Tower blocks' crumbling image restored in new



Royston B in Glasgow, shown in its partly-demolished state

Social and architectural historians from Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) will create a publically accessible catalogue that celebrates Britain's post-1945 building boom, at a time when high-rise homes are increasingly threatened with demolition.

Tower Blocks – Our Blocks! has been described as the 'Domesday Book' of the UK's post-war reconstruction. It will contain images of every single multi-storey public housing project ever constructed in Britain, including ones destroyed more than 30 years ago.

The three-year Heritage Lottery-funded project will digitise 3500 images taken in the 1980s and make them fully searchable as part of the Tower Block Slide Archive. Among them are the Red Road and Gorbals schemes in Glasgow, the Everton flats in Liverpool, Birmingham's Chelmsley Wood, Manchester's Hulme redevelopment, and London estates such as Broadwater Farm, Thamesmead and Roehampton.

Professor Miles Glendinning, Head of the Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies at Edinburgh College of Art, said: "We hope this project will help contribute to the ongoing shift in public attitudes towards the post-war Modernist housing heritage, which is fast turning from an object of dislike and alienation into a force for potential community empowerment.

“Council tower blocks were once the most prominent and dramatic legacy of the post-1945 reconstruction drive, but mass demolitions over the past 35 years, still continuing today, have depleted this vast heritage, leaving it obscured or incomprehensible to the public at a time when popular interest in post-war Modernist heritage is sharply increasing.”

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: “Without archives, vast segments of our nation’s history would be missing. As the high rise towers that have dominated many towns’ and city’s skylines begin to disappear, it is important for us to capture this heritage and give voice to the experiences of those who live in these flats and communities. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to be able to help make this happen.”

The £52,900 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund will help digitise the photographs and support local outreach initiatives which encourage high-rise residents to tell their stories, and aid them in telling community histories. The project will be completed in late 2017.

Further information

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