

# NOOKS and CORNERS

## GAS LAMPS

**L**ETHAM GRANGE, a late Georgian house near Arbroath, designed mostly by Archibald Simpson who created several Aberdeen landmarks, is sinking into a sorry state of disrepair.

Simpson's use of granite in Greek Revival designs such as Aberdeen Music Hall and the county assembly rooms gives his buildings particular distinction. His best work is considered to be Stracathro House, near Brechin, an ashlar-faced Greco-Roman mansion from 1828. At that time, he would also have been working on Letham, for wealthy landowner John Hay.

Grade B-listed, Letham later became a hotel, which closed in 2002; and remained the focal point of a golf club until that folded in 2019. This year, plans surfaced to cover the golf course in more than 250 houses, in an outline application submitted on behalf of Hong Kong-based Smartwill

Investments Limited, believed to be controlled by Taiwanese businessman Peter Liu, who paid just over £2m for the estate in 1994. His tenure has seen complex legal battles which began when a development company he formed ran into financial problems. A court battle with the liquidator took until 2018 to be settled.

Liu has form for buying historic property in Scotland and presiding over decay. In 1994, he acquired the grade A-listed Balintore Castle, near the Loch of Lintrathen, which was abandoned in the 1960s after dry rot was discovered. As Liu shuffled ownership between himself and one of his companies, Balintore deteriorated. It was compulsorily purchased "in a near ruinous state" by Angus council in 2007.

Locals now fear for Letham. Inspection in 2016 found the conservatory was missing glazing. By 2019 the Grange had become disused after the golf club moved out, and ground floor openings were boarded up. Last year there was a roof fire and a balustrade was vandalised. Friends of Letham Grange (FoLG) reports that lead was stolen from the roof and more has since been stripped by a workman. The roof has been bodged with felt covering. Photos last year showed extensive interior damage where water had seeped in, causing ceilings to collapse.

FoLG fears its inside condition will now have worsened, "posing a serious risk to the structural integrity". Meanwhile the golf course is an overgrown wilderness.

A detailed scheme for the housing is yet to be submitted to Angus council. Although council officials have only checked Letham Grange from outside, they're "satisfied" it doesn't present a danger.

FoLG wants immediate action. "It's baffling no enforcement action has been taken against an absent landlord who has adopted an apathetic attitude to such a significant historic building and its environment," the group says. "It must be clear that the deterioration of Letham Grange under the current ownership will only continue. We're asking Angus council to use its powers... including the option of compulsory purchase."

**WESTMINSTER's deputy lord mayor was among the assembled dignitaries when a new green plaque was unveiled on Pall Mall in 2007 to mark where in 1807 Frederick Winsor had given a world-first demonstration of street lighting by coal gas.**

**His lighting delighted the crowds and**

**marked the birthday of George III; and the plaque's unveiling in 2007 recognised the first gas street lighting as an "historical or cultural event of great significance". Fourteen years on, however, the significance of the gas lamps seems forgotten.**

**Westminster council has embarked on a two-year programme to remove the remaining 299 gas lamps from its streets, but heritage groups are trying to block it by appealing to Historic England to give the lamps listed status. Westminster says it must remove the lights as they are "difficult to maintain" and do not "provide sufficient light to illuminate the**

**highway". It also says removing the lamps will help tackle the climate emergency.**

**Those campaigning to save the gas lamps say their carbon footprint is only the equivalent of the gas usage of 100 houses, while their**

**heritage value is enormous. They are to be replaced with a faux version complete with LED bulbs. For aficionados of the gentle yellow glow of the historic gas lamps, the glare from an LED light in a fake lantern is no replacement.**

**Frederick Winsor's demonstration saw gas fed from a pipe on the Mall to light the first row of gas lamps in Carlton House Terrace. Westminster's gas lamps developed, as 19th century technology improved, from an open flame to the use of the gas mantle which provided far more light using far less gas.**

**Carlton House Terrace lamps (see pic) – now under threat of removal – were manufactured by William Sugg & Co. Sugg's great grandson Christopher, who writes a blog about his family's gaslight history, reports that the threatened Carlton House Terrace lamps were an important development in gaslighting. They are Upright Rochesters, which were "the final development of the multi mantle superheated cluster burner 'shadowless' lamp that was developed to replace the framed lanterns such as the square Windsor from 1898 and the more decorative conical Grosvenor". His great grandfather, he says, would be "turning in his grave" if he knew Westminster wanted to remove the last lamps in its care.**

**In Prague, a lamplighter still lights the city's historic gas lamps while Boston is proud of its own famous gaslight district. Both cities realise the historic value of their gas lamps whereas Westminster, where it all began, does not.**



Letham Grange in happier days



"It seemed a lot bigger when I was a kid"

## Letters

Private Eye

### Grave accusation

Sir,

I hope that you are suitably ashamed of your "joke" on page 31 of Eye 1558, "Call Jacob for 'beyond the grave' advice" further to the murder of another Conservative Catholic MP, Sir David Amess, this week. It may be an opportune time to tone down your steady stream of vitriol against the Conservative party and the Catholic Church.

ROBERT RUSSELL.

### Exemplary member

Sir,

It seems in every issue of your magazine there is a story of cronyism and/or outright corruption among our elected officials from local councillors to government ministers. There are so many stories that I have often wondered if there are any MPs whose sole aim is to make a positive difference to their constituents and the country rather than line their own pockets or those of friends, family or party donors.

It appears that Sir David Amess was just the sort of MP I hoped existed, which makes it even more desperate that he has been taken from us. Some of those MPs who are giving interviews speaking of wanting a change in parliament are those who have often been featured in this magazine, so I won't hold my breath for any lasting change for the good. But maybe I'll hope just a little.

SHARON BROWN.

### Sick pay slip

Sir,

May I be the 94th person to point out that when it was stated in the recent Page 94 Podcast (Episode 65), that Statutory Sick Pay is £130 per week that this is not correct. I believe confusion has arisen between the minimum average earnings per week a person must earn in order to qualify at all (£120) and what you are actually paid, which is a pathetic £96.35 per week. Please would you insert a joke about cancelling my subscription over this disgrace here as I'm sure you can do it better than I can. Thank you and keep up the good work.

LUCAS AINSWORTH, Redcar.

### Corps value

Sir,

It may be true that the Royal Logistics Corps pay HGV drivers £20,400 ("Haul of Mirrors", p7, Eye 1557), but you might also mention that this includes free food, accommodation, transport, superb sports facilities and recreation opportunities, and a degree of pride and comradeship beyond calculation.

STEPHEN MORRIS,

Wiltshire.

### Missed connection

Sir,

Hedgehog's article (Road Rage, Eye 1558) on the "lorry platooning" scheme raised a wry smile. I believe this concept has worked (and continues to do so) using one driver, and a convoy of trucks. Readers of Dr B Ching will be familiar with this concept, commonly known as a "train". Could ministers be missing the points here?

CRAIG TRUSCOTT,

Cornwall.