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*Historic Preservation, the State and Nationalism in Britain*

*Abstract:* The paper discusses the relationship between the state, historic buildings preservation and nationalism in Britain from the nineteenth century to the present. It argues against the idea that, because of comparatively continuous nation and state formation, state preservation in Britain until the mid twentieth was exceptionally weak. By suggesting a broader understanding of ‘the state’, the paper shows the variety of ways in which institutions within the state were, and remain, involved. Through spotlights on major turning points in the administrative framework, it further argues that nationalism has been more often mobilized to foster state preservation than the other way round and suggests to place nationalism alongside other motive forces to understand the rise and transformation of state involvement in preservation.

Britain poses a puzzling case for understanding the relationship between historic preservation, the state and nationalism. While most of the literature on heritage and nationalism sees a strong link between the rise of preservation and the rise of nationalism and assumes that the state played a major role, in scholarship on Britain (and let me call it ‘Britain’ for now, before dealing with the protracted problem of ‘Britain’ versus the ‘four nations’ and ‘empire’), the state is virtually absent and the nexus between preservation and nationalism appears much more fuzzy. Ever since Gerald Baldwin Brown, Fine Arts professor in Edinburgh argued in 1905 in a seminal comparative study that ‘by continental standard’, state care for ancient monuments in Britain could only be called ‘defective’, scholars tended to agree with him. In contrast to France in particular, where an inspectorate, a historic monuments commission and a range of other preservation institutions were in place since the 1840s, Britain had no proper legislation for the protection of ancient monuments until 1882 and no designated administration until the early twentieth century. Even when stronger legislation was passed in 1913 buildings in use were excluded, and remained so until after the Second World War.

Hence the civil servants in charge of preservation in the interwar period, and with them later historians, deduced that historic buildings were less well protected in Britain than in ‘any other country in Europe, with the exception of the Balkan states and Turkey’. As a result, it is generally assumed that ‘the recognition of a place for government involvement in the preservation of historic buildings or monuments was to prove slower to develop in Britain than in many other European countries although the UK today is recognized as having some of the most comprehensive heritage protection laws in place when compared to any of its neighbours’ (Cowell 2008: 98, 13).

Several policy histories have traced how state preservation took off (Saunders 1982; Champion 1996; Delafons 1997; Drewry 2008; Emerick 2014), but why it developed has been less studied. Whether early state involvement was weak has been questioned little, as the argument of a British delay helped early campaigners to push for greater engagement and allowed their successors to celebrate improvement (Swenson, 2011). When a critical scholarship on heritage emerged it focused less on the ‘the state’ than on ‘elite’ versus ‘popular’ contributions (Hewison 1987; Wright 2009; Mandler 1997). Very recently, however, interest in the history of state preservation has risen. Impulses have come from discourse analysis (Waterton 2010, Cooper 2010 & 2013) and comparative history (Hall 2011, Swenson 2013), but mostly from changes in the political landscape. In 2013, the ‘Heritage Centenary’, celebrating the anniversary of the 1913 Ancient Monuments Act, provided the opportunity to rethink, and popularise, the role of government historically. But more than celebration of achievements past, fear for the future has animated debates, as the biggest restructuring of state preservation in England since 1913 was taking place and, according to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) estimates, at least £500 million a year of public funding have been lost to the heritage sector since 2010 (Bagwell et al. 2015: 28). The Coalition government’s attempts to reduce the national deficit by replacing the state with ‘big society’, coupled with uncertainty

over the future of the UK in the context of the referenda on Scottish independence and membership of the EU, have changed debates about nationalism and the care for the historic environment.

Meanwhile, the devolution of culture in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland has resulted in diverging approaches to preservation in the different parts of the UK. While the economic value of heritage tourism is recognised across the country, in Wales and Scotland policy directions ‘have articulated a much broader appreciation of the historic environment and its power within national development plans that is apparent for England’ (Baxter 2015: 37). The Scottish Government in particular described the historic environment as ‘the very heart of our national cultural identity’ and therefore ‘is committed to the historic environment, seeing it as a key building block for a successful future for Scotland’ (Historic Scotland, 2011: 1). The value of historic buildings was perceived less intrinsically on the southern side of the border. ‘When, in 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition had to make massive cuts, ministers turned to the part of the National Heritage Collection in the care of English Heritage. Could it be given away, sold or dismembered in some way? Surely this was just a collection of old buildings randomly assembled that could be casually dispersed?’ For Simon Thurley, then Chief Executive of English Heritage, such thoughts indicated that historic buildings were ‘not perceived as having the same cultural weight as other collections’ and that in part this might be due to a lack of awareness about how the preservation of historic buildings by the state came about (Thurley 2013: 3-4).

