




**2nd International Fire Information
Conference, 30-31 May 2002**

Fires in Historic Buildings: the Extent of the Problem

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**To understand a
problem, it is necessary
to define it.**

**‘If you can’t express it in
figures, it’s not fact, but
opinion’**

R A Heinlein



**It's easy to recognise
some heritage
fires.....**

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**But how to obtain
information about all
heritage fires ?**

Problems of Obtaining Reliable Statistics (1):

- There are no uniform European fire statistics
 - (There is little reliable official fire information outside UK and Sweden)
- Many countries publish no data at all
- UK statistics are generally accepted as most reliable, but even they do not include anything specific on historic buildings
- The problem was identified in 1986 by the FPA but despite efforts by Historic Scotland, English Heritage and National Trusts little has been done

Problems of Obtaining Reliable Statistics (2):

- Fire brigade data is based on use to which building is put - ie dwelling, school, office, factory. The FDR1 Report Form does not include specific category of listed building
- Volunteer fire brigades (in much of Europe) do not provide authenticated data
- There may be an element of 'national pride' or embarrassment implicit in under reporting
- Fire is not coordinated by a single EU DG and there appears to be little interest in fire safety from Brussels (but see below for COST 17)



**There's nothing new
about fires in
heritage buildings
.....or repeat fires.....**

English Examples:

- York Minster
 - 1463
 - 1648
 - 1877
 - 1984
- Hampton Court
 - 1882
 - 1886
 - 1986
- Windsor Castle
 - 1853
 - 1992

Nor is it true to say that the problem was not been identified until Hampton Court.....

So what data is available ? (1)

- In England, various estimates* suggest:
 - One total loss of building of international importance each year (Grade I building)
 - One loss of building of national importance every four months (Grade II*)
 - One loss of building of regional/local importance every six weeks (Grade II/unlisted)
 - At least 12 listed buildings lost each year
 - Probably 50 - 80 fires in buildings in conservation areas
 - At least 20 churches destroyed or seriously damaged each year
 - At least 20 listed buildings which are empty or derelict destroyed each year

* FPA, English Heritage, NT

So what data is available ? (2)

- The National Trust for England & Wales owns/ manages 7500 listed buildings
- Between 1992 and 1993 the Trust recorded 133 fires - an average of 44/year (1:170)*
- Even these figures are considered by the Trust's Fire Advisor to reflect some degree of under reporting
 - Of course, 99% of these fires resulted in little damage
 - Over past 20 years the Trust has suffered major damage to five Grade I/II* buildings - including Uppark

