historic features themselves.

Design and Specification. Safety fencing would be subject to Building Regulations in detail design and specification, a fact that would not be necessarily sympathetic to a historic landscape. Some form of chain or chain link might be less obtrusive, moving on impact but actually presenting a barrier against route choices in unsuitable directions.

Conclusions. The owners were displaying a kind of knee-jerk reaction without, apparently, making a careful analysis of the potential problems as an aid to appropriate solutions. Which was why a risk assessment was an important first step. Bearing in mind that Warwick Castle was a visitor attraction by reason of its heritage significance, it was odd that the owners were not applying a similar yardstick to their Alton Towers holdings.

THE PUGIN CENTRE, Cheadle

From two recent Press Releases issued by Urban Vision Enterprise CIC:

CELEBRATING PUGIN

The Pugin Bicentenary Celebrations is a programme of community-led projects organised and coordinated by Urban Vision to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the inspirational Gothic revival architect, AWN Pugin.

Urban Vision has worked with the Cheadle Tourism Group and local partners to secure funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, from the Communities Mean Business Leader Programme, part of the Rural Development Programme for England, and from a group of local sponsors and supporters to create a programme of events, tours, lectures, and other community activities featuring Pugin’s legacy in North Staffordshire.

Saturday 3rd March 2012 saw the launch of the Pugin Bicentenary Celebrations 2012 and the grand opening of the ‘Pugin Centre’ a dynamic creative hub at the heart of the historic town Cheadle, celebrating of one of the foremost architects of the Victorian age.

Born in 1st March 1812 AWN Pugin is best known nationally for his work in the Houses of Parliament, but Cheadle in Staffordshire is nationally recognised as “Pugin land” for its 14 buildings designed by him including ‘Pugin’s Gem’, St Giles, Cheadle.

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Hannah Barter, a director of Urban Vision Enterprise CIC, who is leading the project, said “Pugin’s work is celebrated nationally and worldwide. This project provides a unique opportunity for local people to visit their local heritage assets, and we very much look forward to working with the community during 2012.”

The launch events held at the Pugin Centre included free guided heritage walks of ‘Pugin’s Gem’, St Giles, led by architectural historian David Slade, tile and pattern making workshops and a preview of exhibitions before the grand opening by the Rt. Hon. Earl of Shrewsbury and Cheadle Mayor Ian Whitehouse, launching the celebrations and the official opening of the Pugin Centre including the Hardman collection and RIBA exhibition.

MORE PUGIN GLAZED WORKSHOPS
Following our hugely successful and popular “Pugin Glazed” workshops the Pugin Centre in association with local artists, the Cultural Sisters, will be holding some more free unique workshops to create Pugin inspired ‘fused glass’ influenced by the rich colour and patterns of A.W.N Pugin’s work. The workshops will take place on Monday 29 October and Wednesday 21 November 2012.

The above is largely self-explanatory. However, during the Branch visit, David Slade did point out that Cheadle was a depressed location needing new economic input. An obvious medium for the development of the town as a visitor destination was its Pugin buildings, including, especially, St Giles Church.

ST GILES CHURCH, Cheadle
26th November 2012

David Slade took us on an ‘iconographic’ guided tour paying particular attention to the way in which Pugin had designed the building as a ‘theological statement’ presenting the truths of the Catholic Faith – the ‘architect as theologian’.

The font had been located in the nave aisle bay next to the main entrance because it was by Baptism that a person became a Christian. Inscriptions and choice of images reflected the significance of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

The building had been very expensive in contemporary terms, with almost all the funding coming from Lord Shrewsbury’s family fortune. Lord and Lady Shrewsbury had their likenesses (in medieval costume) carved as corbel heads around the building. The heraldic ‘Talbot’ hounds emblematic of the Shrewsbury family were to be found in carving and on encaustic tiles. A Shrewsbury daughter who had died young appeared in a corner of the great ‘doom’ painting over the chancel arch.

The building had been fitted out using some architectural salvage and detailing replicated from plaster casts taken off medieval originals. The north aisle altar reredos was a large and complex example of late medieval Flemish wood carving.

Both the Doom' painting and the image in the Easter Sepulchre had been painted on canvas by the Nazarene School artist Hauser in Rome, specially commissioned and imported. The choice of Hauser is intriguing, indicating a knowledge by Pugin of contemporary European art developments. The German Nazarenes, like their slightly later contemporaries the British Pre-Raphaelites, looked for inspiration to pre-Renaissance art.

The pulpit had been carved from a single large block of local alabaster with bas-reliefs of three great Franciscan preachers. The rich and elaborate brass grille over the entrance to the Blessed Sacrament chapel included representations of the Lamb of God.
the points of the nave arches where original light fittings had been removed.

