

The diocese of Lichfield describe it as a poisoned chalice but are required to maintain the upkeep of city's only Grade I building



● Uncertain future
Trentham Mausoleum is the only Grade I listed building in the Potteries, and below site foreman Martin Berry looks at the huge tower doors and the work to be done on the roof
Pictures by Steve Bould

Crumbling mausoleum waits for lease of life

THE Potteries' only Grade I listed building faces an uncertain future of patchwork repairs and continued decline.

Trentham Mausoleum, which was built in 1808 on the orders of the Duchess of Sutherland, is protected by law under its Grade I status, granted by English Heritage 33 years ago.

But the building has fallen into disrepair — and as it is legally owned by the Parish of Trentham, no money is available to restore it to its former glory.

Instead the mausoleum, which was presented as a gift to the parish by wealthy county landowners the Sutherland family, is likely to get just enough work to prevent it from crumbling into ruin.

Despite work currently under way to repair the building's roof, English Heritage will declare it "at risk" next week when it launches a campaign to raise awareness of listed buildings in disrepair.

It is estimated a full restoration project would cost £2 million. Stoke-on-Trent City Council has been helping to fund grants for repair work, but responsibility for the building rests with the parish, under the control of the Diocese of Lichfield.

By Richard Ault

said: "When the Sutherland family moved their remains to Scotland and reburied them, they presented the mausoleum to the Parish of Trentham as a gift. But it has been a bit of a poisoned chalice. It would cost over £2 million to fully restore it and it has cost an awful lot of money in repairs as it is. The trouble is, it is such an unhelpful building, there is not really anything you can do with it. It is surrounded by a cemetery and it is a bit of an empty shell. The Parish has not got any money to spend on restoring it and parishioners don't want to give their own money to this building that they can't use.

"The building has been boarded up. But it is a Grade I listed building, so there is a responsibility for its upkeep."

According to English Heritage, the older and rarer a building is the more likely it is to be listed. When inspectors visited Trentham Mausoleum in 1972 they deemed it to be of "exceptional interest" and classed it as Grade I.

Usually, only cathedrals and great country houses are given this status but English Heritage added the mausoleum to the list as a good example of the Victorian buildings

used as monuments to the dead members of extremely wealthy families. Cash for the current round of repairs to the mausoleum was split between English Heritage and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

A spokeswoman for the city council said: "The roof repairs are essential maintenance, to stop it falling to rack and ruin. As a listed building there is a legal responsibility for its upkeep. We are helping out by trying to secure funds from a variety of sources but all we are looking at are essential repairs.

"The roof repairs are costing £140,000, 80 per cent of which has come from English Heritage and 20 per cent from the city council.

"There will be more work to restore an oak door which will be funded by a £5,000 donation from the Duchess of Sutherland. Before this work was started it had not been repaired for quite some time."

The mausoleum was built in 1808 by the architect Charles Heathcote Thaxam as a 'gateway to heaven' to provide a lasting tribute to the Sutherland family.

The Leveson-Gower family bought the estate in Trentham in 1540 and were active in politics, diplomacy and commerce, with

interests in many local industries, including coal mining. They became known as the Sutherlands from 1833, when George Granville Leveson-Gower was made Duke of Sutherland, just before his death, for services to politics.

Millicent, the duchess of Sutherland, and her husband gave their home to the city of Stoke-on-Trent in 1910 when they left the county.

Some people in Trentham would like to see the building restored to its former glory.

Cllr Roger Ibbs, who has taken a special interest in the building in the past as one of Trentham's representatives on the city council, said: "The cost of refurbishing it is fantastic, but we should not allow it to fall into disrepair.

"This is the only Grade I listed building we have got and we should celebrate that fact, we need to make more of it. But I think if you don't know its there you can drive straight past it."

However, the fate of Trentham Mausoleum has highlighted a wider issue of why some buildings are preserved at great expense, yet have no obvious use.

Potteries historian Fred Hughes thinks English Heritage has been overzealous with its protection of ancient buildings and should let nature take its course.

Mr Hughes believes the Sutherland family papers, which document the history of the Leveson-Gower family, are of far more historical importance than the mausoleum.

This collection has been on loan to the Staffordshire Record Office since 1959 and a fundraising campaign is nearing completion to raise enough cash to buy the documents outright.

He said: "The mausoleum is just a huge grave. What possible benefit is that to Stoke-on-Trent? Is there any point in listing buildings for protection?"

"The Victorians built buildings like the mausoleum, Victoria Hall, or King's Hall in Stoke, to last. The majority of Victorian buildings are listed but many of them have no use or relevance to today's society. But why is Trentham Mausoleum Grade I? No-one seems to be able to tell you. I think there are far more deserving buildings in Stoke-on-Trent than a rich man's grave.

"If you want to see a mausoleum, go to Highgate Cemetery in London, there are lots of them. Why protect one family's grave? "If there is any money to be spent, it should be spent on the Wedgwood Institute instead."

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