

The Follies Trust: A Decade and Counting



Stephenson mausoleum after.

Follies are generally defined as ornamental buildings with no practical purpose. They inspire thoughts of eccentricity and romance, and to some perhaps peculiarity. This may be only one side of their story, as when looked at critically, every folly has a purpose. This purpose may be to commemorate a loved one, or to mark a view point. Regardless of their purpose follies undeniably have finesse and intricate architectural detailing, which only adds to their charm and to the surrounding fabric of the landscape. Sadly, many follies are in poor condition and some have been added to the Built Heritage at Risk register where their future is uncertain, however the endeavours of the Follies Trust have been turning the future of some of these structures around.

The Follies Trust has been working tirelessly across the island of Ireland to conserve, preserve, restore and protect these structures. Speaking with the Chairman of The Follies Trust, Primrose Wilson CBE, she said 'The Follies Trust was formed in 2006 by a group of people who share a passion for unusual structures. We wanted to see these architectural curiosities preserved as they are part of our history and our heritage



Stephenson mausoleum before.

but having no regenerative value they are often regarded as expendable. In ten years the Follies Trust has conserved over twenty architectural curiosities many of them buildings at risk.' As a Building Preservation Trust (BPT) they have worked hard to source a cocktail of funding for repair works, worked collaboratively with local groups and local authorities, as well

as giving advice and guidance on repair works to these types of structures. The Follies Trust's commendable efforts to bring follies back to life in their original setting now adds the richness of their local landscape. A selection of the structures The Follies Trust have singularly and collaboratively repaired, and subsequently no longer have an 'at risk' status, are detailed below.



Beresford Obelisk before.



Beresford Obelisk after.

In County Londonderry the Beresford Obelisk also known as the 'Ballyquin Obelisk', or the 'Beresford Monument' stands as a testament to the remarkable life of Henry Barré Beresford. The Follies Trust have outlined a useful and accessible history of through their publication 'The Beresford Obelisk a legacy of stone in the Roe Valley'. The Beresford Obelisk dates from 1840 and is a classically designed structure consisting of a 34 foot needle set on two square steps on a 12 foot rectangular high plinth, which before repair, contained two of the four original plaques. Being exposed on all elevations, at all times of the year, made this structure extremely susceptible to natural weathering processes and the evidence of this was present on the deteriorating stonework. The Follies Trust entrusted the repair work to Conservation Surveyor Chris McCollum who undertook the task of strategizing the repair of the stooped needle, friable masonry and replacement of the two missing plaques. Chris McCollum advises that 'the key to the successful repair of these historic structures is identifying their significance and understanding the building defects, sometimes inherent, which have caused failure. The



Stephenson mausoleum door after.

paradox is to do enough to safeguard the historic fabric while appearing to do little so as not to lose the patina of age. Knowing when to stop is as important as knowing when to intervene', it is apparent that this approach towards conservation has been of great benefit to the Beresford Obelisk.



Stephenson mausoleum door before.

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In County Down the Ardglass Bathing House is perhaps one of the iconic structures in Ardglass harbour built in the early 1830s as part of a wider scheme of harbour improvements by Ardglass proprietor William Ogilvy. The bathing house is the only surviving part of the range of facilities built to draw visitors to the seaside destination in the summer months and most likely used as a ladies changing facility. The structure was increasingly becoming under threat of collapse due to exposure of strong Spring tides and associated salt weathering deterioration to the stonework and further erosion of the internal floor structure. These issues have been addressed and the building has now been safe guarded from collapse, where it is hoped it will remain in-situ for another one hundred years.

The Stephenson Mausoleum in the cemetery at Kilbride Presbyterian Church in County Antrim is an example where the Follies Trust provided legal advice and guidance to Newtownabbey Borough Council on the repair of the mausoleum. The Follies Trust advised that attention should be directed towards the missing pinnacles, deteriorating stonework and cast iron door, and these issues were addressed by the local council. The Stephenson Mausoleum is dedicated to no less than thirteen members of the family and imbues an exotic and oriental presence in a rather solemn location. It has transpired that one member of the Stephenson family was a superintending

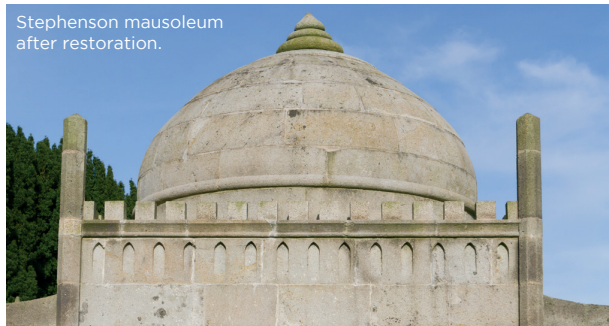


Ardglass Bathing House before restoration.



Ardglass Bathing House after restoration.

Images: David Bunting, Images NI.



Stephenson mausoleum after restoration.



Beresford Obelisk after restoration.



Beresford Obelisk before restoration.

surgeon based in Madras, India, which is perhaps why the tomb evokes such an Indian-styled presence prompting Maurice Craig in his book *Mausolea of Hibernica* (1999) to described it as a 'miniature Taj Mahal built entirely of cut stone'. The repair work now reveals a delightfully unusual structure of craft and architecture in a rural setting.

Without the collaborative ethos, and expertise of The Follies Trust, both the life and resilience of these iconic structures may have been lost to the forces of nature. However, after more than a decade this group of enthusiasts continue to highlight and repair these idyllic structures. Even though some may not fulfil a practical purpose, it is their intangible value relating to sense of place and local worth that deems these structures of most importance. ○

Connie Gerrow
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The Built Heritage at Risk Register is managed by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society in partnership with the Department for Communities: Historic Environment Division. More information can be found on the website: www.uahs.org.uk