

The teams who

ONCE IT'S GONE, IT'S GONE FOR GOOD - OR IS IT? OCCASIONALLY, DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS CAN BRING IT BACK AGAIN. **CAT TURNELL** LOOKS AT FOUR PAINSTAKING RESTORATION PROJECTS

When Windsor Castle went up in flames a few years back, the Queen's restoration team flew into action with a £37 million pouch of public cash.

For the rest of us, with time and money less available, the artful act of returning something to its former glory requires a more personal and dedicated level of commitment. Today, across busy city and county, there are thousands of men and women knee deep in projects that will pay back their subscribers in the priceless sweat of satisfaction.

Here are a just four restoration schemes in action in Leicester and Leicestershire...

TRAM SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE

IN a barn on a county farm lies the carcass of a 1904 Leicester tram: it's the rusty-looking lynchpin of a secretive restoration project.

Steve Foxon, one of seven men repairing the old carriage, is deliberately vague when asked the tram's location.

"Put 'south Leicestershire'," suggests the 33-year-old after a well-considered pause.

There's good reason for the secrecy, explains Steve - Leicestershire has a big tram following. And, while it's genuinely well-meaning, there's a farmer's field in Markfield which used to have five trams.

Over the years they've been stripped by souvenir gatherers, aggravating the farmer into the bargain. They don't want to risk that happening at the new location.

Since the last Leicester tram drifted into history on November 9, 1949, appetite for this green and civilised form of transport has only grown.

Not surprising when you consider Leicester's trams were once considered the



ON TRACK: Tram 31 in its heyday and, below, what the restorers have had to work on



best in the British Isles. They were made of polished brass, oak, maple, ash and mahogany, with stained glass bearing the city crest and soft leather seats.

Strangely enough, most of these old movers saw out the last of their days in Leicestershire's fertile fields - put to use as animal shelters - with pigs downstairs, chickens upstairs.

The tram men are working on has had 60 years exposed to the elements.

The dream of Leicester Tram 31 Group (the tram's old working life number) is simple.

It's to restore the carriage and then return it to the city of Leicester, perhaps taking it on tour, then giving it to a deserving museum where it will fill the gap left by not having a Leicester tram in the city's transport collection.

If it weren't for a case of poor timing, we'd have one now in its original condition.

However, a delay by the city's museum committee meant the firm had destroyed the last one by the time the committee returned their call.

"So much of Leicester's transport history has been lost," laments Steve. "Last year was a terrible year: we lost Abbey Park Road bus depot. We lost the LERO building, next to the Belgrave flyover. That generated the electricity for Leicester's trams. We lost Braunstone Gate's bow-

string bridge. I live in the West End and I'm still upset about that. We've had a bad run."

By appealing to the thousands of tram enthusiasts in the city and county, Steve and his friends are hoping to re-use some of the original tram parts taken as treasured mementos. They're also looking for paraphernalia, memories, anything valuable they can use.

www.leicestertrams.org.uk

WINDMILL ULLESTHORPE

IN the year 1800, a group of 29 ruddy-faced locals in rural south Leicestershire joined forces to build a windmill.

This Ullesthorpe landmark proved such a success it soon added another three pairs of grindingstones.

However, by 1900, this totem of Georgian engineering was derelict.

With its future uncertain, in 2004, two villagers - Susan

Tebby and Roger Jones - met to discuss options.

Since then, things have moved apace, and the Grade II mill's restoration team now involves five trustees, 20 trust members and 70 friends. The windmill trust is also a charity and a limited company.

There have been a series of grants to pay for repairs, booklets, newsletters, and a feasibility study. Trustees are bidding for about £700,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to pay for sails, a fan tail and a reefing stage, and to build a new study centre, furnish the granary museum and create a café and small shop in the bakehouse.

In June, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings paid a visit.

"They said the mill has the oldest, most complete set of wooden machinery in the country and should be upgraded," says Susan Tebby, now chair of the Ullesthorpe Preservation Trust. "That's an important point for us."

This means the windmill isn't

just locally significant, it's nationally important, especially as it's within its original compound, containing the miller's house, granary, bakehouse and pigsty.

"The most exciting part of the windmill is up in the cap," says Susan. "It's where you have the brake wheel with all its teeth and that drives another gear on a solid oak tree trunk that goes through three floors."

"It's effectively medieval (the engineering) - it wasn't altered during the industrial revolution."

The windmill will be open to visitors on May 14 and 15, from 11am to 4pm.

www.ullesthorpewindmill.org.uk

HEATHLAND BEACON HILL COUNTRY PARK

THE pigs went in first. Then the students. By the end, and as unlikely as this sounds, Beacon Hill Country Park will have



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TEAMWORK: Ullesthorpe Windmill volunteers, from left, Russell Payne, Brian Burningham, David West, Derek Briginshaw, Susan Tebby and David Burton



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EFFORT: Restoration project organiser Russell Payne

AIMS:
Steve Foxon