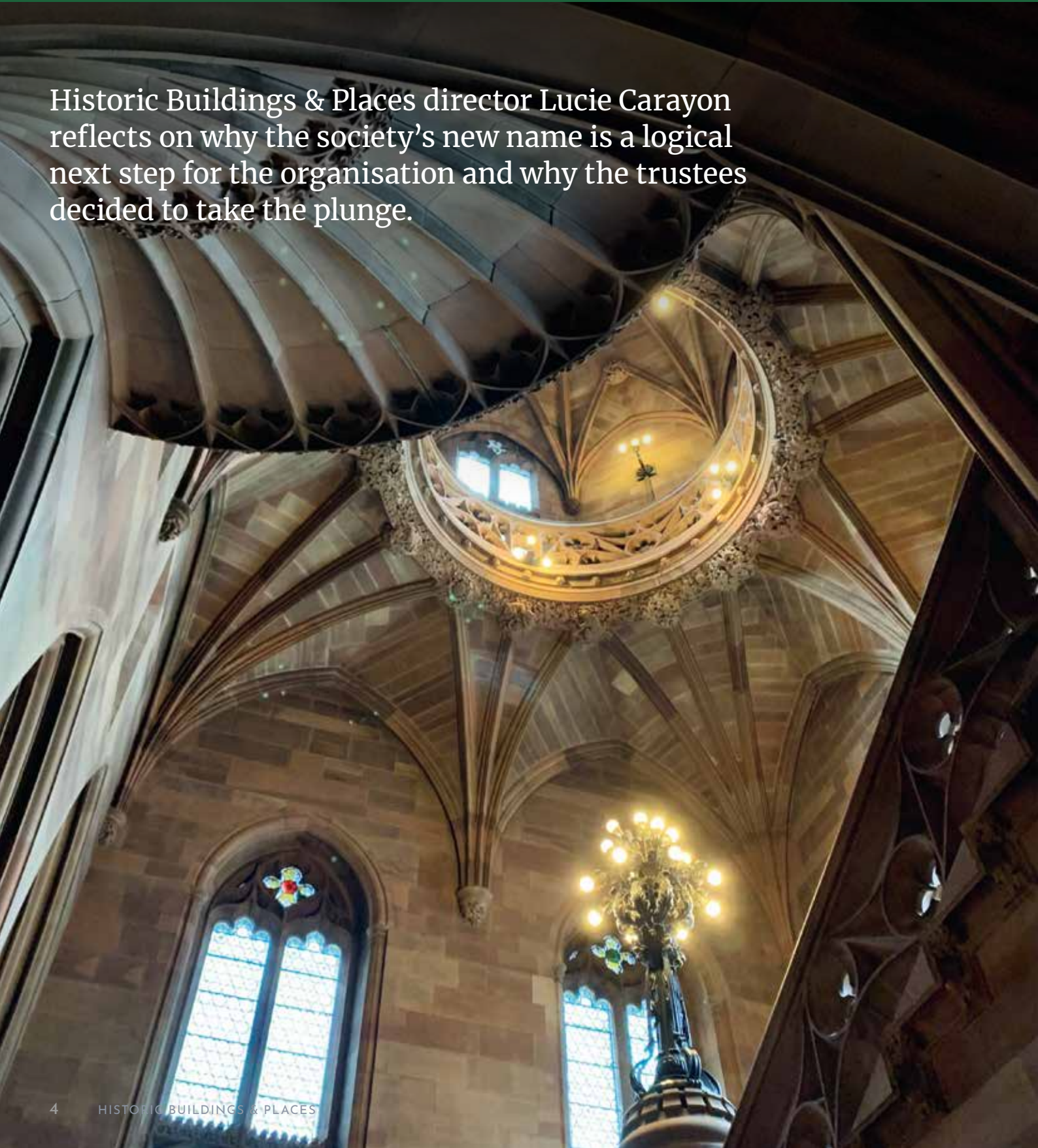




Lucie Carayon

# Evolution, not revolution

Historic Buildings & Places director Lucie Carayon reflects on why the society's new name is a logical next step for the organisation and why the trustees decided to take the plunge.



By the time members receive copies of their new-look magazine, the Ancient Monuments Society will have become Historic Buildings & Places. Trustees decided soon after the separation with the Friends of Friendless Churches was announced in September 2020 that they needed to address the problem of the society's name, something which had been tentatively looked at around 15 years ago when the strapline 'Defending Buildings of all Types and All Ages' was created. After nine intense months of planning, discussions, meetings and workshops, trustees resolved on 5 July 2021 that the society's new name should be Historic Buildings & Places. As the society enters a new chapter in its history, it seems important to look back on its past, to explain why the decision was made and to say something about how it is more fitting for the contemporary situation and our current activities.

The Ancient Monuments Society was founded on 2 June 1924 by architect John Swarbrick (1879-1964) at a meeting at John Rylands Library in Manchester. It is the second oldest National Amenity Society after the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), which was founded almost 50 years earlier, in 1877. Much had changed during that half-century: 1924, was the year of the first successful round the world flight, the first radio play and the first radio time signal broadcast from the Royal Greenwich Observatory. It was also the year in which the newly-founded Royal Fine Art Commission adopted Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's design for the K2 telephone kiosk, and the timber prototype (now listed Grade II\*) can still be found in its original position under the entrance portal of Burlington House in London.

