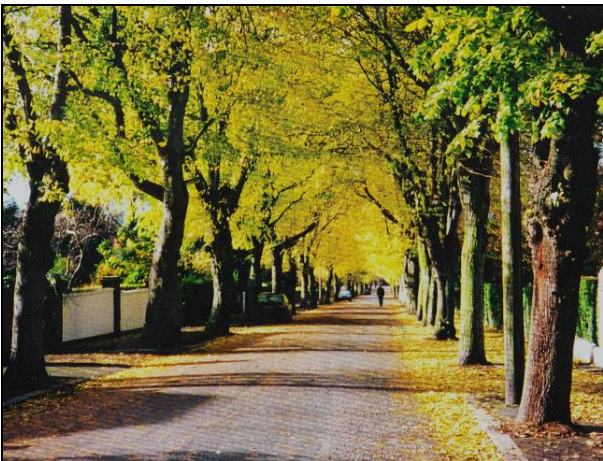


MALONE AND STRANMILLIS SUBURB, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

In April 2009 Sharon Brown and Alan Oliver co-presented a paper on the Malone and Stranmillis suburb at the FUUH International Seminar in Hanoi on a possible New Category of World Heritage Site: Historic Urban Landscapes (HULs). The presentation highlighted the global importance of the area and the key issues facing it. This article provides an update.

The Malone and Stranmillis suburb is reputed for having an epoch of the greatest concentration of buildings from the Victorian and Edwardian periods of anywhere in Northern Ireland. This is all the more so given the absence of intact streetscapes in Belfast from earlier periods such as the medieval, early modern or Georgian eras, as would be the case in other cities, for example, Edinburgh with its preserved ‘old town’ and its eighteenth century set-piece ‘new town’. It displays many examples of the ‘Arts and Crafts’ movement, integral to its sense and spirit of place. The area’s properties are of cultural, historic and architectural interest, in many aspects including their articulate crafting, plan forms and materials. Paul Larmour (1991) said “*The area contains a great wealth of buildings of special architectural interest*” and ...*there is no other suburb in this country (NI) with such a rich architectural heritage.*” ‘The Architectural Heritage of Malone and Stranmillis’, Belfast, 1991.



A Lime Walk at Cadogan Park



Grass verges, hedges & trees, Malone Park



‘Tilecote’, Malone Park



‘Nutley’, Adelaide Park (Academy Award Winner)

The harmonious visual character of the area, with its villas in their landscaped setting and the rhythm of the streetscapes, is vulnerable to a myriad of cumulative threats. This includes demolition; visually disruptive extensions and alterations and un-controlled removal of historic fabric and landscape features (trees, boundary hedges and grass verges) and harmful interventions. Traditional villas have been redeveloped for more intensive apartment development; properties boarded up and vacant; intensive subdivision of single occupancy villas into flats. The statutory protection afforded to the area is fragmented through being covered by a number of separate demarcations, as opposed to having a single Conservation Area.

EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATING KEY ISSUES IN THE MALONE/STRANMILLIS HUL

66-68 Malone Road



Demolition of Villas

Permission was granted for the demolition of this pair of semi-villas and their replacement with 2 dwelling houses in 2005. The outcome of a planning appeal hearing for a more intensive scheme of 8 apartments is awaited (expected January 2010). Their statutory listing as a building of special architectural or historical interest has been repeatedly called for. A second report laying out new material in support of their listing has been submitted in the last few days. This new material highlights their international significance.

3 Lennoxvale



Demolition of Villas

Queens University Belfast has applied for the demolition of No's 3 (and 1) Lennoxvale and redevelopment of the sites. The proposals include the adjoining site of No 52 Malone Road, already demolished. The applications are still pending.

Queens University Belfast have made further applications for the demolition and replacement of villas - no's 2 and 4 Holyrood, again outcome awaited.

1 Lennoxvale



Demolition of Villas

Queens University Belfast has applied for the demolition of No's 1 (and 3) Lennoxvale and redevelopment of the sites. The proposals include the adjoining site of No 52 Malone Road, already demolished. The applications are still pending.

Rushmere House



Harmful Extensions/Alterations

The original 1870s villa on the site was demolished and replaced in the 1980s by the single block pictured (centre rear). There has been a planning application on average every 18 months over a period of 30 years for this plot, villa (now demolished) and its garden. Proposals to increase this building in height currently are the subject of a planning appeal to be heard in January 2010.

There is robust legislation and policy to prevent the demolition of historic villas, harmful extensions and interventions in the conservation area. But this is not happening – the special architectural and historic character of the area is being rapidly destroyed. Alan Oliver and Sharon Brown are pursuing inscription of the Malone and Stranmillis suburb (HUL) as a World Heritage Site. Northern Ireland currently only has one UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Giant's Causeway. Further UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, and a greater focus on the Provinces outstanding global cultural heritage, would shift focus in this post-conflict society from Northern Ireland's troubled past to the protection of cultural heritage which would help bring social cohesion whilst avoiding uniformity and monotony. But the Malone and Stranmillis suburb is at risk of being totally destroyed and this is immediate in terms of the timing of imminent planning decisions.

Sharon Brown is the Institute of Historic Building Conservation Trustee and National Council Member for Northern Ireland.

Alan Oliver is an Associate of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and NI Events Officer

NB: This paper reflects the views of its authors and as such does not necessarily represent the views of any other body.