



A future for The Landgate: Rye Conservation Society's approach

Members will no doubt be aware from the local press of the renewed interest in the future of The Landgate and the need for its restoration. The Society has been in communication with Rother District Council and with the Town Council since 2011 over a sustainable future for this unique Grade I listed Ancient Monument. Rother owns The Landgate and, as freeholder, it is under a statutory obligation to maintain the building and has been since the early 1970s, when the monument came into its ownership.

Since a review of its heritage assets in 2011, Rother has identified Landgate as their one heritage asset that could be disposed of to another body which, it was hoped, would be able to take on the building in perpetuity and be responsible for its maintenance and upkeep.

In 2015 a survey of Landgate was carried out on behalf of Rother. This found that the fabric was basically sound but various elements of repair and restoration would be required to maintain the building.

For those members who are only aware of Landgate from the outside, it consists of two stone drums with an internal diameter of approximately 4.5m (15ft) linked by a small room over the arch. Both drums are open to the sky and have no internal floors. The room over the arch is also open to the sky and the only windows are those narrow arrow slots that can be seen from the road. Although it looks big from the outside, there is not much accommodation within the structure. Access to the drums is by narrow steps directly off the roadway and internally by rotten wooden steps and a partially-collapsed stone stair. It is a ruin just as it has been for over 200 years.

Following an analysis of the fabric report and of the building and its context, the Society came to the conclusion in 2015 that the only way forward was for Landgate to be conserved as a '**consolidated ruin**'. That means a structure where the effects of time are minimised, not just by repair of the existing fabric, but by suitable interventions such as a lightweight roof, to control water ingress and pigeon infestation. **We are still of this view and believe that the ownership should remain with Rother.** This approach does not preclude an alternative use being found in the future but the Society is concerned that the search for such a use will delay the necessary works identified in the fabric survey.

The main reasons for adopting this approach are:

- Currently no safe access is possible because the doors open directly on to the road. Alternative access would only be possible by the purchase of adjoining properties and consent to form new openings into Landgate itself.
- There is a limitation on possible future accommodation because of access, size and daylight, all of which preclude likely viable future use.
- The potential cost of providing usable accommodation within the existing ruin would be prohibitive given the resulting space created.
- Any alternative owner would be responsible in perpetuity not only for the repair but also for the insurance obligations. These could be considerable given that Landgate is the main access to the High Street and the Citadel. There is also the question of the interface between East Sussex County Council, which is responsible for the highway, and any new owner.

Rother stated last year that it would publish a 'Vision Statement' in November 2016, setting out a way forward, but we have not seen any such report. We understand that Rother requested funding from Historic England during 2017 but this was refused. The particular problems of access, safety and the lack of a viable future use may well make it difficult to raise funds from bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, not only for Rother but also for any other potential owner.

The Society believes that, unless Rother can identify another body willing to take on the responsibility and financial obligations in perpetuity, it should accept that the only way forward is to adopt the Society's approach of a '**consolidated ruin**' as an initial approach and accept that the structure will remain its responsibility. Given its location and problems of access and scaffolding, piecemeal repairs are likely to be prohibitively expensive and we would advocate a single programme of works to stabilise the structure with a view to minimising future maintenance.

The sooner Rother accepts that this is the most viable way forward, the sooner all interested parties, including this Society, can come together to assist in achieving the result that all residents of Rye want, which is to preserve our Landgate not just for now but into the future.

Julian Lockett

Report from the Highways Forum

It appears that Rother District Council is now actively pursuing the decriminalisation of parking, which is not, in the view of RCS, before time. Decriminalisation refers to the process of transferring responsibility for parking offences from the Police to the local authority; presently only 14 authorities, including Rother, have not picked up this tab, but it is thought that national legislation may be imminent to force their hand. In Rye there has been considerable frustration over the lack of Police enforcement, blamed on financial constraints and priority-setting, when it is well known that many offenders are local residents who persist in parking illegally knowing they can get away with it. Members will know that we have made a number of suggestions to deal with the areas in Rye that are worst affected, but remain hamstrung both by lack of enforcement and by the poor state of the street markings. This latter issue was to have been dealt with in August, but only a small section of the worn yellow lines on Strand Quay and Wish Ward has been repainted. Marking elsewhere both for parking bays and restrictions are in places invisible. The Society will continue to lobby East Sussex County Council for the remainder of the necessary work to be done as soon as possible.

RDC have indicated that they are considering three questions: first, should a decriminalisation scheme be produced for the whole area, and then implemented; second, should existing restrictions be taken over piecemeal; and lastly should the cost be met by local taxation or by motorists. RCS and the Town Council are in agreement that waiting for a council-wide plan may be lengthy, and both favour immediate introduction in line with existing restrictions. They also both agree that the cost should be borne by those parking.

The Town Council and RCS have been invited to send representatives to a meeting in Bexhill on November 29th. David Bookless and I will represent the Society and will report back on progress.

Andrew Bamji

Rye Conservation Society visit to Weald and Downland Living Museum

The main purpose of the visit was to see the new Gateway Centre. It was opened in May this year at a cost of £6 million - £4 million from the Heritage Lottery and the rest from donations. Designed by [ABIR architects](#), the series of wooden-frame buildings provide a gallery space, café and other facilities for both visitors and staff. It is clearly a very high-quality construction and has an attractive location at the lower end of the site, next to the artificial lake, and works well as a Gateway to the museum from the car-parking area.