Externally, a number of figures in niches appeared to have been over-painted in an ochre paint. This was now peeling off. However, enough damp had been sealed-in by the process to cause some stone decay.

St Giles continues as a fully-operational Roman Catholic Church within Birmingham ArchDiocese.

Comment

St Giles is a quite extraordinary building, hugely rich in decoration. As such it is recognised as Pugin’s finest surviving church building. Work is obviously needed, to tackle problems with the outdoor statuary. However, the greatest challenge lies in the removal of the varnish from the nave decorations. This would be enormously beneficial in reinstating the visual effects originally intended, but would be hugely costly to implement. Perhaps decisions should be held-over until the new initiatives result in an increased visitor flow bringing in an income that can be reinvested.

FORTRESS MALTA

The Editor

Malta is a World Heritage Site for two reasons: (1) its pre-historic megalithic temples; (2) the fortifications created by the Knights of St John C16-C18, which were extended by the British Empire C19-C20.

These fortifications only went out of use after 1945. WWII saw massive additions of AA batteries, signal towers and coastal artillery, complete with radar. When in Malta in October 2012, I had the opportunity to see quite a lot of it, though far very from everything. Everything was designed and built with defence against artillery in mind.

The Knights of St John arrived in Malta in 1530. They were refugees, having been expelled from their fortresses in the island of Rhodes in the Dodecanese by the might of the Turkish (‘Ottoman’) Empire 1523-4. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, offered the Knights a remote part of his dominions, the Maltese Archipelago, as a new home.

Since the Knights were crusading corsairs, Christian pirates operating a fleet of galleys, the offer of Malta, at the central crossroads of the Mediterranean, was an attractive one, particularly as the main island had two spectacular deep harbours on its east coast. This was despite the fact that the archipelago was arid, short of water and decidedly infertile. On arrival, the Knights found little in the way of fortification. The capital city of Malta, Mdina, had medieval walls. Rabat in Gozo was basically a fortified hilltop. And there was a fort at the end of the promontory occupied by the small port town of Borgo in Grand Harbour.

The Knights started work on new fortifications almost immediately. They built a huge new fort, called St Angelo, at the end of the Borgo promontory. They fortified the landward front of Borgo with bastions. They built a new town on the next door peninsula, Isola, with similar bastions on the landward front. St Angelo was a tall structure, based on what the Knights had built in Rhodes. Their next effort was more up-to-date, a low star-shaped fort – St Elmo – at the seaward end of the high peninsula – Mount Scibarras – separating Grand Harbour from Marsamxett Harbour. The bastions at St Elmo were long, sharp and narrow.

Just 35 years after arrival, the Knights’ new fortifications were put to the test. A very large Ottoman expeditionary force, fleet and army, was able to make an unopposed landing in 1565. This force was handicapped by a divided command – the Admiral, Piyali, and the General, Mustapha, had equal rank. However, both were assisted by the corsair Dragut, who had a sharp appreciation of the military realities and the personality to get things done. Ottoman strategy was to knock out Fort St Elmo so as to have unimpeded access to the two great harbours. Heavy artillery was manhandled to
the top of the Sciberras peninsula, which subjected St Elmo to a plunging fire. Coast artillery prevented the Knights from reinforcing by boat from St Angelo.

St Elmo was pulverized by cannon fire and its design deficiencies became glaringly obvious, it being overlooked and not being able to deploy cannon in sufficient numbers to safeguard its bastion faces. Even so, the garrison were able to hold out long enough as to take terrible toll of their attackers. Corsair Dragut, superintending the siege, was killed by a cannon shot from a battery mounted on the topmost tower of St Angelo. Finally, St Elmo, cut off from re-supply, was taken by infantry assault. The Ottoman attack switched to the landward front of Borgo and Isola. The Knights were just able to hold out. Then, relief came. A small force from Sicily arrived and landed unopposed, able to take the Ottoman besiegers in the rear. Having been afflicted by sickness and many casualties, Turkish morale broke, and those who survived took ship and sailed off to report their failure. So ended the famous ‘Great Siege’ of Malta.

Having excellent intelligence of what was happening in Constantinople, the Knights knew that failure of the Ottoman siege was not the end of the war. They were still in desperate danger of renewed assault. And they wanted the best new fortifications possible, to make their limited manpower count. They engaged the services of one of the leading military engineers of the day – Francesco Laparelli. Laparelli recommended the siting of a fortified city on the high ground of the Sciberras peninsula. His recommendation was accepted. And so Valletta came into being.

A great deal of Laparelli’s Valletta fortifications still survive. There is a wide, deep ditch. Behind it, two great bastions. Within the two bastions, higher towers called ‘cavaliers’, designed for observation and to mount cannon for plunging fire. In front there was a glacis, a cleared area carefully carved from the rock to leave no cover from cannon fire. Today, the glacis is mostly occupied by Valletta Bus Station. But the Bus Station is flanked by a ravelin, another, lower, bastion-shaped outwork.