The history of state preservation has since become a battlefield among those who argue about the future of state involvement mobilizing historic precedents (AHRC, 2013) in a classic cultural-nationalist ploy of looking to ‘forgotten multiple and competing pasts’ (Hutchinson 2013: 91). In these battles, concepts of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ remain often ill defined and their

relationship largely untheorized. Thurley's history of the Ancient Monuments Department for instance is essentially about reminding the reader what his *Men from the Ministry* have known all along: that there is an organic link between 'identity' and the historic environment: 'English identity is very closely bound up with the physicality of England', such as 'the patterns of fields and villages seen out of an airplane, red phone and post boxes, the mills of Manchester, Victorian civic buildings, the great cathedrals, seaside towns with their piers and amusement arcades, Blackpool Pleasure Beach, parish churches with their graveyards'. Thurley acknowledges that this 'of course, changes at the edges as new places develop. The Regent's Park Mosque built in 1978, the Angel of the North finished in 1998, and the London Eye, erected in 2000, are all now part of the identity of the places where they stand.' Overall however he neither problematizes ideas of heritability nor the constructed nature of a visual canon, but concludes: 'The bones of our heritage are the tangible and visible remains of our ancestors, their achievements, their industry and their ideas of beauty. This is what makes up our common visual understanding of our country. They are the clues that let you know that you live in England, not France or Italy.' (Thurley 2013: 258). Therefore the National Heritage Collection is 'part of the very fabric of the nation, of society indeed'. And, moving seamlessly between England and Britain, he continues: 'It is also British.' While acknowledging that this 'is a difficult concept to argue without sounding xenophobic or nationalistic, he suggests 'what is represented in the National Heritage Collection is, by very definition, the project of the peoples who lived on these islands', 'the most visible expression of our cultural and civil values' and 'encapsulate most vividly our history.' (Thurley 2013: 255).

Here, like in earlier academic works (Hunter 1996, Delafons 1997, Mandler 1997, Cowell 2008), the history of heritage is told as a history of the 'national past'. While there has been growing attention to the provenance of objects in 'national collections' from outside the

current borders, the story of the built environment, and the history of its protection, is still mostly seen as quintessentially national, rather than as a result of entanglements across the world (Hall 2011; Swenson & Mandler 2013; Swenson 2013). This national focus is underpinned by the widespread, and often unquestioned belief that the main function of ‘histories, heritage and museums’ is ‘representing the nation’ (Boswell & Evans 1999). Yet despite the ubiquity of the nation to frame concepts of preservation, there is overall little explicit problematizing of the role of nationalism (Waterton 2010). This, as Mandler suggested, is perhaps due to the stubborn survival of the idea that England (and in the mind of many English, by extension Britain) had no need for nationalism because of its distinct pattern of nation and state building, ‘marked by continuity – undisrupted by the wars, revolutions and nation-building of the Continent’ (1997: 2). As Herbert Butterfield put it in his influential study in 1945: ‘we in England’ ‘have maintained the threads between past and present we do not, like some younger states, have to go hunting for our own personalities. We do not have to set about the deliberate manufacture of a national consciousness, or to strain ourselves, like the Irish, in order to create a ‘nationalism’ out of the broken fragments of tradition, out of the ruins of a tragic past’ (qu. in Kumar 2006: 414). The stress of English, and often by extension British, exceptionality can of course, as Kumar has argued, be seen as the key element of nationalism itself as it helped to construct the perceived uniqueness of the nation (Kumar 2000: 576-7). At least since Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s *Invention of Tradition* (1983) historians are aware that most of the seemingly ancient traditions in the British Isles were modern creations, and a substantial historiography has developed on nationalism in the United Kingdom (Colley 1992; Tanner et al. 2006). Historical buildings, however, have not been central to this literature, although scholarship has touched on historic buildings and national identity in relation to the countryside (Mandler 1997; Readman 2008) and archaeological sites (Harvey 2003, Hingley 2010).

This article does not aspire to fill the many empirical gaps, too large to address in a short paper. Rather, it seeks to propose a framework for thinking about the place of the state and the role of nationalism, to re-interpret the known sequence of events and to raise new areas of investigation. In order to understand the relationship between state, historic buildings, nationalism and national identity - in Britain, and more generally -, it is first of all helpful to disaggregate preservation from nationalism and national identity. In other words, it is necessary to neither assume that nationalism automatically always constitutes the motivation for preservation, nor that preservation necessarily leads to reinforcing the concept of the nation. Too often this link has been assumed rather than investigated by projecting theoretical beliefs onto the historical context without empirical verification. Much of the literature arguing that English national identity since the late nineteenth century has been dominated by an anti-modern longing for the rural past, for instance, took a causal link between the growing interest in the past and the *Decline of the Industrial Spirit* as a given and identified every instance of preservation as an instance of nostalgia despite plenty of evidence to the contrary (Mandler 1997). More recently, the literature inspired by Smith's idea of an 'authorized heritage discourse' (2006) has interpreted all state activities as an attempt to impose an exclusionary, static, white, male, upper class vision of heritage (Harrison 2010; Waterton 2010). Empirical research, however, suggests that the processes that led to the creation of state institutions were more collaborative, that ideas of heritage were never static, and that national concerns were only one of many motivations (Cooper 2010; Swenson 2013).

To put academic and public debates on firmer empirical ground, it is time to re-examine the relationship between the state, preservation and nationalism with conceptual clarity and attention to historical specificity. To understand *when*, by *whom* and *why* state preservation developed, this article will use the analytical quadrant discussed by Mark Thatcher in the introduction to this Special Issue to highlight the porous and shifting boundaries between

state/non-state actors and nationalistic/non-nationalistic aims. It argues against the idea that because of the comparatively continuous nation and state formation, state preservation in Britain until the mid-twentieth century was exceptionally weak. By suggesting a broader understanding of 'the state', the first part of the paper will show the variety of ways in which institutions within the state have been, and remain, involved. Through spotlights on major turning points in the administrative framework from the late eighteenth century onwards, the second half will demonstrate that nationalism has more often been mobilized to foster state preservation than the other way round and suggest to place nationalism alongside other motive forces to understand the rise and transformation of state involvement in preservation.