The Museum's 40 acres provide a beautiful setting for a collection of historic buildings dating from 950 AD to the Victorian era, all saved from demolition. The site is within the South Downs National Park, close to Goodwood

racecourse, and occupies a corner of the West Dean Estate. It was the estate's eccentric owner, Edward James, who gave the land to Roy Armstrong and his small group of volunteers in 1967. The Sixties was an era of architectural vandalism and Roy Armstrong had been appalled at the destruction of fine medieval buildings in Crawley and other parts of the South-east. Inspired by the "Open Air" museums in Sweden and elsewhere, he had been looking for a suitable site to preserve Wealden traditional vernacular architecture. The land he was offered is outside the Weald so the area of interest was extended to include the Downs. As well as preserving doomed buildings he wanted the museum to raise awareness of the built environment and to preserve the traditional crafts and industries associated with their construction and maintenance. Old industrial skills were also to be preserved and there is now a working mill and blacksmith on the site.

Most of the houses are furnished with original artefacts that demonstrate the way of life of the occupants. Overall the impression is that one could quite happily live in these houses although we would probably miss some comforts of the 21st Century.

A recent addition to the Museum was the construction in 2002 of the innovative Gridshell building. This was designed by Ted Cullinan and the [Cullinan Studio](#) and was the first of its kind to be built in Britain. Some members of our group were given a tour of the building and its large basement storage area. The spectacular upper interior space known as the Jerwood Gridshell Space is used as a conservation workshop and for training. The basement houses a large collection of tools and artefacts of rural life.

There is a strong emphasis throughout the museum on the contribution made by volunteers. Since the foundation of the museum by the small group led by Roy Armstrong, the local community have been much involved in making the museum the success it is today. At every stage during our visit we were able to turn to helpful and well-informed volunteers who answered every type of question – such as how the medieval occupants relieved themselves in the middle of the night and how the smoke on the floor at the centre of the hall escaped without a chimney. The volunteers in the mill and the smithy were all too happy to explain every detail of their trade including the origin of the phrase "rule of thumb" – it was the miller's way of precisely calibrating the gap between the millstones by rubbing the flour (Wikipedia disagrees).

Trips of this kind are regularly arranged by Rye Conservation Society and was meticulously organised by the hard-working chairman John Griffiths. As the weary but contented group travelled home in the coach it was John again who was reminding them of the next Society event – the Christmas Party on Friday 1 December 6.00 pm 'till 8.00 pm in Rye Town Hall.

Christopher Strangeways

Make use of heavy rain

Next time it rains hard in daylight put on suitable clothing, take an umbrella and take a look outside. Look up. What is happening, where is the water from the roof going? Is it going into the gutter? Is the gutter able to take the amount of water or does it overflow? Is the gutter taking it away or does the gutter slope the wrong way? Another question which you may not be able to answer from below - is the gutter blocked? Are the joints in the gutter leaking? Is the gutter cracked?

Then look at the pipe which is meant to take the water? In builders' jargon it's an RWP (Rain Water Pipe) also known as a 'downpipe'. Is it properly connected to the gutter or has something slipped and the rain water from the gutter is splashing the ground below? Is the pipe cracked? You may need to take your gloves off and feel behind the pipe. A damp patch in the room the other side of the pipe may be your only clue. If there is a (builders' word) 'Hopper Head' looking like a large kitchen funnel collecting water from pipes coming into it from different directions make sure it is not blocked by leaves or an old bird's nest.

Then look down. What is happening to the water? Can you see it coming out at the end of the pipe? Does the pipe disappear into the ground or does it discharge into a gully? If so is the water getting away or is the gully in a sort of duck pond?

Or, and this is a feature of Rye's pavements, does the water go into a so called 'Secret Gutter' or pavement gutter. The idea behind these gutters is good and sensible. Get the rain water away from the house or shop and let it run into the street gutter from where it can go into the town drainage system. What if this last length of gutter is blocked? Then all the water which has been carefully collected to discharge into the town drains goes into the cellar or soaks the building structure below ground level. The good news is that you can see easily if they are blocked and there are plenty of examples in Rye High Street. Unblocking is easy - starting at the edge of the pavement, use an old stout screwdriver or an old kitchen knife to clear the narrow slot between the two flat strips of cast iron leaving it all open and clear.

Keeping rain water under control helps keep buildings dry and helps pedestrians in heavy rain.

If you can get pictures of rainwater out of control do email them to the Society and likewise 'before' and 'after' pictures of Secret Gutters.

John Griffiths

Rye Conservation Society
Christmas Party
Rye Town Hall
Friday 1 December 2017
6.00 pm - 8.00pm
all welcome
Members £6.00 Non members £8.00
Pay at the door

Published by Rye Conservation Society
Honorary Secretary: David Bookless,
Top Flat, Faraday House, The Mint, Rye TN31 7EW
Main email: ryeconservation@gmail.com
Planning matters: ryeconservationsociety@sky.com
www.ryeconservationsociety.org
Registered Charity No. 283888

Editor: Andy Stuart
Publicity and Membership Secretary
Little Orchard House, 3 West Street, Rye TN31 7ES
email: nikiandandy@hotmail.co.uk