

EVICTED FROM ETERNITY?

This is the Darnley Mausoleum at Cobham in Kent, a masterpiece of 18th-century architecture, yet shamefully abandoned and vandalised. It symbolises the problems that afflict family mausolea and monuments throughout the country—problems which a new trust is beginning to tackle, as MICHAEL HALL discovers.



LORD DARNLEY's mausoleum at Cobham, Kent, has always been a lonely place (Fig 1). On its ridge rising out of an overgrown landscape designed by Humphry Repton, it gazes down at Cobham Hall, nearly a mile away to the south. Following the instructions of the 3rd Earl of Darnley, James Wyatt, the architect, designed a monumental structure—a pyramid raised on a square base containing a domed chapel. After its completion in 1784, the Bishop of Rochester, disapproving of burials in secular settings, refused to consecrate a building that so brazenly evoked pagan arcady. As a result, the platform constructed in a deep basement for Lord Darnley's coffin has never been occupied. For years, the building has been in a ruinous condition and almost daily is further vandalised.

This must be one of the most long-running stories in British conservation and no end is yet in sight. In 1985, the present Lord Darnley sold the mausoleum to a developer for residential conversion; following the developer's bankruptcy, the mausoleum is now in the hands of Touche Ross, the receivers. Yet this sorry tale provides one important warning: if a building of European stature, fit to be compared with the mausoleum at Castle Howard, can fall into such a deplorable state, what hope can there be for lesser buildings forgotten in parks or in churchyards, when the family for whom they were built has died out, moved away or lost interest?

In response to that concern, a trust was set up last year to rescue threatened mausolea and monuments of architectural significance and to campaign for their preservation. The Mausolea and Monuments Trust was the inspiration of the architectural historian Jill Allibone, who 30 years before had been dismayed to witness the demolition of the Nunburnholme family chapel at Warter in Yorkshire and the dispersal of its fine monuments by George Frampton. The immediate impetus for the creation of the trust, however, was a recent visit to her grandmother's grave in the churchyard at All Saints, Whitstable, Kent, where she noticed, hidden among sycamores, the tomb of Wynn Ellis (Fig 4).

This stepped granite pyramid set on a mighty entablature derived from the Tomb of Scipio was designed by Charles Barry, Jr, in 1875 for Ellis, a wealthy haberdasher who bequeathed his collection of paintings (including masterpieces by Claude and Canaletto) to the National Gallery. He is buried at Whitstable with his wife and illegitimate son—an example of how mausolea often reveal intriguing family



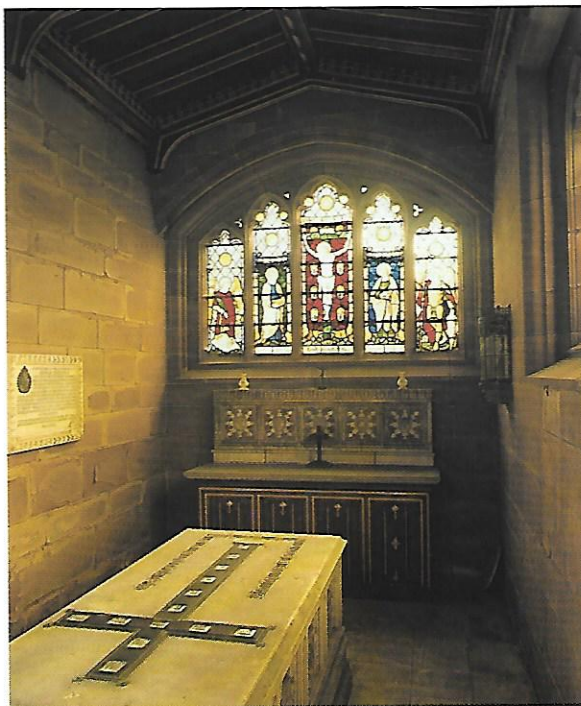
(Right) 1—The neglected Darnley Mausoleum

histories. The tomb was in urgent need of repair to its stonework and iron railings, and the bronze doors that lead to the burial chamber had been vandalised. Dr Allibone proposed the tomb for listing (it is now Grade II) and set about tracking down its owners, so repairs could be put in hand.

If the first glimpse of an unrestored mausoleum such as Ellis's evokes the spectral frissons of a Victorian novel such as *The Woman in White*, the task of finding its owners soon becomes reminiscent of *Bleak House*: the quest leads to Chancery lawyers, aged trustees and distant heirs to long-sold estates. Dr Allibone discovered that every year the churchwardens at All Saints received a cheque for £8 for the maintenance of the tomb. The solicitors who forwarded the cheque were the trustees of a fund set up by Ellis's family: it then amounted to £240, invested in 2½% consols. The idea that responsibility for the tomb might be transferred to an independent body led to Dr Allibone's proposal for a new trust which could assume ownership of unwanted tombs and mausolea.