Before proceeding, a few disclaimers are necessary. First, this article will examine the policy side of preservation exclusively. Although the effects of state activities on ideas of the nation are in need of study, this can logically only be a subsequent step after the state activities themselves have been established. For the same reason, while considering the different activities constituting the 'cultivation of culture' - salvage, restoration and pageantry (Leersson 2006: 568-73) -, this study will focus mostly on salvage through the creation of legislation and institutions, rather than on the often quite different implementation of policies, or the 'changing meaning with respect to the development of ideas of nationalism and nationhood over a longer period' of particular buildings' 'life history' (Harvey 2003: 177). Second, this paper will not offer a comprehensive survey of the development of state preservation in Britain, but rather suggest ways of categorization. Chronologically, while engaging with twenty-first century developments, the focus will be on the earlier period, as most misconceptions of an absent state are extrapolated from the years before 1914. Geographically, space limitations prevent this paper from engaging with all the different nationalisms of the archipelago so rather than offering a comprehensive overview of policy in the different parts of the United Kingdom this article will zoom in on case studies of

particular relevance. The period discussed is marked by a complex web of common British and separate English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish policies and institutions. What is under discussion here are mostly common frameworks for state preservation, such as the Ancient Monuments legislation, rather than their different implementations - and the different listing legislation -, and the divergent policies after devolution. For this reason, Ireland will be mostly excluded from the analysis, as the Ancient Monuments legislation that shaped England, Scotland and Wales from 1900 did not apply to Ireland (Fry 2003). Far from wishing to conflate Englishness with Britishness (Langlands 1999), this essay will at times pay particular attention to England merely because most arguments about British exceptionalism are based on the English case. On the contrary, the aim of this article is to reveal the complex administrative and discursive intermeshing of layers within and beyond the geographical borders of the British Isles. Its analysis will therefore be informed by comparisons and particular attention will be paid to transnational, imperial and international processes in order to better understand the interaction of external and internal triggers as well as motive forces beyond the nation (Leersson 2006: 564-6).

### **Rethinking ‘the state’ in British preservation**

It is first necessary to rethink what is meant by ‘the state’ in British preservation and to acknowledge its multiple and shifting nature. Traditionally the literature focuses on successive ‘Ancient Monuments’, ‘Town and Country Planning’ and ‘National Heritage’ Acts to assess state involvement. As their history is well established, I only want to recall the main aspects, before suggesting a broader interpretation of state involvement. The legislative development can roughly be divided into three phases indicated by the denomination of the Acts:

**1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act (Great Britain), creation of an Inspectorate**

1892 Ancient Monument Act Ireland

1900 Ancient Monument (Amendment) Act Great Britain

1908 Royal Commissions for Scotland (RCAHMS), Wales (RCAHMW) and England (RCAHME)

**1913 Ancient Monument Act Great Britain, creation of Ancient Monuments Boards**

1931 Ancient Monuments Act (integrating AM and planning)

1944 National Buildings Record

**1947 Town and Country Planning Act**

**1953 Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act**

1962 Local Authorities (Historic Buildings) Act

1971 Town and country Planning Act

1972 Town and country Planning (Amendment) Act

1974 Town and country Planning (Amendment) Act

1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act

1980 National Heritage Act => National Heritage Memorial Fund

**1983 National Heritage Act => English Heritage, Historic Scotland and Cadw.**

1990 Town and Country Planning Act

1993 National Heritage Act

1999 Royal Commission (England) merges with English Heritage

2002 National Heritage Act

2011 National Heritage Protection Plan

2012 Decision to merge RCAHMS and Historic Scotland and RCAHMW and CADW

2014 Merger of RCAHMW and CADW shelved

2015 English Heritage to split into English Heritage and Historic England

A first phase started with the 1882 ‘Ancient Monuments Act’ that protected pre-historic sites. Subsequent acts extended the protection criteria to later periods, first in Ireland (1892) and then Great Britain (1900). Buildings in use remained excluded until after the Second World War out of respect for private and ecclesiastical ownership. Administratively, the Office of Works was responsible for preservation. An inspectorate was created in 1882, but fell vacant between 1900 and 1910. In addition to central government, County Councils had the option to take sites into care since 1900 and further measures of protection could be taken through planning legislation passed in the first decade of the twentieth century (Hall 2005: 151-3). The advent of stronger legislation was helped by the creation of three Royal Commissions on Ancient and Historical Monuments first for Scotland, then Wales and England in 1908. The 1913 Ancient Monuments Act established the framework that governed the protection of ancient monuments until 1979. It enhanced the Office of Work’s power to take sites into guardianship, allowed it to issue compulsory ‘Preservation Orders’ when a monument of ‘historic, architectural, traditional, artistic, or archaeological interest’ was at risk of demolition by its owner; and foresaw the establishment of a ‘schedule’ of monuments of ‘national importance’, whose damage was a criminal offence. By 1931, when a new act restricted development in the vicinity of ancient monuments, 3000 monuments had been scheduled and around 200 had been taken into guardianship. Through this act, as well as through the Planning Acts of 1925 and 1932, which empowered local authorities to interdict the demolishing of significant historic buildings, Ancient Monuments and Planning legislation became more integrated, even if the two areas remained administered separately in the departments of ‘Work’ and ‘Health’.