These were the 'Roaring Twenties' and the age of new technologies, but Britain was still recovering from the devastating effects of the first world war, in which almost a million lives were lost. Communities and organisations were still erecting war memorials and no fewer than 15, which were unveiled in 1924, are now listed Grade II\* and Grade I, notably Sir Robert Lorimer's Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth naval memorials and the Manchester Cenotaph designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, which was unveiled by the Earl of Derby not very long after the AMS was founded. In Paris the Surrealist Manifesto was published and in New York George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* had its premiere, while in the United Kingdom the Empire Stadium (later Wembley Stadium) was built as part of the British Empire Exhibition. The exhibition was formally declared open by King George V in the first ever radio broadcast by a British monarch on 23 April, St George's Day. Lutyens, who worked extensively in India and became associated with the architecture of the Empire, also designed the only Grade I listed building of 1924, the Midland Bank in the City of London.

When the AMS was founded in 1924 it had the most relevant and up-to-date name that any organisation trying to defend historic buildings and places could have had. Not only did it reference the main heritage protection legislation in place at the time, the Ancient Monuments Act, it also closely aligned itself with the main government body in charge of caring for and protecting the historic environment – the Ancient Monuments Board.

The first meeting of the AMS was chaired by Sir Henry A Miers, then Vice-Chancellor of Manchester University, and the address was given by Professor Thomas Frederick Tout (1855-1906), a medievalist and founder member of the Historical Association. Tout's address, reported in full in volume 20 of the *Transactions* (1973) in an article written by L M Butterworth, notes that the breadth of the society's remit was clear from the start- Tout concluded his speech with the rallying cry:

*Whether the ancient monument is a Roman camp, a Queen Anne house, or a neo-classical building of the early 19th century, they have all had their part in the history of this country, and, preserved, they all tend to diversify the monotony of modern life, and ought at all costs to be saved.*

It is clear that already by 1924 'ancient monuments' was seen to encompass a lot more than archaeological remains or public monuments. But it was only in the 1940s that the concept of 'listed buildings' was introduced. It was enemy action during the second world war and the threat of destruction which led to the creation of the first

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LEFT: The splendid interior of John Rylands Library, where the Ancient Monuments Society was founded in 1924 © Ross Anthony

RIGHT: Our founder John Swarbrick

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'lists'. In November 1940 a meeting was organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and SPAB to discuss 'action to prevent damage to historic buildings'. Out of the meeting came the resolution that under the supervision of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and with funding from the Treasury, an army of architects and architectural historians would be sent out to make a record of the country's most precious historic buildings. These were Britain's very own 'Monuments Men' and the mission was known as the 'salvage scheme'.

It did not take long for this initiative to be enshrined in law – the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act formalised the concept. It took a while for the lists to be developed, however. Reference is made to the process in the AMS's first volume of *Transactions* in 1953.

*A very useful step is being taken by the Ministry of Local Government and Planning in compiling Statutory Lists of old buildings worthy of preservation in every locality, under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.*

*[...] There are many organisations and societies, both national and local, concerned with this question. This is well, since the field is so vast, and so much depends on voluntary efforts. There are practical limits to what any one such body can accomplish, and this is why all should lend support to each other and work together in the closest alliance.*

