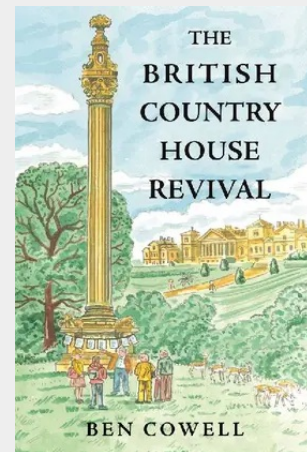


The British Country House Revival

British country houses have experienced a renaissance since the early 1970s. A new accord is needed today, recognising the increasingly contested contribution of country houses to British cultural life. Fifty years ago, the future for country houses in Britain looked bleak. The Victoria & Albert Museum's exhibition *The Destruction of the Country House*, which opened in October 1974, charted the loss of over a thousand country houses in the preceding century. The makers of the exhibition warned that history could be "about to repeat itself" because of the threats besetting mansion properties, principally from higher taxation. Houses faced the prospect of having to be stripped of their collections and sold for use as offices, hotels, or hospitals, with their parks and gardens turned into golf clubs. Government might afford to save just a handful of the most significant of these places, working in tandem with charities such as the National Trust. The rest would be consigned to history. This book traces the history of country houses in Britain, from the *Destruction* exhibition to the present day. The wave of country house losses anticipated in 1974 never actually happened. Instead, over the next five decades Britain's country houses experienced a renaissance. Fiscal rules changed in the mid-1970s to make it easier for owners to hold on to their assets. Economic improvements in the 1980s and 1990s allowed many houses and estates to develop profitable commercial businesses. All of this was achieved only after dedicated campaigning from heritage organisations in support of the country house cause. The book argues that a new accord is needed today, to recognise and value the ongoing, if increasingly contested, contribution of country houses to British life and culture in the twenty-first century.

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