It was only as a result of the threats posed to historic buildings by aerial bombing during the Blitz, which led to the establishment of a salvage register known as the National Buildings Record, coupled with the breaking up of the great landed estates, that ‘historic buildings’ in

use were finally properly made the subject of legislation. The modern listing system, with different grades classifying buildings according to their national or local importance, was introduced, and a new doctrine based on the 'presumption to preserve' was supported with an increase in funding and personnel. A new Ancient Monuments Act in 1953, which phrased eligibility criteria as broadly as possible, changed the emphasis from a system based on guardianship to a system based on grant aid for owners and created new Historic Buildings Councils for England, Scotland and Wales as advisory bodies. Although the merger of the departments of Planning and Ancient Monuments was discussed at various moments, they stayed, apart from a brief moment during the war, in different ministries until 1970 and hence, the listing of buildings of special importance, remained under a different body of legislation and oversight. When the old Ancient Monuments Department was finally joined with the listed buildings sections into a new Directorate in 1972 (DAMHB), it was an English body only, as administrative autonomy for Welsh and Scottish monuments had been delegated in 1969, before a full transfer of staff and functions took place in 1978 (Thurley 2013: 236).

After the continuous expansion of state preservation during the welfare state years (by 1981, for England alone, the Department of the Environment which then oversaw historic preservation had over 1000 people on this work, the Royal Commission for England had another 100 staff and the Ancient Monument Board for England, and the Historic Buildings Council for England had 18 and 20 members each (Delafons 1997: 136)), the Thatcher and Major governments introduced major changes. They simultaneously enhanced the visibility of what was now increasingly called 'national heritage' and reduced direct state involvement. As part of a wider drive to bring down state funding and 'the total civil service manpower count' (Delafons 1997: 136), new public sector agencies were created with greater commercial and entrepreneurial responsibilities. With devolution, responsibility for English Heritage (created by the National Heritage Act in 1983), Cadw, and Historic Scotland, as well as for the wider

planning process went to Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff respectively and state involvement in preservation has been taking increasingly divergent paths in Wales and Scotland and England. England underwent the most dramatic changes through the split of English Heritage into a charity of the same name, in charge of the National Heritage Collection, and Historic England, in charge of the statutory duties (DCMS 2013). There are, however, also institutions that retain a British framework, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, a non-governmental body that has become the largest funder for the historic environment in the UK (Larkin 2014: 12).

Before analysing the role of nationalism in these developments, it is necessary to point out that while broadly right, this traditional account of slow beginnings, followed by rapid expansion and then retreat (at least in the case of England), is historically problematic. It is not only based on the false assumption that the early legislation was exceptionally weak by international standards, but also ignores that there was state involvement beyond the areas covered explicitly by Ancient Monuments and Planning legislation. From a comparative perspective, there is little reason to dismiss the involvement of 'the state' early on. Britain had in fact a designated 'monument act' (a category that was more widely used than that of 'historic buildings') earlier than France, Italy or Germany. By 1913, the exclusion of inhabited houses and working churches was unusual compared to France or Italy, but in Prussia for instance only archaeological sites, and no historic structures, were protected (Swenson 2013: 273-328).

Moreover, it makes sense to think about 'the state' and its involvement with historic buildings in much broader terms. Other forms of legislation not explicitly labelled as 'Ancient Monuments' legislation had an impact on historic buildings and the Inspectorate, the Royal Commissions and the Ancient Monuments Boards were neither the only nor the first

institution to care for historic buildings within ‘the state’. Although no formal legislation for the protection of ‘ancient monument’ or ‘historic buildings’ was in place before 1882, a range of government departments had been responsible for what we would now call historic buildings. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Office of Works was in charge of the Government’s civil estates, whereas the War Office, the Navy Office and the Office of Wood cared for military and naval buildings and crown estates. Crucially, across all departments a growing sense developed to care for buildings not only in a functional way but also with the aim of preserving and promoting their historic character. As a result, by ‘1840 it was the Government that was by far the largest and most successful operator of historic visitor attractions’ (Thurley 2013: 16). Buildings were opened to the public and restored extensively to a more ‘historic state’. As the century progressed approaches to restoration and public openings were increasingly consolidated in the hands of the Office of Works, as the War Office and the Office of Woods handed over the majority of their historic buildings (Emerick 2014: 55-57). Other departments also showed increasing interest in historic remains. The Ordnance Survey for instance, founded in 1791 to provide detailed topological knowledge in case of a French invasion, started to systematically map antiquities from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. After 1900, the Board of Education, progressively encouraged visits to sites, instructing teachers in secondary schools that it was more important for historical understanding to train the eye through local historic monuments than to memorise the entirety of political history (Thurley, 46-48, 77).

To the activities by different ministries can be added those of local government. Even before the 1900 Ancient Monuments Act allowed local authorities to take sites into guardianship, many individuals interested in preservation thought to influence the fate of historic buildings by seeking election to the Country Council created by local government reform in the 1890s (Hall 2005; Cooper 2013b & 2014). It also makes sense to include the colonial and imperial

institutions in an analysis of state preservation. Hoock has demonstrated the active role of the state in the war over antiquities during the Napoleonic period in accumulating the collections of the British Museum (Hoock 2007 & 2010). While imperial institutions had at first glance less impact on the immovable monuments of the metropole, flow of personal and transfers of experiences were significant as the care for historic buildings often developed earlier in the colonial context than in Britain (Swenson & Mandler 2013). The influence of Indian legislation on the British one is particularly well studied (Singh 2004), but there are many other examples. In Malta for instance, where the Crown inherited the fortresses and Catholic churches of the Knights of St John, various institutions within the colonial government and in Downing Street developed preservation policies as early as 1814 (Swenson, 2015).