* NT

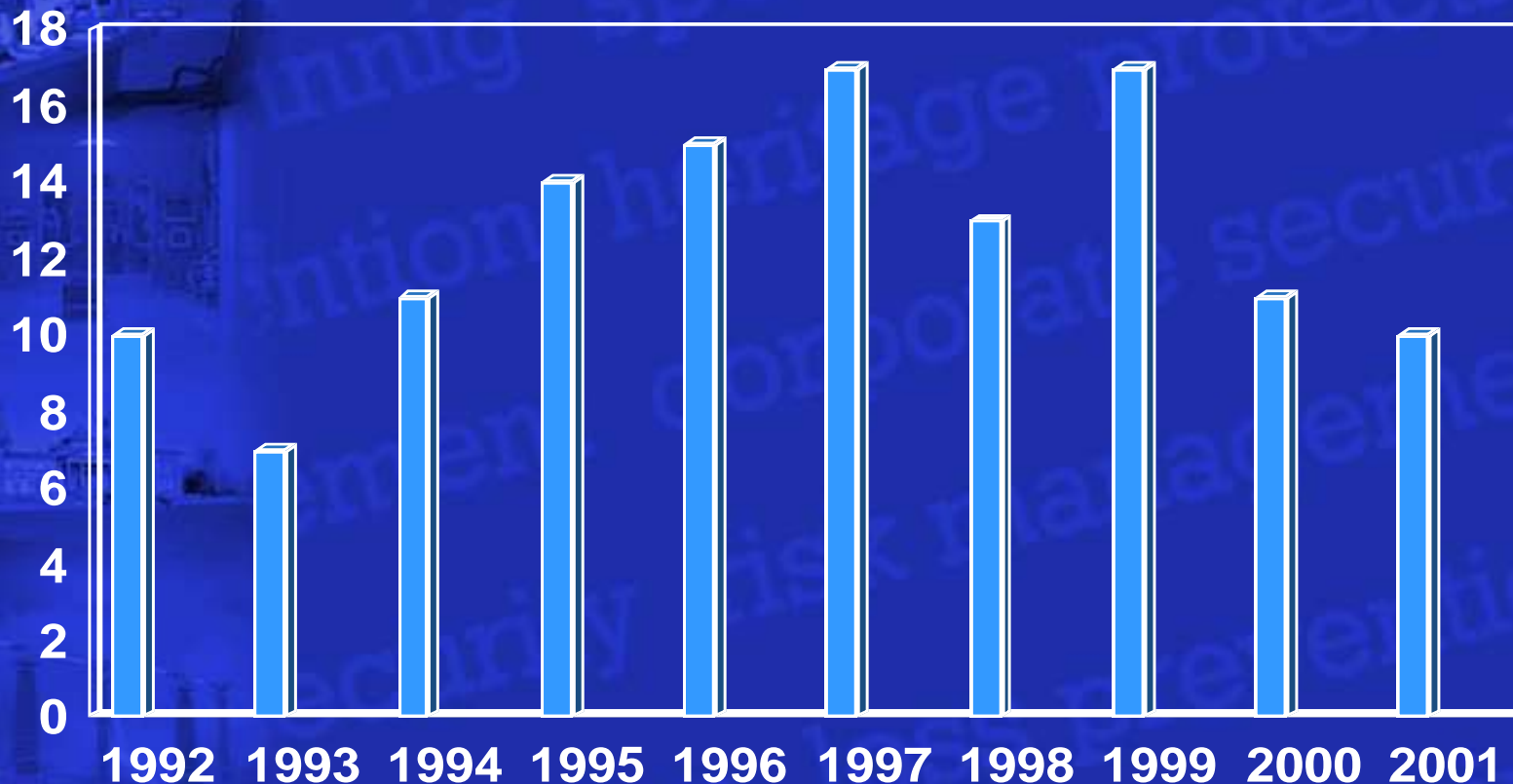
1996



So what data is available ? (3)

- Based on a press surveillance exercise by Historic Scotland since 1992, fire in listed buildings cost Scotland:
 - One Grade A (major building) lost each year
 - One Grade B/C less important building lost or severely damaged each month
 - These are the most severe fires as only such fires get into the national/regional press
- My own estimates suggest that there are 20 - 25 fires in Grade C buildings each year

Serious Fires in Grade A/B Historic Buildings 1992-2000 (Historic Scotland)



In 2002 the figure is already 5

Can these figures be extrapolated for Europe as a whole ?

- Population of Scotland: 10 million
- Therefore: 1 heritage fire/833,000 people
- Population of Europe Union: 365 million
- 438 lost heritage buildings each year ?
- BUT: Using National Trust figures:
 - Austria* could have 217 fires each year
 - Bavaria could have 588 fires each year
 - Scotland should have 307 fires each year

What can we tell from these figures ?

- Europe has more than 1 million heritage buildings†
- There are 43,000 buildings listed as being of architectural or historic value in Scotland
- It is suggested that there are 37,000 buildings in Austria*
- Bavaria probably has more than 100,000
- Are we comparing like with like ?
- What actually is a heritage building ?

† Council of Europe, 1992

*Bundesdenkmalamt, Vienna, 1999.

Work in Progress

- Historic Scotland/CACFOA Project - CD Rom
 - Possible extension to England and Wales
- Fire Safety Advisory Board - WG on Fire Statistics
- EU COST* 17 Action - Protection of Heritage:

1.1 Data and Fabric analysis

1.1.1 Establish available information about the total number of cultural heritage buildings to be considered, their value in cultural and financial terms and the actual risks they are subjected to

1.1.2 Compile available statistical data on the extent of the built heritage at risk

1.1.3 Balance the impact of physical interventions and of potential fire damage with the “value” and “significance” of the site

1.1.4 Identify, analyse, and report on minor fire incidents (where the fire is extinguished without fire brigade attendance, false alarms etc.).

*Co-Operation in Science & Technology

Definitions

- Council of Europe
- EC Recommendations of 1993
- ICOM/ICOMOS
- UNESCO
- Burra Charter (and other similar documents)
- NFPA/US Department of the Interior

Conclusions (1) What do we need?

- Real data and statistics - more research
- Data from all countries
- EC/Council of Europe Guidance on
 - Care and Management
 - Prevention of Fire/Fire Safety Management
 - Technology
 - European/ISO Standards = NFPA 914/920

Conclusions (2) What do we need?

- An authoritative definition is needed not only for 'historic building/structure', but also for 'heritage'
- A single set of classifications of inherent or implicit value is also needed
- Such definitions should be used throughout Europe
- NB: US definition of historic building is one more than 50 years old !



**Thank you for your
attention**

**Questions ? - or even
passionate disagreement !**



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**Thank you for inviting me
to your conference**

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