



## **VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS**

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

### SEMINAR ABSTRACT

02 February 2015

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### **Saving Winchester: Voluntary Societies, Historic Buildings and Urban Redevelopment**

This seminar will examine the rise of the historic buildings conservation movement, exemplified by the experience in Winchester.

In rapidly expanding English cities on the eve of the First World War, historic buildings were razed for infrastructural improvement with little or no public comment. Legislation was heavily weighted in favour of private property rights and offered only the most cursory safeguards against destruction. During the interwar years, national voluntary groups such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) successfully engaged with the media to raise awareness of the plight of the historic environment, and proposals to demolish historic buildings met with greater opposition. The SPAB worked with locals to take action against threats, but options were limited and in Winchester the results were mixed. However, after the Second World War social value for the historic environment underwent an abrupt and vivid transformation. Locals organised the Winchester Preservation Trust and gathered force to highlight the city's rapidly disappearing historic legacy in a series of pitched battles.

This paper will seek to explain how social value for the historic environment in Winchester progressed so briskly from indifference to organised outrage. It will explore the rise of the historic buildings conservation movement in Winchester between 1925 and 1970, and place this in a national context to link the movement to the stronger legislative protections for historic buildings enacted in the 1960s. It will demonstrate that a groundswell of local voluntary action and organisation was an essential driving force towards the more robust legislative protection for historic buildings in place today.