

## **Trouble at the National Trust: Post-war Recreation, the Benson Report and the Rebuilding of a Conservation Organisation in the 1960s**

The growth of conservation organisations like the National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NT), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the county wildlife trusts was one of the more striking features of post-war social change. With their roots in late Victorian and Edwardian ideas of preservation and conservation, the membership of these organizations expanded sharply from the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> The two biggest – the NT and RSPB – saw their combined memberships grow from just under 300,000 in the mid-1960s to over 5M by the turn of the century, making them the two largest conservation groups in Europe.<sup>2</sup> By 2012/13, they had combined income of nearly £400M and are major landowners, holding in the case of the NT, substantial property assets in the form of historic buildings.<sup>3</sup> The property owned by both organizations, including open access land and nature reserves, has proved immensely popular with the general public. In 2013, 2.5M people visited RSPB reserves, while in the same year 19.2M visited NT properties which charged an entrance fee.<sup>4</sup>

The size, financial resources and popularity of these organizations, together with the expertise they have developed in the fields of conservation science and land management, has

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<sup>1</sup> The RSPB was formed in 1889, four years after the National Trust. There are currently 47 County Wildlife Trusts which have their origins in the formation of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves in 1912. They have a combined membership of 800,000. On the wider conservation movement see W. Adams *Against Extinction: The Story of Conservation* (London, 2004); J. McCormick *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement*, (London, 1991); J. Sheail *Nature Conservation in Britain, The Formative Years* (London, 1998); T. Sands *Wildlife in Trust, A Hundred Years of Nature Conservation* (London, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The size of the membership of these organizations contrasts with the decline in political party membership in the UK. The combined membership of the three main political parties was 367,000 in 2013. R. Keen 'Membership of UK Political Parties', SN/SG/5125, House of Commons Library, September 2014, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Report of the National Trust for England and Wales 2012/13*, 50; *RSPB Trustees' Report and Accounts 2014*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Annual Report of the National Trust for England and Wales 2012/13*, 12; *RSPB Trustees' Report and Accounts 2014*, 7.

given their influence in their dealings with government and policy makers at both the national and international level.<sup>5</sup> In the Government's recent consultation on reforms to the planning process, for example, the NT successfully lobbied for a revision of the proposed National Planning Policy Framework. Both organizations have also taken strong positions on energy policy and the RSPB has been seen by some commentators as being especially influential in shaping European Union policy on bio-fuels.<sup>6</sup> The success of these groups, however, has also brought its own problems. In particular the practical issues associated with their growth have forced them to ask what kind of organizations they were and what kind of organizations they might become.

In what follows, I focus on the National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the soul searching that it undertook in the late 1960s.<sup>7</sup> The Trust had been formed in 1895 with the aim of permanently preserving for the nation land and properties of beauty or historic interest. By the 1960s it was a well-known institution in British public life, with its central focus the preservation and protection of the English country house.<sup>8</sup> The Trust was led in these years by a landed elite of aesthetically-inclined aristocrats supported by distinguished experts recruited from the ancient universities and artistic and cultural societies. These 'men (and occasional women) of taste' gave the Trust a distinctive social profile at its upper echelons. It was decidedly more patrician than the RSPB in this period, despite the latter's

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<sup>5</sup> The NT also has expertise in the preservation and display of historic buildings, painting and chattels.

<sup>6</sup> M. Harvey & S. Pilgrim 'The Battle Over Biofuels: NGOs and the Politics of Markets', *Sociological Research Online* 15(3)4, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The National Trust for Scotland was formed in 1931.

<sup>8</sup> For an account of the Trust's early years see D. Cannadine 'The First Hundred Years', in H. Newby (ed.) *The National Trust, The Next Hundred Years* (London, 1995), 12-23; R. Fedden *The National Trust, Past & Present* (London, 1968); J. Gaze *Figures in a Landscape: A History of the National Trust* (London, 1988).

Royal patronage.<sup>9</sup> As an organization the NT also possessed a number of unique characteristics which set it apart from other conservation groups. Whilst it was a private voluntary body with charitable status, the constitution of the Trust was governed by Acts of Parliament (the first of which was passed in 1907). This constitutional position enabled the Trust to declare its lands inalienable. This meant that they could not be sold or be subject to compulsory purchase without the approval of Parliament. The Trust's rights over land represented a legal arrangement that sat between the principle of private land ownership and ideas of land nationalization, with the Trust holding land as private property yet doing so in the public interest. As Patrick Wright has suggested, this arrangement gave the national or public interest a position within the National Trust analogous to that of a shareholder in a limited company. As such the legal principle of inalienability established a public concern within the relations of private property.<sup>10</sup> The National Trust enjoyed other legal privileges, with Inland Revenue allowing it to receive land and properties in lieu of capital transfer tax and estate duty.<sup>11</sup>

These unique characteristics of the Trust, however, did not insulate it from the organizational challenges and strategic choices generated by the growth of its membership, which more than doubled in the twenty years after the War, and the swelling of visitor numbers to its properties.<sup>12</sup> These were pressures exacerbated by the burgeoning of the Trust's property holdings. Fuelled by the Country House Scheme, Hugh Dalton's National Land Fund and the economic decline of some of the smaller landed estates, the Trust took on 168 new properties

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<sup>9</sup> The former civil servant and Life Peer Lord Hurcomb chaired the RSPB Council in the 1960s and was its only peer. RSPB Council Minutes, 1960-70, RSPB Archives, Sandy.

<sup>10</sup> P. Wright 'Trafficking in History', in *Representing the Nation*, D. Boswell & J. Evans (London, 1999), 124.

<sup>11</sup> *Report of the Council's Advisory Committee on the Trust's Constitution, Organization and Responsibilities*, The National Trust (London, 1968), 11-15.

<sup>12</sup> P. Mandler *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, 1997), 381.

between 1949 and 1954. At the same time its salaried staff only increased from 59 to 73.<sup>13</sup> The combined effect of these increasing pressures on the Trust's staff and financial resources served to focus a sharp light on its purposes, policy and management, forcing it to confront a number of pressing questions: Should it continue to be run by the largely voluntary effort of a committed but amateur leadership and staff? Should it become a more bureaucratic, professional organization? Where should the balance lie in its focus upon the preservation of country houses and the natural environment and the demands for greater public access? Should the Trust be guided by – to paraphrase one of its critics – the principle of protecting the countryside and coast *from* the public or *for* it?<sup>14</sup> These questions and the divisions within the Trust which animated them propelled the NT into conducting a review into how it was run led by Sir Henry Benson, an eminent chartered account. The advisory committee that he chaired and its subsequent report to the National Trust's Council set out significant changes to the governance of the Trust, including the relationship between its ruling council, its executive, full-time officials and members.