This was a propitious moment for such an idea, as a great deal of scholarly attention has recently been focused on what might be called the architecture of death. In 1992, Julian Litten staged the Art of Death exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and in 1996 the Dulwich Picture Gallery mounted an exhibition on Soane's fascination with funerary designs. For several years, the Victorian Society, of which Dr Allibone is a committee member, has

been campaigning for the conservation of the great urban cemeteries. That has been complemented by the important work of more narrowly focused groups, such as the Soane Monuments Trust, and local initiatives, such as the Friends of Little Ousebourn Mausoleum, which is raising funds for the restoration of the Thompson Mausoleum in the churchyard at Little Ousebourn in Yorkshire, designed in about 1742 with the help of Lord Burlington.

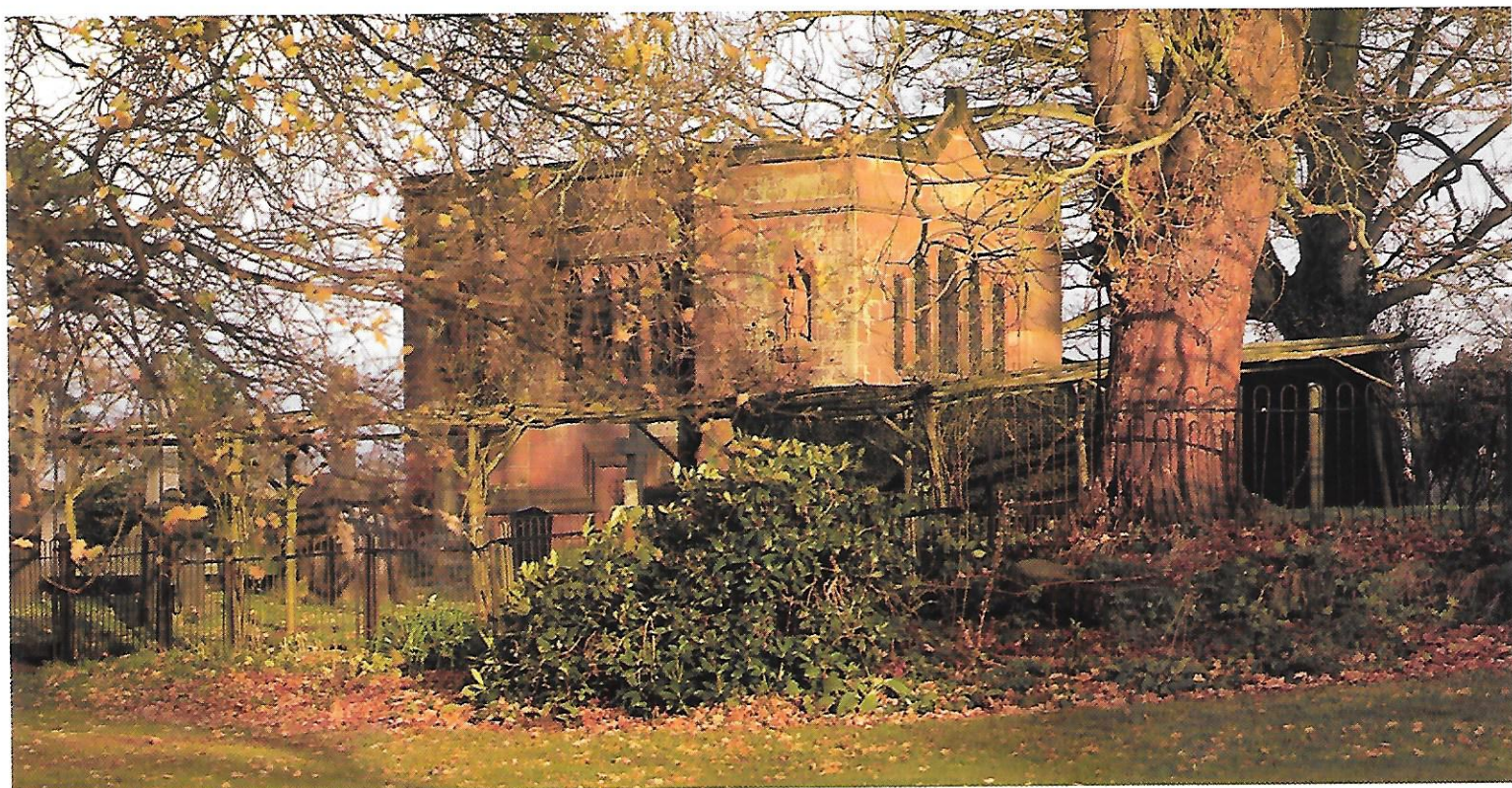


2 and 3—The Bateman Mausoleum, Morley, Derbyshire. Designed by G. F. Bodley and built in 1897, it was the Mausolea and Monuments Trust's first acquisition

Many of these scholarly and conservation concerns are represented by the trustees of the Mausolea and Monuments Trust, which was formally constituted last year—they include Julian Litten, Christopher Woodward of Sir John Soane's Museum and Chris Brooks, chairman of the Victorian Society. The trust's patron is Sir Howard Colvin, whose book *Architecture and the After-life* (1991) is a magisterial overview of the history of mausolea and funerary chapels in the Western world.