Apart from the different levels of national, local and colonial government directly concerned with buildings, it is also worth considering a number of other institutions, such as the Church and the Monarchy. The Anglican Church created its own machinery for restoration during the 1830s and 40s. Extensively documented (Miele 1995), the Victorian Church policies are usually not discussed as part of state intervention. Although it has been noted that ‘by virtue of the established church, Westminster Abbey and St. Paul’s Cathedral were effectively national monuments’ (Thurley 2013: 16), there has been no further elaboration on what this might mean for a broader understanding of the place of the Church within state preservation. Because of the ‘ecclesiastic exemption’, the Church is characteristically treated in a separate chapter in policy histories (Delafons 1997). Yet, does it make sense to separate state from church preservation in the absence of a separation of state and church? Why not start the history of ‘the state’ and historic buildings with the seizure of ecclesiastical buildings under Henry VIII, and treat Church preservation as part of state preservation? The fact that in contrast to France, Italy, or Germany the state in Britain had no need to include churches in monument legislation to establish its primacy might demonstrates the strong hold the state

already had over a major category of historic buildings, rather than a weakness in state preservation.

One could also include the Head of the Church and state, and the Royal family, into the history of state preservation. The patronage given by members of the royal family to preservation charities, such as Queen Victoria's daughter HRH Princess Louise's presidency of the National Trust, is often casually mentioned, and so are Prince Charles' intervention in heritage debates (Waterson 1994: 45-8; Delafons 1997), but overall the contributions of the royal family to preservation, and the links between preservation and royal pageantry, remain to be more strongly integrated into a history of state preservation. It is also worth to reconceptualise the place of the aristocracy. Much has been written on the prominence of British aristocrats in preservation (either to show that state preservation was unnecessary, because the aristocracy already functioned as a guardian of the 'national heritage', or to criticize the continued imposition of an aristocratic past as national heritage through the National Trust), but again one could see the aristocracy much more as part of the state well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, given the persistence of aristocratic government and an upper house consisting of hereditary peers.

The National Trust too is a highly interesting case for thinking about the role of the private sector versus that of the state. With its more than four million members, the National Trust stands like no other institution for the exceptional success and weight of non-state led preservation in Britain. Today it operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, when it was established, it had a UK-wide, and indeed imperial and transatlantic remit. Irish independence removed its authority over the Republic of Ireland (though it continued to own at least one property there until as late as 2000), and a separate National Trust for Scotland was established in the 1930s. Its origins are closely tight to the movement for more state

involvement. Its foundation in 1894 as a landholding body was brought about by the absence of any government agency that could take historic buildings into custody. While believing in private initiative, the National Trust's founders never thought it the only, or even the best solution. In particular the solicitor Robert Hunter, a civil servant by day and campaigner by night, worked tirelessly for better Ancient Monuments legislation throughout his life (Cowell 2013). The trust's founding community was also convinced that the trust's land needed protection by law if it were to be salvaged in the long term. In 1907 the National Trust Act endowed the organisation with the unique right to hold land inalienably for the nation and its position was enhanced by further legislation in 1919, 1937, 1939, 1953, 1971, and further entanglements were created through grand aid in the post-war period (Delafons 1997: 71; Thurley 2013: 178-194).

Although the majority of the built heritage is still in private hands, other interventions on the part of the state, and in particular tax legislation, have made historic preservation one of the purest examples of public-private partnerships. Conditional exemption from inheritance taxes allows owners to retain heritage assets that would otherwise be subject to tax, provided they are open to the public for a certain number of days a year. Acceptance in Lieu also allows pieces to remain in situ in return for public access. The Heritage Maintenance Funds, exempt from inheritance tax, were created by the government in 1976 to enable owners of historic houses designated by the Treasury as being of national importance, and which are open to the public, to set up 'asset-locked' funds for the purpose of generating resources for maintenance (HM Revenue & Customs 2011). Over time the National Land Fund created after the Second World War and used to finance many of the transfers of houses to the National Trust over gave way to the National Heritage Memorial Fund in charge of saving heritage 'at risk of loss to the nation' through grant-in-aid (NHMF online).

Among the bodies that are not strictly seen as part of government but which were created and enhanced by the government, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has particular importance as the largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK. Under John Major the decision was taken to give money for ‘heritage’ projects through the National Lottery and since then the proportion of the National Lottery funding given to heritage has been increased (Delafons 1997: 163; Babbidge 2015: 21). Although the HLF is not a government department, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport issues financial and policy directions to the organisation, which reports to Parliament through the Department.

While there has been a clear drive by Conservative governments to reduce direct government involvement since the 1980s, ‘heritage’ in other ways was given more importance. There has been an increasing steer to coordinate the many bodies involved in heritage management. The Heritage Protection Reform on which the government, English Heritage and the heritage sector have been working under Labour since the early 2000s has inter alia led to a Heritage Protection Plan Framework to coordinate activities through common guidelines (EH 2013). Under the Coalition government (2010-2015) many aspects of heritage have been ‘mainstreamed’. Even though DCMS lacked political effectiveness, ‘the sector is now considered in any number of policy decisions and directions’ (Baxter 2015: 37). In spite of the stated aim for historic buildings to be managed with ever ‘greater autonomy from Government’ in England, the design for the split of English Heritage into a statutory body and a charity in 2015 shows that separation is not total: the government ultimately retains control of the National Heritage Collection via a property license, and the new English Heritage charity remains a subsidiary of the statutory body (DCMS 2013; Larkin 2014).