The article has two aims. Firstly, to explore further the pressures and forces that prompted the NT to review how it was structured and run and the consequences this had for the shape and direction of the organisation. In exploring these developments, the article draws on but partly seeks to revise recent research on environmental and conservation organizations.<sup>15</sup> This

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<sup>13</sup> The Country House Scheme had been established in 1936 to facilitate the preservation of English country houses deemed under threat from an increase in death duties. The National Land Fund was established to enable the government to acquire properties in need of preservation. The property acquired could be held by the government or passed onto an organisation like the NT. See, D. Cannadine *In Churchill's Shadow: Confronting The Past in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2002); Gaze *Figures in a Landscape*, 121-147. On the post-war growth in Trust properties, J. Jenkins & P. James *From Acorn to Oak Tree, The Growth of the National Trust 1895-1994* (London, 1994), 197.

<sup>14</sup> John Grigg, 'Trust in Travail', *Guardian*, 7/11/66, 22. In Grigg's words, 'those who run the Trust seem more interested in preserving places from the public than for it'.

<sup>15</sup> P. Lowe & J. Goyder *Environmental Groups in Politics* (London, 1983); P. Rawcliffe *Environmental Pressure Groups in Transition* (London, 1998); N. Carter *The Politics of the*

research has been important in drawing attention to the growing size and significance of these groups and the role they play in giving voice to environmental and conservation concerns. It has usefully placed their long history within a broader understanding of the changing forms of voluntary and non-governmental action and associational and political life. As Hilton and his co-authors, for example, have suggested the relative rise of the NGO sector as a whole in the latter part of the twentieth century needs to be situated alongside the decline of other forms of association, including church attendance and trade union membership, as well as the substantial falls in membership of political parties and participation in formal politics. They note the particular success of conservation and environmental groups in growing their memberships during this period, seeing their rise as part of a broader shift in political action away from the ballot box and into the realm of non-governmental action.<sup>16</sup>

In exploring the success of these groups, the secondary literature has drawn attention to the increasing professionalization and business-like orientation of the whole NGO sector.<sup>17</sup> This is evident in the expansion of full-time salaried staff (as opposed to voluntary staff) within these groups, the development of a career structure within and across the NGO sector, the rationalization and formalization of administrative and managerial structures and the adoption of publicity and promotional techniques drawn from private business.<sup>18</sup> For Hilton et al this transformation of 'voluntary action' is part of the broader professionalization of non-party politics. They see this as a consequence of longer term developments associated since the 1920s with the rise of the modern technocratic state and the growth of formalized

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*Environment* (Cambridge, 2011) ; M. Hilton, J. F Mouhout, N. Crowson, J. McKay *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2012); M. Hilton, J. F Mouhout, N. Crowson, J. McKay *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Rawcliffe *Environmental Pressure Groups in Transition*, 7 & 97; Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, 68-86; Hilton et al *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain*, 347.

<sup>18</sup> Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, chapter 4-6; Rawcliffe *Environmental Groups in Transition*, 98.

administrative systems and expert knowledge across the public sector and civil society.<sup>19</sup> These processes accelerated in the years immediately after the Second World War as ‘professional society’ reached its zenith and the ‘professional principle’ emerged as a defining societal ethos both nationally and internationally.<sup>20</sup> One manifestation of this process was the way many NGOs outgrew the influence of their founding figures, overturning amateurism to become more formally organized and professional enterprises. It was also evident in the way a more systematic approach to branding, advertising and public relations developed in the promotion of NGO causes. As Hilton et al have shown NGOs in the aid and development sector like Oxfam and those in the housing and anti-poverty field like Shelter pioneered this move towards a more sophisticated approach to marketing and PR through the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, Hilton and his co-authors contend, they stimulated other NGOs to follow suit. This leads them to suggest that the post-war professionalization of NGO activity, particularly in relation to publicity, was shaped by the way NGOs learnt from each other as much as they aped the commercial sector or were transformed by the inexorable process of professionalization.<sup>21</sup>

In the account that follows, I draw on these broad arguments about the professionalization of NGOs in order to explain the transformation of the NT from the mid-1960s. Despite its unique status as a semi-public body with statutory powers and the elite, well-connected nature of its leadership which set it apart from the majority of NGOs, the organizational changes that the Trust underwent following the Benson Report fit squarely into the professionalization thesis. Henry Benson’s reforms precisely sought to formalize (bureaucratize) the organizational structures of the NT and to encourage the recruitment of professionally-trained administrators. He also recommended that the NT expand its use of

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<sup>19</sup> Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, 7-9 & 54.

<sup>20</sup> Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, 64-5.

<sup>21</sup> Hilton et al *The Politics of Expertise*, 83-91.

public relations and grow its commercial activities, seeing its membership as not just a source of income but as purchasers of additional services. Through these reforms Benson sought to turn the NT into a conservation bureaucracy and to give it some of the attributes of a consumer-orientated enterprise. Thus, whilst it was something of a limit case within the wider field of NGO and voluntary action, the Trust succumbed to the pressure to professionalize like other NGOs. That it did so tells us much about the pervasiveness and power of this process in the late mid-late twentieth century.

Understanding the developments that led up to the Benson Report and the ways in which it helped to reshape the Trust, however, also requires that we revise the general account of NGO professionalization proposed by authors like Hilton et al. In their account it is the inexorable process of professionalization as an internal organizational logic which transforms the shape and character of NGOs. Such an understanding tends to bracket-off any attention to the social changes specific to the immediate post-war decades that might have provided the catalyst for change. That is, they are weak in explaining the role played by social and cultural developments outside the field of NGO action in precipitating organizational change. My account contends that the pressure for change within the NT was precisely triggered by broader sociological changes and uses this to account for why the National Trust changed when it did. Central here were the effects of growing popular affluence, greater leisure time and mobility. These not only helped to draw more visitors seeking a pleasant day out in scenic surroundings to the Trust's properties, but also had broader cultural effects. Mass affluence was part of a reorganisation of social hierarchies in the post-war period which challenged established social elites, including aristocratic privilege. As historians and sociologists have shown, upper-class authority was eroded not only by the reforms of the post-war Labour government but also by popular affluence and trends within commercial

culture which gave more weight to popular tastes and aspirations.<sup>22</sup> The National Trust, given its patrician leadership, was challenged by these shifts in political culture and by the commercial innovations associated with popular consumerism and the wider climate of cultural modernization. It was this set of cultural and social developments, rather than simply the inevitable logic of professionalization, which provided the conditions in which the Trust was impelled to reinvent itself and modernize its ways of working. In fact this can be expressed more strongly. Professionalization was itself driven, in the case of the National Trust, by these wider cultural and social changes.

