

Heritage in Austerity

A talk given to the Heritage at Risk conference, 16th July 2013
by Janet McQueen, Chairman of The Enfield Society

Thank you for inviting me to speak here today.

So: "Heritage in Austerity": money is tight and needs to be spent wisely, I think we can all agree. But where we may have differing opinions is: *where is wisely?*

When we, The Enfield Society, heard about this meeting (and we thank Doug Taylor, very much for the proposal which I'm sure will be very useful) it spurred us on to get together and review our priorities and reconsider Enfield's heritage and what I am going to say in the next few minutes reflects our thoughts.

First: what is Enfield's heritage and why do we want to prioritise it as deserving of time and money?

Second: what methods do we have of maintaining this heritage effectively?

- Enfield's Heritage**

 - Buildings
 - Green Belt
 - Parks and open spaces
 - Footpaths
 - Metropolitan open land

Well, we are fortunate to live in an area with great individuality, a very special ambiance and character, much of which is due to its history and cultural heritage. But also the varied nature of the area with a built environment of both domestic and industrial importance and many open areas as well as the Green Belt, which **must** be defended. And surely this is easy and not expensive—just don't build on it.

In our area we have 5 parks nationally listed as having special historic interest and importance:

- Enfield's Historic Parks and Gardens**

 - Forty Hall
 - Grovelands Park
 - Trent Park
 - Broomfield Park
 - Myddelton House

And 5 scheduled ancient monuments

- Enfield's Scheduled Ancient Monuments**

 - Site of Elsynge, Forty Hall
 - Earthworks at Old Park
 - Moated site, Camlet Moat, Moat Wood
 - Flash Lane Aqueduct
 - Old Park Moated Lake
 - ??New River Loop

You will have noticed at the bottom I have added the New River Loop with a question mark – this is something the Enfield Society has been discussing in the past year and we are looking into getting the Loop on this list.

So there are two aspects we would like to stress:

First – keeping, maintaining and, indeed, improving what we have; for example buildings such as Forty Hall and the Charity School, but also the Green Belt, footpaths, parks and open spaces.

And second – ensuring that any new building is sympathetic to our particular character, in restricting any further high rise buildings for example, and ensuring that required new developments fit sympathetically into the local environment.

We argue that maintaining and improving – valuing our heritage – will save money in the long term. There is evidence that if a community values and has a stake in the area they live in there is less vandalism, less crime, and life styles and health are improved.

This approach probably needs to start in schools, and this brings me to Forty Hall which I think we can agree has been a very successful project, led by the council. It is now a heritage building in daily use by the community and hopefully making some money.

The Charity School in Church Street Edmonton is another **potential** success but it needs similar leadership and commitment. We fully support the plans of Art Start to renovate the property and use it as the base for community heritage projects

– I hope the Council will give them the support they need.

There are many other buildings I could mention – here is a list of some of them:

Enfield's Heritage Buildings at risk

- Salisbury House
- Charity Hall, Edmonton
- Trent Park House
- Broomfield
- Truro House
- Craddock House
- Nonconformist Chapel, Cedar Road

Salisbury House is high on our list of concerns, one of the oldest examples of domestic architecture in Enfield and all that remains of the ancient village around Bury Street. It has less protection than some, despite its Grade II* listing, as it is not in a conservation area.

However we fully realise the council cannot do everything. Voluntary and other groups too need to take responsibility for some of it – something most of us here would argue we already do – but we do need timely and effective support on occasion.

I'm sure, however, that we could do more and perhaps that is something we could discuss today – what the voluntary sector could do, both in combination with the Council or alone, which would help our heritage. Businesses too benefit from a healthy community and maybe more could be achieved from the private sector.

But buildings are only a small part of our heritage, there are also the Green Belt and metropolitan open land, parks and open spaces, and footpaths – all of which are important in making up the particular character of Enfield and keeping us, the residents of Enfield, healthy and happy.

When we met we thought footpaths were not at great risk at present but then one of our members walked a local path recently and found it completely blocked with weeds. When we enquired we found there was no regular plan for maintenance just an "as and when", so they too need to be part of our priorities.

There are several local voluntary groups who do sterling work, such as all the friends of parks,

Ground force and Enfield Conservation Volunteers, but organisation is needed and a flexible approach from both sides to use skills and necessary equipment effectively.

The Green Belt is a continuing concern, particularly as Government opinion and approach appears to vary and protection seems to be less. Here we value the input of various national bodies such as the Green Belt Council.

We also considered various ways of maintaining, and improving our heritage. Here is a list of our suggestions:

Some initial thoughts on ways of protecting our heritage

- Conservation areas
- Local listing
- National listing
- Council policy documents
- Local interest groups
- National interest groups

and I would welcome your thoughts and other ideas too

Enfield has quite a few conservation areas – 21 are listed on the website – and they do offer some protection but are at risk of encroachment and deterioration of quality if there is insufficient money or will for enforcement of their status.

Local listing is important and national listing is of proven value thanks to English Heritage. Enfield has only a few entries on the English Heritage *At Risk Register* but most have been there quite some time.

Council policy documents are useful but some need updating – for example the *Enfield Heritage Strategy* and some of the area action plans – and we would be keen to work with the Council and other groups on this.

Using local interest groups, both voluntary and businesses, must be a way forward but, as I have already mentioned, they need co-ordinating and supporting if work is to be done effectively.

National interest groups too are important and we have representatives on many of these. The experience of other groups is valuable and often helpful in giving us ideas and support.

The Enfield Society would be keen to try and centralise some of the organisation of maintaining our heritage. There are so many differing groups many of whom are not even aware of each other let alone working together, and this is something I'm sure we could improve which would make everyone's job easier and more effective.

Some initial thoughts on ways of protecting our heritage (cont.)

- Use
- Prioritising
- Heritage asset appraisal
- Fundraising
- Awareness raising
- Responsibility

Using buildings is a very good way of protecting them particularly if they can create an income to help support them. Assessing our heritage assets – something currently happening – will I'm sure focus on this.

Fundraising, and awareness raising among the public and other relevant bodies too can help to protect our assets.

I have put **responsibility** on the bottom. By this I mean it is ALL our responsibility to ensure the future of our heritage, but also I wonder if individual groups were given more responsibility, or took it on, then more may be achieved than when no-one is quite sure who is responsible and all just leave it to others, or the Council, who clearly have to prioritise.

For example a park, open space, footpath or building etc could be given as a charge to one group to maintain and manage and if they were responsible for this then perhaps we could lower costs and keep up standards while empowering people and getting them involved.

And there must be many more innovative ways we can discuss today to make heritage work for us in these difficult times. It is often said, but I feel worth repeating, that once something is gone, be it the green belt, a park, path or building, it cannot be retrieved: it is gone for ever.

To sum up then:

Enfield has a very varied heritage worth our time, energy and money.

Protecting, improving and maintaining it will make a difference to **all** the residents of the Borough.

There are many ways **everybody** can help, we just need to get out there and do it.

Thank you very much.