

## Topics

# Righting Wrongs

## Demolition Justice

Landmarks, like other forms of beauty, are in the eye of the beholder, and the contractor who recently reduced a historic manor house in Britain to a heap of rubble made a mistake. Either that, or he preferred a historic ruin. He was supposed to be demolishing some cow sheds on the other side of the road, which didn't look much like a part-Jacobean, part-Georgian landmark, but he persisted even after a warning that he was on the wrong site. A very bad eye, obviously — but then Monkspath Hall was only a Grade II monument, as the British rate their protected buildings: a simple country house, not a palace.

Since unauthorized demolition is a violation of the British Town and Country Act, the contractor has been fined. If penalties don't undo the damage,

they do cool the ardor for hasty jobs — at least on designated buildings. But even fines won't stop those Saturday specials favored by American developers when they're in a hurry to get rid of structures of landmark quality. The recent stripping of the Biltmore Hotel was only the latest in a long line of weekend spectacles.

The British, however, have not stopped at fines. The wreckage of Monkspath Hall still exists, and the town council is asking that the building be put up again. Although a study says it can be done, we doubt that very much. Unless the demolition process was a lot tidier than most, this will be a Humpty Dumpty operation. True, a contractor will get an architectural education, but that poses a new danger. A bulldozer driver with a discriminating eye might insist on Grade I landmarks next time.

## Voices of the Deep

The voice said something like this: "Tension pasjers sistrain will make onlxpress stop huntwenfif necks." A friend heard the announcement on an IRT local during rush hour, and it was his frantic guess that for unfathomable reasons the train was turning into an IND express. Only the day before, the reverse had occurred: an express had been demoted to a local, also accompanied by an enigmatic announcement. So he fled the train, the closing doors nipping at his raincoat.

The unreliability of New York subways is an old problem, maybe not curable for years — or so the T.A. insists. But passengers have a right to be told what is happening in audible language, and should be given time to get out of a train before it starts skipping scheduled stops. That's curable.