Henry Benson's apparent success, however, also requires some further reflection. This is the article's second dimension. It asks how was he able to make his mark on the National Trust? Did his reforms represent a decisive turning point in the history of the organization or was aristocratic oligarchic control able to survive his drive to modernize and professionalize the NT? The majority of assessments of the Benson Report have been upbeat and tended to echo the assessment of Jennifer Jenkins, Chairman of the NT in the 1980s, that the Report was a 'seminal moment' in the story of the Trust.<sup>23</sup> For Paula Weideger, author of a critical expose of the Trust in the 1990s, it was a 'clear-eyed look at how the NT was operating ...and a long detailed manual setting out how the Trust should be changed'.<sup>24</sup> For David Cannadine, the Benson Report transformed an 'amateurish oligarchy into a responsible business enterprise' bringing to an end the dominance of the Trust by 'patrician oligarchs'.<sup>25</sup> This article suggests a more qualified reading of the effects of the Benson's reforms on the NT. Benson succeeded

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<sup>22</sup> F. Mort *Capital Affairs, The Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), 57; R. McKibbin *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), 42-43; D. Cannadine *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), 637-651; M. Savage *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> J. Jenkins & P. James *From Acorn to Oak Tree, The Growth of the National Trust 1895-1994* (London, 1994), 249.

<sup>24</sup> P. Weideger *Gilding The Acorn* (London, 1994), 185.

<sup>25</sup> D. Cannadine 'The First Hundred Years', in H. Newby (ed.) *The National Trust, The Next Hundred Years* (London, 1995), 25.



in setting in motion the bureaucratization of the administration of the NT, helping to subsume the amateur enthusiasm and passions of the Trust's voluntary staff and advisors to the work of salaried professional administrators. He also, in Peter Mandler's apt assessment, 'gently commercialized' the Trust's outlook through his emphasis on expanding its PR activity and beefing up its consumer-orientated services.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, however, Benson's legacy was not that of revolutionary change within the Trust. His reforms, carried through by a new cadre of sympathetic administrators, allowed the Trust to modernize without appearing to change radically. In doing so he enabled the 'even tenor' of the Trust to be re-established after the caesura of the mid-late 1960s even as it became a different kind of organization. This was one in which the demands of conservation were increasingly tailored to fit the practices of consumerism and the post-war 'leisure society'.

### **The Challenge of Post-War Recreation**

In August 1964, the *Sunday Times* magazine devoted its cover and an eight page article to the dramatic story of the crisis of Britain's coastline. The preamble of the article set the tone:

'It has happened this century – most of it within the last thirty years. The immensely varied coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland has been transformed: by caravans and car parks, beach huts and cafes, power stations and oil refineries, derelict army huts and pillboxes. Of about 3250 miles of coast, only 887 miles of the finest remain from development. The National Trust is alarmed. A £2M appeal, with the Duke of Edinburgh as its patron, is underway and it's called Enterprise Neptune'.<sup>27</sup>

The article was a sympathetic showcase of the NT's arguments about the contemporary threats to the coast, not only giving free publicity to the Trust's recently launched campaign

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<sup>26</sup> P. Mandler *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, 1997), 395.

<sup>27</sup> 'A Kind of Coastline', *Sunday Times*, 16/8/1964, 12.

but ventriloquizing its principal concerns. The idea of Enterprise Neptune had been initiated by the NT in March 1962 and was spectacularly launched on St. George's Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1965 with the lighting of bonfires on the sites of the Armada Beacons. The event garnered significant public interest, even featuring in the BBC radio serial, *The Archers*.<sup>28</sup> The campaign that developed aimed to preserve the best parts of the remaining areas of unspoilt coast, especially those of high scenic and aesthetic value, by appealing to landowners to transfer their coastlands to the Trust or secure their relative protection by covenant. The Trust saw the whole endeavour as its most pressing task in the early-mid 1960s. Central to Enterprise Neptune was a particular diagnosis of the pressures facing Britain's coastline. While the Trust was undoubtedly concerned about industrial and residential development pressure on coastal land and what it felt was the weakness of local planning law in protecting it from redevelopment, it was also agitated by the effects of popular leisure and recreation upon what it deemed as coasts of high scenic value.<sup>29</sup>

The increasing demand for access to the coast was part of a wider phenomenon. Growing affluence, more leisure time and greater mobility amongst the general public had transformed popular recreations during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>30</sup> These developments had their roots in the inter-war years when the countryside and the coast had first been subject to what contemporary commentators saw as the 'blight of the motor car and the charabanc'.<sup>31</sup> These

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<sup>28</sup> Enterprise Neptune was celebrated with an inaugural luncheon at the Mansion House including a speech by the Duke of Edinburgh, a Kodak-sponsored exhibition of coastal photographs and an exhibition hosted by the National Books League. *NT Newsletter*, Spring 1965, 7; *Gaze Figures in a Landscape*, 208-9; Weideger *Gilding the Acorn*, 138.

<sup>29</sup> *NT Newsletter*, Spring 1965, 4-5 & 20.

<sup>30</sup> See Board of Trade *Staggered Holidays, 1962-3, Cmnd 2105*; *Leisure in the Countryside, 1965-6, Cmnd 2928*; Countryside Commission *The Planning of the Coastline, A Report on a Study of Coastal Preservation and Development in England and Wales* (London, 1970); Countryside Commission *Coastal Recreation and Holidays* (London, 1969); N. Curry *Countryside Recreation, Access and Land Use Planning* (London, 1994), 19.

<sup>31</sup> D. Cannadine *In Churchill's Shadow*, 229; D. Matless *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1989).

pressures increased sharply in the post-war period. The number of families taking holidays of more than a week away from home doubled between 1937 and 1962. Alongside the annual week's holiday there was a sharp increase in the number of secondary holidays and day trips. The big increase in the use of private motor cars as the principal means of travel to holiday destinations changed the character of many people's holidays. Whilst train travel to resorts and towns tended to keep holidaymakers relatively contained within the resort, car travel opened up the surrounding countryside, allowing the region rather than the resort to become the focus of the visit. The increase in car ownership was also part of a move towards the growing demand for self-catering accommodation at the expense of hotels and guesthouses. The use of touring and static caravans was part of the same phenomenon and their sales rocketed, with the number of caravans increasing twelvefold between 1947 and 1960.<sup>32</sup>

The growing numbers of people taking holidays and weekend daytrips to the country and coast reprised inter-war fears about the threats to the countryside.<sup>33</sup> National and local government worried, in particular, about the effects of the 'recreation explosion' on the road infrastructure and the fabric of the countryside and coastal areas. Government policy since the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside legislation in 1949 had been to encourage public access to the countryside and coast, while at the same time seeking to conserve and preserve areas of high scenic and environmental value from 'over-consumption' by day-trippers and holidaymakers.<sup>34</sup> The coast became a particular focus for local and

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<sup>32</sup> J. B Cullingworth 'Planning for Leisure', in *Urban Studies*, Volume 1, No. 1, May 1964, 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> M. Dower *The Fourth Wave, The Challenge of Leisure* (London, 1965); *Matless Landscape and Englishness*, 1989.