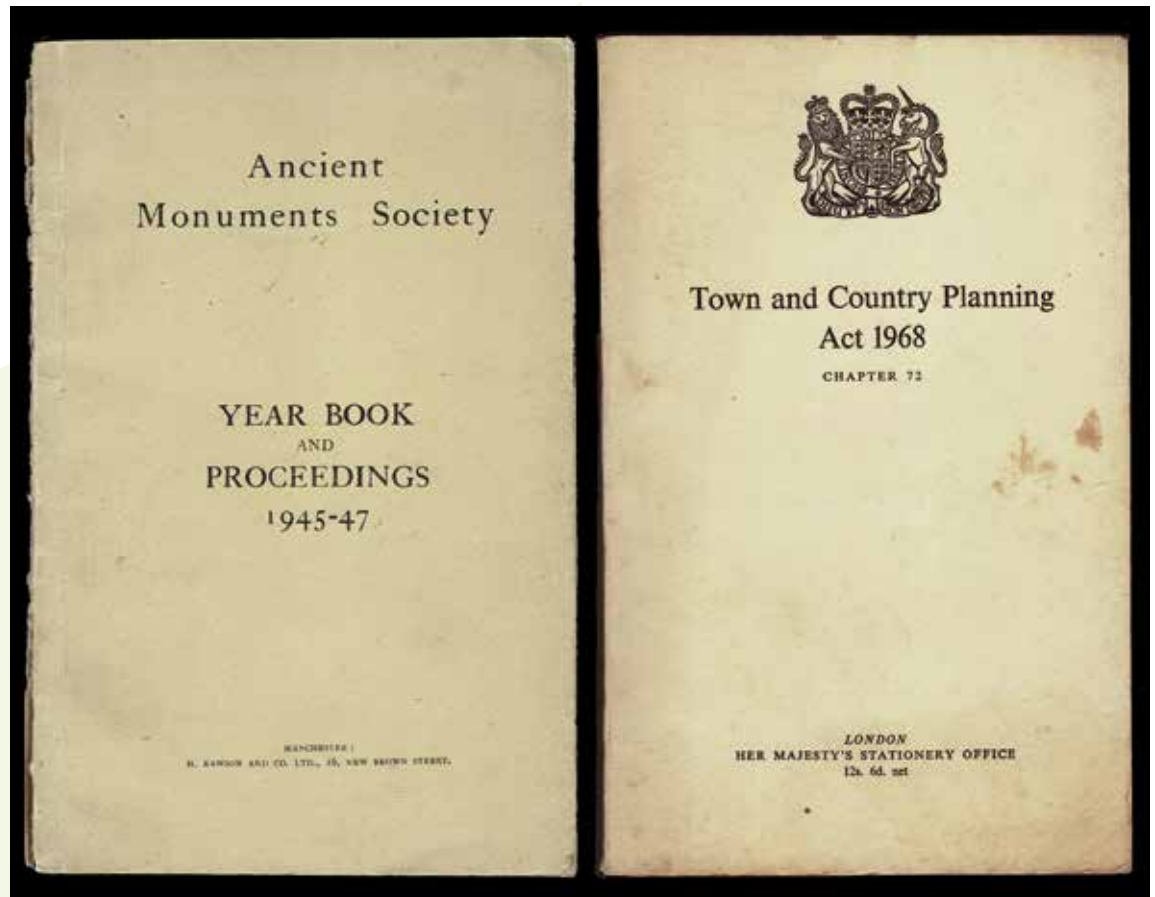
Unfortunately, very few of the AMS's early records survive today and we can only piece a history together by referring to those rare items which did endure, as well as later accounts. On 23 June 1945 the society's 21st annual general meeting was held in Liverpool, with a reception at the Town Hall hosted by the Lord Mayor, the Rt Hon the Earl of Sefton. In September, there was an anniversary meeting at Manchester Town Hall. For reasons which are not entirely clear, John Swarbrick also set up a National Ancient Monuments Society in London in 1945, with council meetings held in the Oak Room at the National Liberal Club. It seems that the two organisations ran in parallel until they were amalgamated in 1953, with a headquarters in London and a branch office in Manchester. The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act was introduced in 1953 and the society might have been expected to add 'Historic Buildings' to its name, however it did not.

The Town and Country Planning Act of 1968 was decisive, in that it introduced the listed building consent regime. In a joint circular issued on 4 December, the Ministry of Housing and the Welsh Office named the AMS as one of the six bodies which had to be notified of any application to

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Manchester Assizes Court by Alfred Waterhouse, completed in 1864. This Ruskinian Gothic masterpiece was severely damaged in the Manchester blitz and demolished in 1957.





LEFT: Ancient Monuments Society Yearbook 1945-7

RIGHT: The Town and Country Planning Act 1968



demolish a listed building. The new arrangements were brought into force on 1 January 1969 and this increased the society's workload considerably. In the mid-1970s Dame Jennifer Jenkins (1924-2017), then secretary of the AMS (and later chairman of the Historic Buildings Council and of the National Trust), secured government funding to underpin the society's statutory role in the planning system. In 1976 the society received a grant of £4,000 from the Department of the Environment to carry out its functions. Casework had always been the bedrock of the society's activities, but now the National Amenity Societies played an important and formal role in the heritage protection system.

The introduction of the designation 'scheduled ancient monument' under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 further complicated matters in terms of the society's name – the line between historic buildings and ancient monuments being more firmly drawn. While the role of the AMS had developed alongside policy and legislative changes, the society's name still reflected the very different circumstances of the 1920s. Several opportunities arose to change the name, but none was seized.

In 2020 AMS trustees decided it was time to act decisively, and in the end opted for something

descriptive which is a clear statement of what the society does. The inclusion of 'places' is important and reflects the fact that it is not just designated listed buildings and conservation areas – protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 – with which the society concerns itself, but all historic buildings and places. In its casework, the society aims to provide advice where there is the greatest need, with a focus on Grade II-listed buildings, historic areas, locally listed buildings and undesignated heritage. Historic England is often involved at pre-application stage for applications affecting Grade II\* and Grade I listed buildings – we therefore tend not to get involved unless we strongly believe the proposals would cause substantial harm. In our educational activities we also strive to talk about the built environment in its totality – that is why changing the name to Historic Buildings & Places seemed a logical step to take.

For the time being, the society's official name will continue to be the Ancient Monuments Society, with Historic Buildings & Places as its working name. The society will celebrate its centenary in 2024, and the change may then be fully formalised. In the meantime we hope you will continue to support the society and that you will enjoy seeing it flourish. —