

Britain has literally thousands of voluntary heritage societies dedicated to diverse causes. In this series **Chris Catling** profiles some of the least known and most dedicated. This month, we take a look at...

The Mausolea and Monuments Trust

Tim Knox, Director of Sir John Soane's Museum, recently described the Mausolea and Monuments Trust (MMT) as 'the dottiest conservation cause in the land'. He should know – he is a former Chairman of the MMT and is now one of its two Patrons, along with James Stevens Curl, the renowned authority on funerary architecture.

Somebody has to be dotty about memorials and mausolea if they are not to topple over from a state of romantic ruination into terminal decay. Gone are the days of the sexton, employed to maintain churchyards, and anyway, these essentially private memorials and sepulchral structures occupy an ambivalent position in law. Who exactly is responsible for their upkeep? The family or the church? Even royal tombs, such as King John's effigy in Worcester cathedral, have suffered grievously in the past because of disagreements between state and church over who should pay for their maintenance.

The late Dr Jill Allibone (1932-1998) set up the MMT in 1996 to step into this legal breach and raise money for the restoration of mausolea that lacked caring owners. With modest resources, the MMT has taken six outstanding examples of their genre into guardianship and is aware of many more that are at risk. Details of these are given on the MMT's website, which has a fully illustrated *Gazetteer of English Mausolea*, with condition reports to identify those most in need of help.

The gazetteer has 460 entries – the

sum total of all the mausolea in England of which the Trust is currently aware – with a date range from 1656 to 1939. Many commemorate in death people who had flamboyant lives. Andrew Ducrow (1793-1842), for example, was the greatest circus performer of his age, famous for posing as Zephyr or Mercury in 'skin tight marbled attire' in lavishly staged melodramas involving teams of horses. His funeral was one of the largest London had ever seen, as the circus horses drew his coffin in procession through the streets to Kensal Green cemetery. Here Ducrow was laid to rest in a flamboyant Egyptian mausoleum, guarded by sphinxes and decorated with winged horses, a structure that *The Builder* magazine described

in 1836 'ponderous coxcombery', but which we now treasure as a Grade II* listed monument.

As for dottiness, surely the Earl of Kilmorey (1787-1880) wins top prize: when his mistress, Priscilla Hoste, died in 1854, he buried her in a pink and grey granite mausoleum in the Egyptian style in Brompton Cemetery, built at the phenomenal cost of £30,000 by the architect Kendall. Thereafter, wherever the Earl moved, the mausoleum went with him: first it was rebuilt in Woburn Park, near Weybridge, and then in 1868, it was moved to its present location, near Gordon House, St Margaret's Road, Twickenham.

The Earl then had a tunnel (which still survives) dug linking Gordon House to the mausoleum. He would frequently rehearse his own funeral, 'summoning his servants' according to *The Isleworth Citizen*, to push him on a trolley, lying in a coffin dressed in a shroud, through the tunnel to the mausoleum. Eventually he was laid to rest for real; he and his beloved now lie side by side in velvet lined coffins, where they can be glimpsed through a glass panel in the mausoleum. Who would not want to try to save such a dotty oddity! 🐼

Further details of the Mausolea and Monuments Trust can be found on the MMT's website:
www.mausolea-monuments.org.uk

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Above Sheffield General Cemetery.