<sup>34</sup> J. Sheail *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002), 107-9.

national government in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> Development pressure since the 1930s from industry, housing and recreational use had seen the despoiling of coastal land. In the feverish debate that ensued in the 1960s, those concerned with the fate of the coast, both within government and beyond, often focused on pressure from visitors and their cars, caravans and tents as central problems. Caravans and tents, in fact, became a flashpoint for the wider anxiety about the effects of the ‘recreation explosion’ on the coast. As the Ministry for Housing and Local Government noted in a planning circular issued to local planning authorities in September 1963, ‘caravans and camping sites near the shore present a particular problem’.<sup>36</sup>

As a major landowner the National Trust took a strong position on the impact of tents and caravans on the landscape. It appealed to caravan builders to avoid finishing their vehicles in the ‘gleaming cream or pistachio colours’ that customers seemed to like. As one of the Trust’s area managers suggested, caravans would be more welcome ‘if they come properly dressed’ to blend into the landscape.<sup>37</sup> Mass tourism more broadly was also seen as a threat by many within the leadership of the Trust. The 1965 Annual Report sought to hold back this surge in visitor numbers by suggesting that for ‘the gregarious visitor the Trust can offer little and suffer fewer’.<sup>38</sup> The 1968 Annual Report reiterated this observation, seeking to segregate the discriminating visitor from the mass tourist. Prompted by the creation of country parks under the Labour government’s Countryside Act of 1968, the annual report suggested:

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<sup>35</sup> Board of Trade *Staggered Holidays, 1962-3, Cmnd 2105; Leisure in the Countryside, 1965-6, Cmd 2928*; Countryside Commission *The Planning of the Coastline, A Report on a Study of Coastal Preservation and Development in England and Wales* (London, 1970).

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Circular 56/63, 2 September 1963, NA BD 4/82.

<sup>37</sup> C. Acland ‘Gleaming Caravans’, *Times* 8/11/1963, 13.

<sup>38</sup> P. Lowe & J. Goyder *Environmental Groups in Politics* (London, 1983), 149.

‘It is most important to provide separately for those who want to have a happy day in pleasant rural surroundings and those who want to have a special experience of a visit to some unique area of tranquil beauty or rugged grandeur’.<sup>39</sup>

Not everyone shared the Trust’s concerns about the growth of popular recreations. In the late 1960s Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, owner of the Beaulieu estate in Hampshire, challenged the Trust’s conservatism. In an article in the *Sunday Times* he provocatively asked whether the National Trust could survive in the era of mass leisure unless it embraced change.<sup>40</sup> Montagu was one of the post-war pioneers of the stately home business and had opened Palace House on the Beaulieu estate to the paying public in 1952. Along with the Marquess of Bath (owner of Longleat) and the Duke of Bedford (owner of Woburn Abbey), he had developed the idea, as David Cannadine cuttingly put it, of re-floating the fortunes of landed families ‘on a flood of half-crowns, motor-coach parties and set teas’.<sup>41</sup> Montagu was trained in American PR techniques and was a director of the PR subsidiary of the British advertising agency Colman Prentis Varley.<sup>42</sup> He was uncompromising in his belief that Stately Homes should to be run as businesses along fully-commercial lines. In his book, *The Gilt and the Gingerbread* – subtitled ‘How to Live in a Stately Home and Make Money’ – he boasted about the administrative set up at Beaulieu suggesting that it was comparable to any conventional commercial company.<sup>43</sup>

The Beaulieu Estate was a great success with the public. In 1967 it was the most visited Stately Home in Britain with just over half a million visitors. However, the idea of turning the family mansion into a commercial venture did not win universal support. For some, like

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<sup>39</sup> NT *Annual Report*, 1968/9, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Lord Montagu of Beaulieu ‘Can the Trust Survive the Leisure Boom?’ *Sunday Times*, 19/1/1969, 12.

<sup>41</sup> D. Cannadine *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1992), 647.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Montagu of Beaulieu *The Gilt and the Gingerbread, or How to Live in a Stately Home and Make Money* (London, 1967), 31 & 57.

<sup>43</sup> Beaulieu *The Gilt and the Gingerbread*, 138.

James Lees Milne, secretary of the NT's Country Houses Committee, diarist and reactionary Tory, it was seen as desecrating the great country houses of England.<sup>44</sup> In the debate about the relative merits of the country house business, modernizers like Lord Montagu of Beaulieu pitched themselves against the NT, whom he saw as resisting the positive drive towards mass access and the commercialization of 'country houses' and the wider countryside. Montagu chided the Trust for 'being out of touch with the needs of the public' and 'as disliking any measure which is even remotely commercial'. This was hypocritical, he felt, because the Trust was undoubtedly, whether it liked it or not, in the 'tourist entertainment business'.<sup>45</sup>

### **The National Trust, Enterprise Neptune and the Rawnsley Affair**

The exchanges between the NT and the country house modernizers formed part of the wider controversies amongst policy makers and conservation organizations about how best to respond to the growing demands of mass recreation whilst protecting the coast and the countryside from the disturbance caused by the increasing numbers of visitors. Enterprise Neptune sat at the heart of how the Trust responded to this debate. The idea for the campaign fitted the preservationist instincts of the Trust and the 'spiritual' values which had animated the appreciation of the English countryside for leading figures within the Trust in the inter-war years. These included the historian G.M Trevelyan who had spoken of the NT as 'an ark of refuge' protecting the English countryside from 'the inexorable march of bricks and mortar'.<sup>46</sup> The campaign also marked something of a return to the founding ideals of the Trust in which protecting places of natural beauty so that they could be enjoyed by the 'nation' was a guiding principle of its founding triumvirate. Since the mid-1930s this interest

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<sup>44</sup> J. L. Milne cited in 'Will Each Man Kill the Thing he Loves', *Times*, 15/4/1968, 11; Cannadine *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, 647.

<sup>45</sup> Beaulieu *The Gilt and the Gingerbread*, 89-90.