Although sketchy and incomplete, this very brief enumeration of different bodies should suffice to show that many parts of ‘the state’ have long been involved in the preservation of

historic buildings. Having established that ‘the state’ in manifold and shifting ways was historically more present than absent, it remains to assess what motivated the development of state involvement.

### **State preservation and nationalism**

The multitude of bodies and individuals involved, their evolving history and changing relationship and the lack of empirical research on many of them make it hard to offer a comprehensive overview of motives and effects at this stage. Through spotlights on the major moments of changes in the legislative and administrative framework of historic building preservation since the late eighteenth century, this article will therefore test some of the explanatory patterns suggested in the literature on nationalism to develop a more analytical approach to the British case and, in turn, use it to advance theorisation. The questions and hypotheses addressed here are: Were ‘salvage’ policies put in place to respond to the ‘continuous and unpredictable external and internal shocks to the existing social order unleashed by secular modernization’ (Hutchinson 2013: 86) or did preservation, like many of the other cultural activities that investigate the past also have its logic that developed to a good extent independently (Leersson, 2006)? Were changes motivated by a search for myth making or moral regeneration (Smith 1999; Hutchinson 2013: 83) or by shifts in the philosophy of regulation (Cooper 2010)? Finally, to which extent were triggers external to the national territory rather than internal (Leersson 2006: 564-6)?

The historical evidence suggests that the answer is rarely monocausal, but rather that distinct factors interacted, with different motives coming to the fore at particular moments in time. In a first instance, impulses were strongly external. Although Britain had no need tackle the effects of expropriation and vandalism of historic buildings like Revolutionary France, the

nationalisations, destructions and new memory institutions created by the French had significant ramifications for the establishment of alternative systems in Britain. The Anglican Church started to restore cathedrals as 'English institutions' to create an identification with the historic fabric of the country to prevent overthrow (Sweet 2004: 297-8) while many aristocrats opened their houses to avoid nationalisation on the French model, giving the nation an intangible but no proprietary claim on the 'heritage' (Colley 174-5). While these measures established the idea of an alternative private way of preservation, at the same time parts of 'the state' also transformed historic buildings more directly. The House of Commons, for instance, turned Westminster Abbey and St. Pauls Cathedral into national monuments for fallen heroes (Hooek 2004). The motivation might not have been to enhance a sense of Britishness but to defend the status of the political elite (Bouwers 2008), but for the long-term effect this seems to have mattered little as it fed into the wider creation of a British identity studied by Linda Colley. A mix of emulation and rejection of continental ways continued in the 1830s and 1840s. While Revolutions waves moved across Europe, the Church embarked on its programme of restoration trumpeting the message of Anglican Christianity and different government departments started opening and restoring castles and palaces. Although a Select Committee of the House of Commons ignored calls from the antiquarian community for a systematic state policy for monuments through an imitation of Monuments Commissions established elsewhere in Europe (Champion 1996: 39-40), the restorations indicate a conscious use of the past to foster internal cohesion. The transformations of the Tower and of Hampton Court Place for example stressed contrasts between past and present. Newly created dungeons of the Tudor period were set along a recreation of Queen Victoria's nursery (Thurley 2013: 5-35) to frame upheaval as belonging to the realm of the past while tranquil domesticity characterises contemporary Britain. Although it is important to stress the state involvement here, it was not a top-down process as openings and restorations by the state responded to popular demand (Melman 2006).

Attitudes towards more direct forms of state preservation, and towards continental models, slowly changed between 1870 and 1914. The beginnings of proper state legislation in Britain coincide with the start of legislation in other countries, especially France, Germany and Italy. Whereas there state preservation was triggered strongly by the need for nation-building after war and unification, nation-building was rarely invoked openly as the goal of state preservation in Britain. Benefits for the nation were certainly stressed, but these were seen less in having buildings everybody could identify with but in enjoying spaces that would help with mental and physical fitness. Arguments about the need for beauty for spiritual wellbeing went back to Ruskinian thinking, but as the defeat in the Boar War created fears about military fitness, the benefits of access to open space, and by extension historic buildings grew more widely accepted (Swenson 2013: 281). The Boar War also had another effect on historic preservation by making the Office of War focus on military modernisation. For this, it got rid of fortresses that were no longer fit for purpose by passing them on to the Office of Works (Thurley 2013: 48). Hence the consolidation of historic buildings in the hand of one department was triggered by concerns about the nation but in a rather indirect way.

There were few explicit suggested to use historic buildings to forge a sense of Britishness across the islands during this period. Debates about Home Rule, and tensions between the nations of the British isles slowed down the establishment of legislation to some degree, as concerns about the cultural recognition that state protection might give to the Celtic past created opposition in parliament. Objection was also voiced against a Monuments Commission that would allow Scottish antiquaries oversight over English properties (Chippendale: 15). At the same time, the rivalry between the parts of the United Kingdom accelerated the creation of state institutions. Campaigners achieved the 1900 Act by using the legislation passed in Ireland in 1892 to argue that Great Britain could not stay behind (TNA,

WORK 14/135) and mobilised Anglo-Scottish rivalry to create more institutions in the early twentieth century.

