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Skript

0:01

Question: what does this elegant stately home and this empty Victorian workhouse have in common?

Answer: they're both owned by the National Trust. A unique charitable organisation whose aim is to preserve Britain's rich cultural heritage.

The National Trust is run from its head offices in London. Over the past century the Trust has grown from a tiny organisation owning just one property into the country's largest private landowner.

O-Ton Jason Tanner

0:49

The National Trust was set up in 1895 well over 100 years ago with the intention of protecting places of historic interest or natural beauty. That includes the coastline, historic houses - places the people today have now come to cherish and love. And the thing is they're now protected forever for the nation.

1:12

Now the Trust owns and protects over 300 historic properties and gardens. Over 600,000 acres of countryside. And almost 600 miles of coastline. In addition to 4,000 permanent employees, the Trust has over 40,000 volunteers who work for it, all with the common aim of preserving the nation's heritage.

O-Ton Jason Tanner

1:40

If the National Trust wasn't here there is a danger that developers might come and demolish buildings. Or they might come and build caravan parks on the coastline. Or they might come and dig up a historic garden or something like that. And what we're trying to do is make sure that children, people of all ages, can enjoy that forever, and also have access to those properties.

2:07

The National Trust is most famous for its traditional stately homes. Belton House in Lincolnshire is a typical example of a National Trust owned property. This magnificent 17th century building stands in over 1,000 acres of parkland and beautiful landscaped gardens. Its stunning interiors contain exceptionally fine plasterwork and woodcarving as well as an important collection of paintings, furniture, tapestries and china.

The house was originally built for Sir John Brownlow in 1685 and remained the family home for generations. But as with so many stately homes, its upkeep became too costly for the family. So in 1984 the second Lord Brownlow decided to gift the house to the National Trust so it could be preserved forever in its original splendour.

It's open to the public between April and October each year with over 120,000 people visiting it.

Paul Hatfield is one of the Trust's 17 permanent employees here and is responsible for the daily upkeep and restoration of the house.

O-Ton Paul Hatfield

3:23

I've been here for 13 years now. I'm employed as House Manager at Belton and I have overall responsibility for the wellbeing of this house and its collections. I look after its departmental finances and more importantly the 150 volunteers who help me to open the house to the public on a rotational basis and of course, the welcoming of the visitors who come in through the main door.

We've done quite a lot of work to the house over the years. The house was in generally good condition, but a number of slightly strange things had happened to a number of interiors - including in fact the entrance hall that we're now standing in, which in the late 1970s got a coat of very fashionable magnolia paint on the wall, which when we took the house on in the mid-1980s realised very quickly wasn't desperately historically accurate to the area. And we decided to put things back the way that they had traditionally been.

4:34

A magnolia coloured hall might appeal to some more modern homeowners but if the Trust had not restored it to its former glory, the hallway would have lost much of its historical significance.

O- Ton Paul Hatfield

4:50

The whole idea of this particular hallway is that the minute you walk through the doorway that you are to be impressed by the wealth and splendour of the Brownlow family, the owner family here at Belton. It's also designed to be just that little bit uncomfortable and intimidating as well.

5:09

As might be expected with a house over 300 years old there are constant repairs to be done. At the moment the grand stairwell is being used as a storage area for the contents of a bedroom in desperate need of restoration. It's thought the cracks in the ceiling may have been caused by the volume of visitors walking on the floors above. It's all part of a 7 year multi-million pound programme of restoration designed to restore the whole house to its former glory.

Although there are some rooms still reserved for use by the Brownlow family, who left the house when it was given up to the Trust the only residents now are some of the Trust staff like Paul. Sadly, they don't live in the main house but in the more modest surroundings of the old butler's quarters.

When Lord Brownlow donated the building to the Trust he also gave them many of its contents. What he didn't donate, the Trust bought. The result - a priceless collection of paintings, ornaments, furniture and books.

O-Ton Paul Hatfield

6:23

We have a very important collection of books here at Belton. It's regarded as being one of the 3 most important libraries in the care of the National Trust. And I use the term library in its broadest sense, because the six and a half thousand volumes that sit in this room represent only one third of the total collection of books held here within the house. They cover the whole 300-year history of Belton. We try every year to look at every single page of every one of the volumes in our collection to make sure that there's no deterioration in this valuable collection of books. When the Trust takes on a property like Belton it is the whole place, it's the spirit of that place and everything that has survived intact within it. And one of the things that you'll notice when you come around houses like Belton are a great lack of labels and notices and signposts and so on. Because what we're trying to do, as close as we possibly can within conservation constraints, is to give you as a visitor the closest possible experience to being a member of the family, or at least one of their guests coming in to what traditionally has been a family home.