<sup>46</sup> Cannadine 'The First Hundred Years', 231.

in landscape and nature conservation had been subordinated to the mission to protect the English country house. This shift reflected the dominance within the Trust's leadership between the mid-1930s and the mid-1960s of what Cannadine has called the 'patrician zealots and country houses addicts'.<sup>47</sup> These were the enlightened aristocrats like G.M. Trevelyan and the Marquess of Zetland, the NT's Chairman from the early 1930s to the end of the War. Together with aesthetes like Christopher Hussey, editor of *Country Life*, Ralph Dutton, author of the *English Country House* and James Lees Milne they shaped the policies of the Trust during the early-mid twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> The dominance within the Trust's leadership of these aesthetes generated tensions with other key groups within the organization, notably the land agents who managed the Trust's properties. The confrontations between these two groups – the battle of the Lily and the Hobnail boot, as John Smith, chair of the General Purposes committee memorably put it – was another dynamic within the internal life of the Trust.<sup>49</sup> For those seeking to overcome these divisions and to refocus the priorities of the Trust away from the dominance of the 'country house zealots', Enterprise Neptune became an important cause.

The idea for a campaign to save the coast had first been proposed by Christopher Gibbs, one of the Trust's agents.<sup>50</sup> It was enthusiastically supported by John Smith from his position as chair of the powerful general purposes committee. Smith, a member of the Trust's Council since 1952 and a banker by profession, had begun trying to move the NT in a more professional and business-like direction through the late 1950s and early 1960s. He saw Enterprise Neptune as a way of pursuing these goals and refocusing the work the Trust

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<sup>47</sup> Cannadine 'The First Hundred Years', 22.

<sup>48</sup> Cannadine 'The First Hundred Years', 22; On James Lees Milne and his circle see M. Bloch *James Lees Milne, The Life* (London, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> M. Waterson *The National Trust, The First Hundred Years* (London, 1994), 175; M. Waterson *A Noble Thing, The National Trust and its Benefactors* (London, 2011), 69.

<sup>50</sup> *Gaze Figures in a Landscape*, 206.

undertook. Smith hired a man called Conrad Rawnsley to lead the new campaign. Rawnsley had impeccable pedigree as the grandson of one of the founders of the National Trust. He had served in the Royal Navy for twenty years before becoming a successful businessman with interests in educational publishing and toy manufacturing.

Conrad Rawnsley was a man who could evoke strong emotions and those that met him were often struck by his powerful personality. R. J. Hookway, a civil servant at the National Parks Commission who was liaising with the NT over Enterprise Neptune, suggested that Rawnsley had ‘the unaffected aplomb of an Olivier as a Shakespearian King. He held us for 10 minutes of entrancement’, he gushed. Others, less favourably inclined, described him as a ‘beast’. He certainly was, as the *Daily Mirror* put it, ‘an awkward cuss’.<sup>51</sup> His personality aside, Rawnsley had ambitions to introduce new ways of working into the National Trust. This included, centrally, a more aggressive and commercially-minded approach to fund-raising and public relations. The Enterprise Neptune appeal made rapid progress, pushed on by Rawnsley’s drive and by the large field force of volunteers that he had recruited. For some within the Trust’s leadership, however, the change of style and approach represented by Enterprise Neptune threatened to undermine the establish ethos and values of the National Trust. These anxieties focused upon Conrad Rawnsley. When he wrote to Lord Antrim, the Trust’s chairman, in May 1966 proposing that the scope of Enterprise Neptune should be extended to embrace all aspects of the Trust’s work, he was promptly dismissed. The scale and rising costs of Enterprise Neptune together with Rawnsley’s growing confidence about his vision for the future direction of the Trust disconcerted Lord Antrim. He had begun to worry that ‘the tail was beginning to wag the dog’.<sup>52</sup> Rawnsley’s sacking provoked a major

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<sup>51</sup> R. J Hookway ‘Letter to Mr. Bell’, 19/1/1965, NA COU 1/24; Gaze *Figures in a Landscape*, 230; Weideger, *Gilding the Acorn*, 122; ‘The Awkward Cuss’, *Daily Mirror*, 15/11/1966, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Weideger *Gilding the Acorn*, 138.



dispute with the Trust's leadership, becoming a catalyst for the opening up of the divisions within the organization about its purposes, policy and management. Rawnsley established a reform group to challenge the leadership of the Trust, eventually forcing an emergency general meeting and pushing the National Trust's Council into setting up the Benson enquiry.<sup>53</sup>

It is worth pausing to reflect on Rawnsley's campaign. At its heart lay the twin issues of public access and internal democracy. Rawnsley argued that the Trust needed to be more focused on the needs of its members and the wider public by improving the access to its properties and by providing more facilities. Encouraging it to embrace 'the man in the street', he claimed there 'are too few campsites and caravan parks, not to mention too few lavatories. Houses are not open to the public as often as they ought to be'. The many members of the Trust who knew this and supported his view were unable, he claimed, to express their views to the Trust's leadership because they were viewed merely as 'a captive source of money' with no opportunity to influence the Trust's policies.<sup>54</sup> In a document produced by Rawnsley's 'Members Movement for Reform of the National Trust', supportive letters were cited to underscore this view of the Trust's conservatism and elitism. As an anonymous correspondent from Somerset argued, 'as you say [the Trust] seems ... mainly interested in preserving the coast solely for the seagulls ... how can we members help to alter this undemocratic disdain?'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> C. Rawnsley 'A Case for the Reform of the National Trust', February 1967; 'Notes on the Reconstitution and Reform of the National Trust', 1968, National Trust Archives (NTA), BC/A/2 [4/120].

<sup>54</sup> 'Notes on the Reconstitution and Reform of the National Trust', 1968, National Trust Archives (NTA), BC/A/2 [4/120].

<sup>55</sup> Members Movement for Reform of the National Trust 'Review of the Preparatory Period before the Extraordinary General Meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster, London', 11/2/1967, NTA, BC/A/2.

Lord Antrim, the Trust's Chairman, recognized the force of some of the arguments put by Rawnsley and his supporters. In a candid moment he conceded that his organization was indeed 'a self-perpetuating oligarchy'. He could hardly have claimed otherwise, with the leadership of the Trust dominated, as we have seen, by aristocrats, the minor gentry and connoisseurs and experts often from the ancient universities recruited through elite social networks. Antrim also conceded that the Trust needed to review the access arrangements to some of its properties. At the same time, however, he sought to resist the demands for the greater commercialization of the Trust's activities proposed by the 'Reform Movement'. Warming to his theme at the Trust's Annual General Meeting in 1966, Antrim stated:

'I want to make it perfectly clear that the Trust's job is not and will not, so long as I am Chairman, be to involve itself in the entertainment industry. Its purpose is to preserve the countryside and coastline so that the public can enjoy these national treasures in peace'.<sup>56</sup>