Valletta was the beginning of far more fortification. In 1636 construction of a new fortified suburb began to the west of Valletta, to the design of Pietro Floriani. This suburb was named Floriana, after its designer, and presented to an enemy another powerful trace of bastions, augmented by a hornwork. Today, the main road into Floriana punches a large hole between the two main bastions, with the original gateway flanked by dual carriageways.

From 1670, to the design of Count Valperga, a semi-circular bastion trace was constructed to protect the landward front of Borgo and Isola, now named Vittoriosa and Senglea. Also in 1670, Fort Ricasoli was built on the peninsula at the south-east extremity of Grand Harbour, again to Valperga’s design. In 1722 Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena commissioned Fort Manoel on the island in Marsamxett Harbour. It was designed by engineer de Tigne in the Vauban manner and was basically rectangular, with corner angle bastions, ravelins and glacis. A splendid Baroque entrance gateway faces Valletta. In 1792 Chevalier de Tigne (not the designer of Fort Manoel) designed and built Fort
Tigne to protect the entrance to Marsamxett harbour from the north side. Fort Tigne is based on alternatives to the angle bastion and features a cylindrical tower with countersunk outworks.

Fort Manoel, seen from Sliema-Valletta ferry

Mdina. Moat, bastion and curtain, with main gate to left.

Main land front of the Citadel, Victoria, Gozo, undergoing repair

The Old Capital, Mdina, was built on a hill top, with medieval walls topping a sheer drop on three sides. In the C17, the main land front was rebuilt with a deep ditch and bastion trace, as well as fine entrance gateways. Much the same happened on Gozo, with the old hill top fortress at Rabat being reinforced by two angle bastions on the most vulnerable side. In 1749 Fort Chambray, overlooking Gozo’s small port, Mgarr, was built on a cliff top, again using an angle-bastion trace countersunk behind a moat. The interior was intended to be a town, but was never occupied as such. However, a modern apartment development has just been installed within the ramparts.

This does not complete the tale of Malta’s fortification. The Knights also constructed a series of lookout or strongpoint forts or fortlets overlooking vulnerable creeks and beaches. The British Empire built a whole new fortress chain – the ‘Victoria Line’ – along the ridge to the north-west of Valletta, and added two forts mounting 100-ton muzzle-loading rifled cannon on either side of Grand Harbour entrance.

Fort Ricasoli, ruined outworks

When I was in Malta repair work, largely EEC-funded, was in hand on the bastions of Valletta, Victoria (Gozo) and Mdina. I viewed Fort Manoel from the Sliema-Valletta ferry, and it seemed to have received recent repair and consolidation. I also sought out Fort Ricasoli, which proved to have been virtually untouched since WWII, and had a tank farm in its moat. Looking down on St Angelo from the Barracca Gardens in Valletta, the oldest of the Knights’ fortifications was looking rather untidy and weed-grown. I actually remember, as a small child, passing St Angelo on the Vittoriosa-Valletta ferry, and seeing the White Ensign flying – as it was then HMS St Angelo, a ‘stone frigate’ of the Mediterranean fleet!

I very well appreciate the reasons for nominating Malta as a World Heritage Site. The fortifications, most in a very good state of survival, are a series of text-book examples of Renaissance, Baroque and Victorian defence installations designed to mount, and counter, artillery. The angle bastion, the major design solution to the problem of artillery attack, can be seen in all its glory. And almost everything can be seen in a short walk from a bus stop. Though I plan to go back with a folding bicycle, so as to view Forts Manoel and Tigne from close up, and penetrate to the Victoria Lines and Fort Chambray.

An excellent short introduction to the fortification and architecture of Malta appears in Fortress – Architecture and Military History in Malta, author Quentin Hughes, published by Lund Humphries in 1969. I quarried my copy for fortification dates and the names of the military engineers for this short piece.

EDITOR’S SHOPPING LIST
Your Editor welcomes, for the next Edition of the Newsletter (No 51), to go out in June 2013, the following:
- Personal news of moves, retirements, arrivals;
- Copies of announcements and press releases;
- Case Studies;
- Letters;
- Articles on Law and Techniques;
- Book Reviews.

Material for inclusion in No 51 should, preferably, arrive not later than the end of May 2013.

Please contact your Newsletter Editor:
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St Giles Cheadle. In the Baptistery next to the porch door.

St Giles. Encaustic floor tiles

St Giles. Main altar

St Giles. The pulpit

St Giles. Pugin stained glass

Fort Chambray, Gozo, seen from Mgarr ferry port. Modern residential apartments just showing over the parapet.

Fort Ricasoli, Kalkhara, Malta. Detail of bastion face showing failure of patch render and joint erosion.