

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Repair/maintenance carried out by a private listed building owner
Name of project/group:	Colin Simms
Location:	30-42 Hamstead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham
Duration (if applicable):	1979 to the present

Short description of project:

Colin Simms moved to Birmingham as a university student in the 1960s and purchased 42 Hamstead Road, Handsworth in 1979, part of a row of Georgian terraced housing. It had been on the market for some time, was in a severely dilapidated state and was located in what was becoming an undesirable area.

During his ownership, Colin painstakingly renovated the house and, subsequently purchased the houses in the row one by one as they came onto the market. The houses, which are listed grade II and are in a conservation area, were built between 1794 and 1824 although the precise date of construction is unknown. Colin purchased number 30 (the last in the row) in 2010 which he is currently living in and restoring. The other houses are in use as mostly student accommodation for Birmingham City University's acting school. Colin has used the rental income to fund the on-going project, although he did receive some financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund in the early 2000s for external work on doors and windows. The row has a series of interconnected gardens which Colin has also restored – they are known locally as the 'Hidden Gardens' and may be visited without charge, by prior arrangement.

What would have happened without this project/group?

The terraced houses were in a serious state of disrepair as Handsworth declined due to traditional local industries being closed down and the traditional middle class residents moving to more suburban areas. The Handsworth riots of the 1980s further cemented the area's reputation as undesirable. Much property in the area was owned by absentee landlords, some of the houses were empty and others used as various business premises. It is likely that without Colin's work, the row would have declined to the point where demolition of part or all of the terrace may have been necessary.



The row of Handsworth terraces (Photo: Louisa Moore, Historic England)

How did the project achieve its objectives?

Colin has largely accomplished this project single-handedly over the past 36 years, with support and advice from the conservation team at Birmingham City Council and some financial support from a Heritage Lottery Fund Townscape Heritage Initiative for external work on windows and doors. Given the long standing nature of the project, Colin has worked with most of the conservation officers employed by Birmingham since the late 1970s. He now has an assistant working with him on the last house's restoration.

What difference has it made: main outcomes and outputs:

The terraced houses and the 'hidden gardens' now get visitors from across the country, and feature in the Legacy West Midlands Heritage Trail of Handsworth & Lozells (<http://www.legacy-wm.org/heritage-trail/site-3-nine-georgian-houses-hamstead-road.html>). When the Trail was launched, the houses were featured on BBC-TV's Midlands Today. Handsworth is slowly improving its reputation and regaining its popularity as a suburb close to the centre of Birmingham, helped by the row of houses restored by Colin Simms.



Owner Colin Simms in the garden behind the Hamstead Road terraces (Photo: Aftab Rahman, Legacy West Midlands).

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges would anything be done differently?

Colin has struggled over the years to maintain the houses, but has persevered largely due to his passion for the work. He first noticed the terrace when, as a university student, he attended a party in a flat across the road, and was saddened by the state of the building. The Handsworth area has been through considerable changes in the 40-odd years since Colin bought the first house, including serious rioting and serious economic decline.

What is the future for the case study?

The final home in the terrace is undergoing conservation now and the future of the site is unclear. Colin is now in his late 60s and is working with Legacy West Midlands to help the residents of Handsworth restore pride in their local area, and celebrate its heritage.

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