This comment was a little surprising given Antrim's own involvement in the entertainment industry as the Chairman of Ulster Television, the ITV franchise in the North of Ireland. His views nonetheless expressed a dominant sentiment within the Trust's leadership. The Labour government took a close interest in these internal disputes within the National Trust. Richard Crossman, Leader of the House of Commons, confessed to have been following closely the row between 'Rawnsley and the reactionaries' within the NT. He hoped that the conflict might develop along fruitful lines, allowing the government to set up a select committee to put pressure on the Trust to reform itself or 'else be nationalized'. Siding with Rawnsley, Crossman complained about the 'stand-offishness' of the Trust and its determination to protect the landowner against the public and its flagrant lack of interest in public access to its

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<sup>56</sup> Lord Antrim, Report on the AGM, *NT Newsletter* Spring 1967, 4.

properties.<sup>57</sup> Other ministers were more cautious about intervening in the affairs of an independent body, though Anthony Greenwood, Minister for Housing and Local Government, in a memo to the Prime Minister, noted how he and the Minister of Land, Fred Willey, would 'propose to tell the Chairman of the Trust, privately, that we doubt it would be wise ... to reject the idea of an enquiry'.<sup>58</sup> Whilst the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, made it clear that it would be better if the Trust 'hold an enquiry ... on their own initiative', the Minister of Housing did meet Lord Antrim in February 1967 to communicate the government's views.<sup>59</sup> Under pressure from the Labour government and seeking to contain the challenge led by Rawnsley, the National Trust's Council agreed to set up an enquiry into its affairs.

### **The Benson Enquiry**

The Council of the National Trust turned to Sir Henry Benson, a senior partner at the accountancy firm Cooper Bros & Co. to lead its review. Benson had established a reputation as a skilled advisor, consultant and general fixer of the organizational problems of a bewildering range of public bodies and private organizations.<sup>60</sup> He was already known to the Trust as one of its shooting tenants and the committee that he chaired was made up of three existing members of the Trust's Council. This familiarity prompted some observers to suggest that the Benson committee looked less like an independent enquiry and more 'a cozy family party'.<sup>61</sup> Conrad Rawnsley was certainly not impressed. Whilst he was careful not to directly criticize Sir Henry, Rawnsley scoffed at his committee's 'independence' noting that

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<sup>57</sup> Memorandum from the Lord President of the Council to the Prime Minister, 24/1/1967, NA T 227/3234.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum to Prime Minister, The National Trust, 26/1/1967, NA T 227/3234.

<sup>59</sup> Memorandum to F.W. Girling from the P.M.'s Office, 7/2/1967, NA T 227/3234

<sup>60</sup> These included the National Coal Board, Northern Ireland Railways, British Iron and Steel and work for the Ministries of Agriculture and Power. See H. Benson *Accounting for Life* (London, 1989), 229.

<sup>61</sup> *Gaze Figures in a Landscape*, 228.

its terms of reference had been established by the ‘very body [The Trust’s Council] which is under fire for its past stewardship of the Trust’s affairs’.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, Henry Benson began his work for the Trust in September 1967, taking charge of the process with his customary vigour, ‘‘driving the bus’ at times to the point of exhaustion of the two joint secretaries’, as one of his colleagues recalled.<sup>63</sup> The evidence collected by the Benson committee revealed divisions within the Trust over how it should address the growing demands of access to its properties and the divergent views of modernizers and conservatives within the organization over whether the Trust should become a more business-like and commercially-focused organization or defend a strongly preservationist and anti-commercial agenda. Benson himself realized that the question of access was central to the deliberations of his committee and conceded in the preamble to a draft of the ‘Access and Amenity’ section of the final Benson Report that this ‘part of our report is probably going to attract more attention than any other’.<sup>64</sup> He reminded the committee that the Trust would be expected to ‘move fairly clearly in the direction of greater access and better amenity’.<sup>65</sup> Behind this imperative lay ‘sociological changes’:

‘An increasing population; more leisure hours; enormous increase in motor vehicles ... All this has meant that access and amenity which was quite adequate between the wars and even in the 10 years after it are now inadequate’.<sup>66</sup>

Establishing a consensus on the question of access and amenity was not straightforward for the committee, however. Landed members of the Council were not the only ones resistant to opening up access to the Trust’s properties. Chris Gibbs, the Trust’s Chief Agent and a close

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<sup>62</sup> C. Rawnsley ‘Notes on the Reconstitution and Reform of the National Trust’, 1968, National Trust Archives (NTA), BC/A/2 [4/120], 1.

<sup>63</sup> Len Clarke *Views*, National Trust, 2011, 5.

<sup>64</sup> H. Benson ‘Access and Amenity, draft’, 5/3/1968, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>65</sup> H. Benson ‘Access and Amenity, draft’, 5/3/1968, NTA BR 1948/17

<sup>66</sup> H. Benson ‘Access and Amenity, draft’, 5/3/1968, NTA BR 1948/17

associate of James Lees Milne, was one of those who balked at any changes to access and amenity arrangements. He felt that ‘public access must be subsidiary to preservation. There were grave dangers in over-popularizing Trust properties.’<sup>67</sup> Lord Wenbury, who had been the Deputy Legal Advisor to the NT in the mid-1950s, similarly recoiled at the thought of allowing greater access. The main purpose of the NT, he suggested, was to ‘preserve its properties in their original unspoilt state’. The Trust should not be driven by Conrad Rawnsley and his supporters into trying to turn its properties into ‘popular centres of recreation such as Woburn Abbey and Longleat’.<sup>68</sup> Others, like Lord Kilmaine, chairman of a local Trust management committee, also urged against any move on the part of the NT to follow the example of the Stately Home entrepreneurs. He argued:

‘People do not expect to see a funfair on the lawns of an historic house, a caravan park on a wild cliff-top, nor a rash of white tents on an exposed mountainside! The NT is not the Duke of Bedford!’<sup>69</sup>

For J. Crippnell, an Area Agent for Wessex, the Trust needed to be clear, in resisting the pressure for greater access and amenity, that it was not catering for mass tourists but a more discerning public. Against the majority who want ‘to take the car almost everywhere and be given facilities and/or amusement’, the Trust should aim to give pleasure only to a more narrow groups of recreationists. These were the ‘true country lovers’ who, like the Trust, did not want to see ‘car parks and lavatories’ spoiling the ‘beauty and tranquillity’ of a Trust property.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> C. Gibbs in Notes of a Meeting of the Council’s Advisory Committee, National Trust, 9/10/1967, 3, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>68</sup> Lord Wenbury Response to Benson Enquiry, October 1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>69</sup> Lord Kilmaine Response to Benson Enquiry, 16/10/1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>70</sup> J. Crippnell Response to Benson Enquiry, 16/10/1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

These conservative objections to any moves to radically change how the NT dealt with access to its properties and the facilities at them was challenged in the evidence given to the Benson committee by the modernizers. These urged the Trust to embrace change. One of them was Lord de la Warr, the former Post-Master General in the Macmillan government and Chairman of the Trust's Estates Committee. In this latter role, de la Warr travelled extensively around the Trust's properties. He felt that the Trust had an important contribution to make to the 'important problem of leisure and pleasure in the countryside'. Urging the committee to be bold he set out an elaborated vision of how the Trust could be transformed, suggesting 'We need more drive put into the provision of camping, caravan sites, car parks and tea rooms, shops and stalls in our houses'.<sup>71</sup> Tellingly, a hand-written marginal note added to de la Warr's statement from either the committee secretaries or perhaps from Henry Benson stated: 'This view must be put forward when we discuss access. I suspect that there has not been enough 'drive' in implementing some of the changes made'.