Although independent trusts with responsibility for a group of monuments are not uncommon—they include, for example, the Wentworth Amenity Trust, which cares for the monuments at Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire, including one of the greatest of all mausolea—the idea of a trust which could acquire and care for monuments throughout the country was new, and brave. So far, the trust has taken on five, of which the first two were the Ellis tomb and the Bateman Mausoleum at Morley, Derbyshire.

The popular conception of mausolea as independent neo-Classical structures, such as the Darnley Mausoleum, is historically justified: the mausoleum was revived as an architectural tradition in Protestant countries after the Reformation, when chantry chapels were abolished. In Scotland, there was religious hostility even to the idea of interment in churches, one reason why that country has so many outstanding mausolea. In the 18th century the mausoleum provided an ideal opportunity for neo-Classical architects such as Wyatt to design





4—The Wynn Ellis tomb and (below right) 5—the Nash Mausoleum, both owned by the trust

recreations of antique forms unfettered by the compromises imposed by modern life.

The Bateman Mausoleum, built in 1897, shows this tradition coming full circle (Figs 2 and 3). Although an independent structure, built into part of an ancient church wall, its architect, G. F. Bodley, designed it as a chantry chapel of the sort so often added to parish churches in the later Middle Ages. Faultlessly proportioned and built of warm red Runcorn sandstone, it is furnished with sculpture by Robert Bridgman and stained glass by Burlison and Grylls. At its centre is the tomb of Hugh Alleyn Sacheverell Bateman, whose widow commissioned the mausoleum, and for whom Bodley also designed the family house, Hayes Lodge. The cross on the tomb chest is set with crystal cabochons, through which the coffin may dimly be seen.

The condition of this tiny building—transferred to the trust by the Batemans' heir, the Duke of Valderano—is not especially bad, although repairs are needed: the lead has been stolen from the roof, its wrought-iron gates are damaged and the stonework is spalling. In dramatic contrast is another of the trust's properties, the Guise Mausoleum, Elmore, Gloucestershire, which almost totally collapsed earlier this century. Built in 1732, it was recently identified by Sir Howard Colvin as the first use of the baseless Doric column since antiquity,

establishing for it an international importance. The columns still stand and the remains of its pyramidal superstructure survive, making it possible that one day the monument may be restored.

The other mausolea owned by the trust were all were giving cause for anxiety before the trust took them on: at Hursley, Hampshire, for example, the vicar and congregation were praying for assistance for the 18th-century Heathcote Mausoleum. Although the exterior of the 1778 Nash Mausoleum at Farningham, Kent, famous for its little obelisk rising from the central dome, has been restored with money from English Heritage (Fig 5), work remains to be done on the interior, and the railings, removed during the Second World War, need to be replaced. In such cases, the trust will raise money for repair work.

Just as important as funds is vigilance: to note vandalism, uproot weeds and maintain locks. So the trust is seeking friends who will help with its work as well as raise money—it has already appointed its first county co-ordinator, for Buckinghamshire. It hopes to extend its work to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Perhaps the most immediate need is research: are such spectacular cases as the Darnley Mausoleum—too big a task for the trust to tackle yet—an isolated concern? To discover the scale of the problem, the trust is collating information

MAUSOLEA AT RISK

Boulge, Suffolk: Victorian mausoleum of the Fitzgerald family, by the tomb of the translator of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Damaged by a falling tree.

Elvaston, Derbyshire: Harrington Mausoleum. The statue of an angel on this unusual Victorian tumulus-like structure has been seriously vandalised.

Kilndown, Kent: Tomb designed by Carpenter and Ingelow, 1882, for Alexander James Beresford Hope. Metalwork and enamels need conservation

Maulden, Bedfordshire: 17th-century octagonal mausoleum reconstructed in 1859 for the Brudenell family. Very poor condition: its celebrated monument of Diana, Countess of Elgin, has been removed for safekeeping.

St Pancras Gardens, London: Sir John Soane's Monument. Restored in 1992 by the Soane Monuments Trust but seriously vandalised in 1997.

Thorndon, Essex: Petre Chapel and Mausoleum. Gothic chapel designed by W. W. Wardell for the Petre family, 1850. Isolated and often vandalised.

on the 150 listed mausolea and soliciting information about the unlisted ones, for a report it is compiling with SAVE Britain's Heritage. Readers of COUNTRY LIFE can give immediate help by sending information about mausolea and monuments—whether or not they are giving cause for concern—to the Mausolea and Monuments Trust, 5/34 Emperor's Gate, London SW7.

Photographs: Paul Barker.

Next week: Wythe House, Virginia.