Gerald Baldwin Brown, an Englishman who had moved to Edinburgh in 1880 to become one of the most verbose campaigners for more state involvement was particularly crafty in playing Scottish and English pride to gain local and central government support for preservation in Edinburgh (Cooper 2013b & 2014). When moving to the government's responsibility for the whole country in his book *The Care of Ancient Monuments*, he like many others, chose to focus the potential to create links across the entire Empire, arguing that preserving 'the traditional memories of the race' through the tangible past would 'help to keep alive throughout the Empire the sense of the unity of the stock' (Brown 1905: 3-4).

Even more important than imperial cohesion was external visibility. The argument most often used for legislation stressed international reputation rather than national benefits. Preservationists increasingly declared the care of historic monuments to be a measurement for a country's civilised status and European states raced each other in the passing of preservation laws (Swenson 2011). Ultimately, the combination of internal and external rivalries brought about the creation of institutions in Britain, and in England in particular: When Baldwin Brown had published his comparative book arguing for an emulation of European examples, he at first had little reception in Westminster, but rose the interest of the Scottish Secretary, Lord Pentland, an enthusiastic promoter of Scottish national identity, who went on to establish the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland in 1908. The existence of this commission was in turn used by English preservationists and local government, especially London County Council, to argue for similar institution in Wales and England (TNA, WORK 14/2251). Overall in the decades before the First World War, nationalism was thus more often mobilised to create state preservation, rather than the

other way round, and competition between the constitutive parts of the United Kingdom, as well as with other states, was a more crucial argument for establishing state preservation than concerns about internal cohesion within the British Isles.

While international and imperial rivalry continued to play a part in the progressive increase of state intervention in the interwar years, the more dramatic changes of the post-war period were made in response to new internal and external dangers. The first, long in the making, but accelerated by the wars, was the decline of the aristocracy and the need to find new owners for their country estates. The second was the threat to the built heritage through areal bombing. The Blitz led to the establishment of listing as an emergency measure in case historically significant buildings were damaged (Saint 1996). The wilful targeting of militarily insignificant, but culturally valued buildings by the Nazis turned historic buildings into symbols of national survival, and preservation into a feature of civilisation that distinguished Britain from her enemy (*The Times*, 13 July 1943: 5). Yet the transformation of such feelings into policies was also underpinned by the broader expansion of the welfare state, i.e. by a fundamental change in the philosophy of regulation, based on the idea that ‘government was responsible for meeting the needs of its citizens using a professional cadre of public servants in a professional and objective manner’ (Cooper 2010: 46). While there was ‘no formal policy on nationalisation of ancient monuments and historic buildings’, the prevailing attitude was that ‘central government should take increasing control of Britain’s heritage’ despite hard economic times (Thurley, 2013: 203). Historic buildings, and the country side they were in, were seen as worthy of preservation often not so much for the story they told about the nation, but as ‘a national possession for all our people’ (Hugh Dalton qu. in Mandler 1997: 335) and planning and preservation legislation were ultimately about developing a holistic system to ‘secure a proper balance between the competing demands for land, so that all the land of the

country is used in the best interests of the whole people.’ (HC Deb 29 January 1947 vol. 432 c 947 (Silkin)).

Once state preservation was in full swing (Delafons 1997: 56-103), explicit articulations of national aims became less frequent. Policy documents adopted a language of historical and technical expertise rather than outlining benefits for the nation. Work might have been underpinned by national concerns at a time when decolonisation and Europeanization brought major changes to British consciousness, but these concerns were rarely made explicit in the developing conservationist doctrine. Rather, a redefinition of the nation in terms of class took place. Although ecclesiastical and aristocratic structures continued to loom large among the buildings protected by the state, a widening understanding of contributions to the national community translated into the inclusion of working class and industrial heritages in the listing and guardianship processes (Thurley 2013: 216-32) and stronger participatory elements in the planning process (HC Deb 31 January 1968 vol 757 cc1361-479).

It appears that only once the Thatcher government transformed the established system, driven equally by the DAMHB overstretch in terms of human resources in the face of the ever expanding lists of protected buildings (Thurley 2013: 249-50), and by a more fundamental shift in ideas about regulation (Cooper 2010), that a national rhetoric was rediscovered again. In its controversial *Managing England's Heritage: Setting our Priorities in the 1990s*, English Heritage outlined in 1992 how it had ‘chosen to reassess objectives and priorities’. The document, which centred on how to make ‘the Heritage Pound go further’, opened with the declaration that ‘the widespread concern for our heritage’ was henceforth ‘to be admired and encouraged not only for its own sake but in the interest of the social cohesion of the nation’. It embraced a nineteenth century conception of patriotism by closing with Rudyard Kipling poem: Our Fathers in a wondrous age/ Ere yet the Earth was small/ Ensured to us an

heritage/ And doubted not at all/ That we the children of their heart/ Which then did beat so high/ In later times should play their part/ For our posterity.’ (Delafons 1997: 159-60). Although a controversial document, the references to national benefits became taken up lastingly in policy guidelines. Increasing ‘our sense of national identity’ (while ‘sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness’) was made explicit in the government’s planning policy in the Planning Policy Guidance 15 issued in 1994. Yet, like in earlier documents, which ‘nation’ this referred to was left open to interpretation.

## **Conclusion**

Britain offers an instructive case for teasing out some of the complexities of the relationship between historic preservation, the state and nationalism. Although the UK had a pattern of nation and state building that was distinctive from most European nations, the development of state preservation was closely related to developments on the continent and the wider world.