Not surprisingly, some of the strongest statements made in favour of greater access and amenity came from those close to Conrad Rawnsley. E.R Cochrane, chairman of the Members' Reform Committee and a farmer from Gloucestershire whose ancestral home had been given to the Trust, submitted a long, serious and considered 16 page written statement to the Benson committee. He pressed for much greater provision of 'simple refreshments' and the encouragement of 'suitably screened camping and caravan sites'. The test, he suggested, was that the Trust should ask itself how much it could do for the public and not how little.<sup>72</sup> A similar forward-looking argument was made by Francis Dashwood, owner of West Wycombe Park. He felt that existing access arrangements and facilities needed to be 'radically altered'. The Trust should be encouraged to adopt a 'more commercial outlook'

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<sup>71</sup> Lord de la Warr Response to Benson Enquiry, October 1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>72</sup> E.R Cochrane Response to Benson Enquiry, noted dated, NTA BR 1948/17, 14.

and bring in ‘some really lively and enterprising commercial characters’ like the Duke of Devonshire or Lord Bath.<sup>73</sup>

The divisions amongst those from whom the Benson committee received evidence were also clear in the competing views taken on the organization and running of the Trust. As with the competing views on access, they cut across any neat division between ‘lilies’ and ‘hobnail boots’. E.R Cochrane again offered the most sustained case for reform. He argued that the Trust had ‘outgrown its administrative skin’ and this necessitated that it be reorganized along the lines of a ‘big business’.<sup>74</sup> Two area agents and one Area Publicity officer – C. Acland, A. Lord and C. Hanson – similarly noted the need for change given the fact that the Trust ‘is [now] too big, too complex, to be run by a committee of amateurs’. It needed, they argued, ‘to show a more professional face to the world’.<sup>75</sup>

A strong defence of the status quo came from other correspondents. Brigadier R. F Johnson, a member of the Trust’s conservative Publicity Committee, defended established ways of working. The Trust was, in the best sense, ‘amateurish’, he contended and no less effective for that. It had none of the brash ‘Ballyhoo of Woburn or Longleat’. He defended the ‘disinterested enthusiasm’ and ‘practical experience’ of the ‘Dukes, Earls and other landed gentry’ who ran the Trust. His motto was ‘Leave well alone!’<sup>76</sup> Other conservative voices worried about the dangers of ‘democratizing’ the National Trust. For Lord Wenbury, the members of the Trust did not have the knowledge to make effective decisions over who

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<sup>73</sup> Sir Francis Dashwood Response to Benson Enquiry, 5/10/1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>74</sup> E.R Cochrane Response to Benson Enquiry, noted dated, NTA BR 1948/17, 10.

<sup>75</sup> C. Acland, A. Lord, C. Hanson Response to Benson Enquiry, 27/10/1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>76</sup> Brigadier R.F Johnson Response to Benson Enquiry, 15/10/1967, NTA BR 1948/17.

should run its affairs. They were better off thinking of themselves as ‘subscribers’, Chief Agent Chris Gibbs added, and should not join the Trust ‘to control its policies’.<sup>77</sup>

### **The Benson Report**

The divergent views received by the Benson committee presented a challenge to Sir Henry and his colleagues. The Benson Report, however, when it was published in 1968 steered a clear course in pushing forward an agenda for change and organizational reform. The Report was emphatic that the size of the NT as a large enterprise required a formalization of its administration.<sup>78</sup> Central to this was the relationship between the three bodies responsible for the strategic and operational management of the Trust: the Council, the Executive Committee and Head Office administration. Under its constitution, the Trust was governed by a Council of fifty. Twenty five were elected by members at the annual general meeting, whilst the remainder were appointed from nominating bodies. Whilst the Council established the strategic direction and policies of the Trust, executive authority was delegated to an Executive Committee (EC) made up of members appointed by the Council. The decisions of the EC and the day to day business of the Trust were implemented by a salaried administration at Head Office in Queen Anne’s Gate in central London. Head Office also coordinated the regional and areas offices, as well as supporting the work of the seven committees that advised the Trust on areas like country house acquisition, gardens and chattels.

For Benson and his co-authors, too much authority had been ceded by the Council to the Executive Committee, with the former body rarely meeting and acting only in a perfunctory

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<sup>77</sup> Lord Wenbury Response to Benson Enquiry, October 1967, NTA BR 1948/17.C. Gibbs in Notes of a Meeting of the Council’s Advisory Committee, National Trust, 9/10/1967, 3, NTA BR 1948/17.

<sup>78</sup> *National Trust Report by the Council’s Advisory Committee on the Trust’s Constitution, Organization and Responsibilities* (London, 1968), 43.



manner. The Report proposed re-establishing the authority of Council, suggesting that it met at least quarterly and with the EC being more accountable to the Council for the management and organization of the Trust.<sup>79</sup> The Report also recommended that the EC should provide a report to council at each of these quarterly meetings, improving the flow of information within the organization.<sup>80</sup> The Benson Report additionally sought to increase the accountability of the Council to the Trust's members by extending the right to vote on those elected Council members to all members of the Trust and not just those present at the AGM.

When it came to establishing clearer management functions, the Benson Report proposed changes to the Trust's full-time administration. During the sitting of the committee, a new role of Director General was created.<sup>81</sup> The Benson Report gave its strong endorsement to this move in the light of the growth in the size of the Trust. It also recommended the simplification of the department structure overseen by the new Director General. This simplification was primarily to come from the decentralization of some of the administration of the Trust through the creation of Regional Committees. They would oversee the management of the Trust's properties in their local areas. Regionalization or 'decentralization' became one of the defining features of the reforms proposed by the Benson report. A further recommendation of the final Benson report was the introduction of an improved system of budgetary control. This was to be overseen by a new Chief Financial Officer who was to replace the role of 'honorary treasurer'.<sup>82</sup> The new role was designed to help the Trust manage its affairs more effectively and plan properly for the future.<sup>83</sup>

Strengthening the chain of command and financial planning was accompanied by recommendations that the Trust should increase its income. This was a pressing concern for

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<sup>79</sup> *NT Report by Council's Advisory Committee*, 33.