7:43

Sadly the National Trust can't always get to a property in time to preserve it like Belton. Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire is one such example. This is one of the Trust's most visited country parks but all that remains of its magnificent 18th century mansion are a few foundation stones.

The estate was handed down through the family for generations but in 1937 it was closed down, its contents sold off, and the building demolished because of heavy tax demands. Clumber House was lost to the nation forever but thanks to the Trust, people can still at least enjoy its beautiful grounds.

8:30

As an island nation, Britain's coast has always played an important part in its history and because of this the Trust is responsible for over 600 miles of Great Britain's coastline. In 1965, concerned at the amount of coastline being lost to inappropriate development, the Trust launched a special appeal which has to date raised some 34 million pounds.

9:06

As a registered charity, the Trust receives funding from a variety of places. But its main source of income comes from its 2.9 million members who pay an annual subscription. Keeping these members happy and informed and encouraging new members to join is an important part of the Trust's work. The members can be sure of one thing - everything owned by the National Trust is protected forever.

O-Ton Jason Tanner

9:33

One of the unique powers that the National Trust has, is something called 'inalienability'. That means that we can say that a property, it could be a country house or a piece of countryside, must be saved for the nation. And once it's saved by the National Trust and once it has that status of inalienability it means it can never be sold or mortgaged, not unless it goes to government and that's never been done before. You'd actually have to change the law to be able to sell one of the properties that we look after.

10:10

In recent years the National Trust has noticed a greater public awareness of all types of social history. With this in mind, it's developed some rather unusual properties that tell a different story to the stately homes they're famous for. This is a workhouse in Nottinghamshire, a place designed by Victorians to look after the country's needy. It took 5 years to research and restore - at a cost of four and a half million pounds.

O-Ton Stephen Lemottee

10:41

About 5 or 6 years ago people in general realised that workhouses were disappearing very quickly. At one time there had been about 600 workhouses - a network that covered the whole of the British Isles. And most of them had either been demolished, converted into hospitals or into houses. And I think the feeling was that really it was important enough to save one workhouse somewhere in the country.

11:08

This workhouse opened in 1824. Workhouses were set up to care for those who couldn't care for themselves. The poor and old, the infirm and the orphaned. Families were split up and lived in separate parts of the building all under the supervision of the workhouse master.

Life was hard and everyone who was able bodied was given chores to do, often pointless, dull repetitive work - therefore discouraging others from seeking refuge here.

O-Ton Stephen Lemottee

11:42

We've kept the building empty for a number of reasons - because we don't really know what the furniture looked like. The workhouse era ended a long time ago, all the furniture was sent away and disposed of. And so at the moment we don't really know what the furniture was. Also we want to give people a picture of a very empty life, a very boring life, a very forlorn life.

12:09

But in a few rooms the Trust has attempted to recreate what the facilities would have been like.

O-Ton Stephen Lemottee

12:17

Although most of the building is empty we've tried to recreate what one of the dormitories would have looked like. This is a women's dormitory and we've modelled the beds on the type that they would have had in hospitals at the time. They're not very big and they're certainly not very comfortable and they would have been even less comfortable when there were two adults sleeping in them as would have happened when the workhouse was busy.

12:40

When we bought the workhouse 5 years ago it had been empty for some time. We had to break down the doors that had been boarded up and as we came into the building this is exactly how we found it. Dark coloured paint, a very damp, cold building and paint peeling off the walls. It gave us a real feeling of how miserable life must have been for the paupers. This room looks very different to the others and it shows 2 important things. One is how the colour schemes have changed over the years. In the later 1800s the darker colours were introduced but you can see underneath them the blues and the whites of the early 1800s.

13:02

This room also shows why it was important for us to restore the building and how easily and quickly an important building like this can fall into disrepair. If we hadn't have restored it, people might never have understood what life was really like in a working workhouse.

13:34

So whether it's the houses of the very poor, or those of the very rich - the National Trust is determined to preserve Britain's rich social history for future generations to enjoy forever. A venture that began with just one house over 100 years ago.