To unpack this process, it has been useful to first of all separate state/non-state actors and nationalistic/non-nationalistic aims in an analytical quadrant, but to fully understand it one must acknowledge that the boundaries between these actors and aims were porous and shifting. It is of limited usefulness to treat the state as an active actor, with its own goals, strategies and interests. While the anthropomorphising of the state helps to historicize debates about ‘its’ role, ‘the state’ only really ever had a single persona in the imagination of those arguing for or against ‘its’ intervention in preservation. In practice ‘the state’ has always had multiple voices. Once this is established, it is crucial to pay attention to why different departments and individuals within particular institutions took up the cause of historic buildings and why other forces within ‘the state’ opposed historic preservation often very successfully (Cooper 2013a: 88). It is also counterproductive to think of ‘the state’ in isolation

of 'the public'. As this article has shown, preservation history exemplifies the degree to which the state in Britain constituted an elusive entity, which shifted form, function, power and ideology over time. It remains often impossible to draw a clear line between 'the state' and 'the public' because of the overlap in personnel between state institutions and voluntary bodies and because of the complicated system of legislative and financial assistance from which the voluntary sector and private individuals have been benefitting. The relationship has not always been based on love: Lord Esher, who rapaciously collected and opened historic buildings for the Office of Works in the interwar years for instance termed the preservation societies as 'the devil', while the National Trust's James Lees-Miles deemed the Ministry's approach to preservation 'tasteless' (Thurley 2013: 57; Lees-Milne 2003: 29), but one of the constants since the nineteenth century has been an interaction between state agencies and the wider preservation movement largely based on the recognition of mutual value. Those interested in historic buildings within the state recognized that they could not achieve preservation alone and sought collaboration. Hugh Dalton, the post-war Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, even went so far as calling the National Trust a typically British 'example of Practical Socialism in Action' (qu. in Pimlott 1995: 456). The preservation societies in turn felt that they could not do the work alone either and that 'the state' needed to be involved to secure protection beyond the lifespan of individual campaigners. Hence many preservationists intensified the links between private and state efforts by standing for local government offices and most lobbied for stronger legislation and greater bureaucracy from the late nineteenth century onwards. If we presume that their activities were motivated at least to some extent by cultural nationalism, then the British preservation movement offers an interesting case to counter the idea that cultural nationalist always felt an 'antipathy to the bureaucratic state' (Hutchinson 1987). They did not see the 'centralizing state as a bureaucratic threat to life forces of the nation' (Hutchinson 2013; 83), but instead viewed it as essential to preserving the nation's heritage. Their suggestions for more preservation were not so much 'co-opted' by

a regime fearing for its legitimacy (Hutchinson 2013; 86), but adapted in a long collaborative process.

While it is relatively straightforward to assert the presence of the state, it is harder to ascertain whether state preservation was motivated by nationalism. Conflicts between, and within, state institutions responsible for preservation, are insightful for placing nationalism in relation to other objectives for and against historic preservation. Quarrels over funds and competencies between different agencies often stopped changes in state-involvement considerably and so did difficulties to reconcile state preservation with other economic and political priorities. In turn, motivation for preservation did not always have to reside in love for ancient monuments, let alone cultural nationalism. Liberal anti-aristocratic policies were a strong driver from the late nineteenth century onwards (Mandler 1997). In the interwar years, the First Commissioner George Lansbury, an avid socialist, used restoration work by the Office of Work as a way to put the employed back into work during the Depression (Thurley 2013: 109-14). After the Second World War, preservation became more widely used to buffer social and economic change after landed estates and industrial areas had lost their primary function. While economic consideration remain high on the agenda, more recently, the positive impact of cultural participation on health and wellbeing has also gained importance.

To put nationalist motivations further into perspective, it is also worth considering that nationalist rhetoric not only co-existed with an imperialist but also an internationalist one. Since the last third of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of those fighting for better national protection and more state involvement in Britain were at the same time also involved in internationalist campaigns - be it to safeguard a multitude of buildings abroad, to fight for the creation of international institutions, or through leadership in European initiatives such as the European Year for Cultural Heritage or Europa Nostra (Falser & Lipp 2015).

Preservationists often tailored their arguments depending on the audiences they spoke to (Swenson 2013). Across the period discussed, those who cared for historic buildings used whatever utilitarian rhetoric might serve their cause. Many who took up the torch for ancient buildings within the state and as private individuals were motivated by long standing antiquarian or art historical interests. The need to refer to the ideological and practical benefits of preservation was most explicitly put again by Gerald Baldwin Brown who stated that for all those who innately loved monuments, the question of preservation was settled. It was only for the rest of humanity that more utilitarian arguments had to be articulated (Brown 1905: 28). The fact that nationalist discourses were chosen - and thus reinforced - does therefore not automatically imply that the motivations for state preservation were nationalist. It mostly tells us something about an uncritical endorsement of nationalism in the hope that, in different moments of crisis, a nationalist rhetoric might trump philistine logic and the deeply entrenched believe that English (if not British) national identity was based on entrepreneurship rather than an appreciation of beauty and that the national way to govern should be about *laissez-faire* rather than the ‘nanny-state’. Because of the latter belief, attempts to reduce direct state involvement have also not necessarily been motivated by an absence of nationalism (or a lack of interest in history and heritage) but rest on a different idea about the relationship between the nation and the state for which the notion of British exceptionalism is often mobilised. It is hoped that the historicization of the relationship between state, nation, and preservation and the international context and connections provided across this volume might counter such ahistorical instrumentalization against state support and help encourage a more critical reflection on the purpose of historic buildings beyond nationalism.

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