<sup>80</sup> *NT Report by Council's Advisory Committee*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> *NT Report by Council's Advisory Committee*, 52.

<sup>82</sup> *NT Report by Council's Advisory Committee*, 54.

<sup>83</sup> *Benson Accounting for Life*, 148.

the Trust, as Benson realized, given the high costs that the Trust was incurring in the maintenance and presentation of new properties that it had acquired since the War. To boost its income, the Report suggested that the NT ought to establish trading operations, undertake a membership drive and bolster its use of PR and publicity. The Report memorably summarized this latter aspect of reform as the need for a ‘vigorous and lively attention to public relations’.<sup>84</sup> To this end, Benson proposed the establishment of National Trust shops and an expansion of visitor facilities, together with the boosting of the promotional activities of the Trust to draw in more members. The Report set an ambitious target of increasing the Trust’s membership by over 65,000 in two years, with an overall target of half a million members in 5 years. These new members would receive more information and communication from the Trust than had hitherto been the case and the Report recommended the publication of an annual report, newsletter and regional reports.<sup>85</sup>

Developing the commercial activities of the Trust was allied to the Benson Report’s recommendations on the important question of access and amenity. The Report conceded the difficult balancing act that the NT had to perform in protecting and preserving the fabric and quality of its properties, whilst giving greater public access. The Report was clear, however, that, other things being equal, there should be a decisive move in the direction of extending the opening hours of all the Trust’s properties, with the visiting season stretched to cover the period from Easter Saturday to the end of September.<sup>86</sup> The Report also argued that the Trust had no choice but to respond to the public’s enhanced expectations about the kind of services and facilities available at NT properties. Acknowledging that some progress had already been made in the provision of car parks, lavatories and other services, the Report urged the Trust to invest more in these consumer services. It advised, however, in keeping with the views of

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<sup>84</sup> *NT Report by Council’s Advisory Committee*, 136.

<sup>85</sup> *NT Report by Council’s Advisory Committee*, 139.

<sup>86</sup> *NT Report by Council’s Advisory Committee*, 99.

many who had given evidence to it, that the expansion of facilities should be carefully planned so as not to detract from the buildings and landscapes that the Trust was mandated to protect. As the Report suggested, ‘no car park is a thing of beauty, but they can, and must, be well sited and, if possible, well-screened’.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, camping sites should be placed so as to ‘not destroy the quiet and peaceful enjoyment which the public is entitled to expect when visiting the Trust’s properties’.<sup>88</sup>

## **Conclusion**

How should we assess the Benson Report? This article has argued that Henry Benson and his committee of enquiry were able to nudge the NT in a new direction. He was able to build on the initiatives of earlier reformers like John Smith and bring about the greater commercialization of the Trust’s activities and its relationship to its members and the public. Whilst Smith had been thwarted in his moves to bring business thinking into the Trust, he had broken the ground into which the changes proposed by Benson could take root. Henry Benson was able to push forward this and other organizational changes because of his immense authority and expertise as a consultant. He had the practical and intellectual skills to know how to rebuild an organization, skills evident in his wide ranging work as a consultant.<sup>89</sup> This authority was enhanced by the fact that, unlike Rawnsley, he was to some extent an ‘insider’ within the Trust and known to key members of the leadership. Whilst Rawnsley’s aggressive attempts to change the NT prompted it to close ranks against him, Benson could play the role of the friendly critic and sympathetic guide helping the Trust to change its ways of working. The status of the Trust as a semi-public body also meant that key

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<sup>87</sup> *NT Report by Council’s Advisory Committee*, 101.

<sup>88</sup> *NT Report by Council’s Advisory Committee*, 101.

<sup>89</sup> See the communication between Benson and the Secretary at the Ministry of Technology, Letter from Cooper Bros. to Sir David Pitblade ‘Performance Indicators’, 8/11/1970, NA POWE 52/437.

figures in the Labour government played a role in stiffening the resolve of the Trust's leadership to pursue the reform process initiated by Benson and his colleagues.

It is also undoubtedly the case that the success of the Benson Report was dependent upon the appointment of a new cadre of professional administrators who saw through the implementation of its recommendations. They included Sir John Winnifrith, the former Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, the National Trust's first Director General and Edward Fawcett, its first director of Public Relations. John Winnifrith brought the skills of a senior career civil servant to the rebuilding of the NT's Head Office administration and embodied in his practice the 'new professionalism' urged by Benson. Edward Fawcett was also crucial. He had been the overseas sales director of the car component firm Lucas. He pushed the NT to build up its advertising, together with the signposting at its properties and the provision of visitor facilities.<sup>90</sup> He was also central to the opening of new retail outlets at Trust properties, helping to set up thirty within his first year in post.<sup>91</sup>

In reshaping the National Trust as a more formalized conservation bureaucracy and as a consumer-orientated enterprise, professional administrators like Winnifrith and Fawcett played a decisive role in institutionalizing the Benson Report. In doing so, they helped the Trust to catch up with the pioneers in the voluntary and NGO sector like Oxfam and Shelter in developing the organizational form of a modern NGO. The changes they steered through also saw the Trust step ahead of an organization like the RSPB which had begun its own 'modernization' from the mid-1960s under the leadership of its advertising trained Director Peter Condor.<sup>92</sup> It is clear, however, that contrary to the model proposed by authors like

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<sup>90</sup> J. Jenkins & P. James *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 262.

<sup>91</sup> J. Jenkins & P. James *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 243.

<sup>92</sup> On Peter Condor and his reforms see Conder, Peter John (1919-1993) by N. Hammond *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51611>,

Hilton et al, the Benson reforms and their implementation took their cue less from other NGO's and more from private business. Henry Benson's reference points were, in this regard, his own private practice and the wider corporate world. His reforms were also able to make their mark because of the wider social forces bearing on the Trust in the 1950s and 1960s. The most important of these were the social changes associated with the 'recreation explosion' and the coming of mass affluence. Commentators have sometimes seen conservation groups as influential actors galvanising popular engagement with the environment and the wider 'national heritage'. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, it was clear that the Trust was caught off guard by the growth of its membership and the numbers of visitors to its properties. It was the demands of an increasingly affluent and mobile population, together with the wider democratising shifts, that challenged the purposes and policies of the Trust and which triggered the reform process. In this regard, historians of environmental and conservation groups needs to be more sensitive to the way these NGOs respond to, as much as lead, social change.

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accessed 13/3/2014; D. Niemann *Birds in a Cage, Warburg POW Camp 1941, Four British Birdwatchers, The Unlikely Beginnings of Modern Conservation* (London, 2012), pp8-10 & 284-6; T. Samstag *For Love of Birds, The Story of the RSPB* (London, 1988), 77.

