

## Tales from the Square: Saving Preston Bus Station

### Podcast transcript

You're listening to tales from the square with me, Doctor Christina Malathouni, from the School of Architecture here at the University of Liverpool.

I'm a senior lecturer here at the School of Architecture. I studied architecture initially, but now I'm focusing more on architectural history and heritage, both in the 20th century, and that's how this project also linked to what I'm doing.

Preston Bus Station is particularly important for a number of reasons. The building got listed in September 2013. It's linked to a bigger picture in terms of motor transport, so it was linked to the very first part of motorway construction for Britain, which was the Preston Bypass in 1959, so it followed from that. Motor transport was increasing, bus, public bus transport was increasing and that's what the building is. It's a bus station, combined bus station, car park and it used to be also taxi rank.

But the significance, architecturally is also quite high for a number of reasons. It's linked to a very important architectural practise building design partnership. It has grown. It has become an international practise, but it was initially founded in Preston and it's particularly important because it brought together very early on combination of design in different areas. So architecture is definitely quite central, but they were also doing graphic design, interior design. Landscaping. So you name it. And they integrated approach is also one very strongly manifested in the building and part of its significance.

So if we elaborate a little bit more on the architectural significance of the building, it's been placed within what we call Brutalism and just the name of the style raises quite strong reactions and the origin of the name is pretty simple. It comes from a French word that used for all concrete, so beton, beton brut, beton is the reinforced concrete in France and brut is what they use instead of what we use as raw concrete.

But of course, because in English it suggests brutality, it brings about very strong reactions from people. This have changed over time and, and we're very proud that Preston Bus Station has played a key role in that. Main characteristics are definitely in most cases, but not in all the use of concrete, which is exposed, but it can be other materials that are also visible so you see the reality of the construction materials. Attitudes towards Brutalism have been changing quite a lot. Initially there were of course, you know, a noble thing, and there was a lot of curiosity gradually, also in terms of how the buildings aides they were quite a few negative reactions. They were associations in general with that part of, you know, social history. So there are a number of reasons why it's history, it's complicated and it kept changing. But it's been moving from a perspective of architectural appreciation. It's been moving towards a much more positive reception both in Britain but also internationally. There are numerous events across the world that have been taking place either initiated by academics, historians or from the heritage sector, or a lot of public events. It's quite funny, I think, I think in Britain recently we have anything funky being sold by a company named as Brutalist, which is not very accurate historically necessarily, but I think it it matches very clearly human nature and how when something gains, popularity tends to reach areas that it has no connections to.

There are quite a lot of challenges to what, what happened in terms of public contribution. People say a lot of these people supporting its retention haven't even visited the building. They haven't visited the city. They don't know what they're talking about. It's all elitist. It's all you know, something to make a fuss about, but what is very interesting is that there have been a number of polls from local newspapers and the vote was always positive. More than 50%. I don't remember the statistics now, but that people were in support of the building and its retention awareness of cost of the cost. At some point it was voted as the best loved building for for Preston, so it's quite interesting to to see that.

There is prejudice against certain styles that does not necessarily reflect the reality, and there are a lot of different things mixed like you need to maintain buildings. You need to provide services.

There are issues of funding, but it doesn't automatically link. From that point, there are issues to be addressed to. Let's demolish a building. And it's fascinating how we went from a building that was considered and and for good reasons. I mean, it wasn't maintained, it was dirty, there were issues about security overnight, which are issues that you can, you know, come across in different buildings, different parts of cities. But the moment the building was saved and then it had to be refurbished, it's it's really something that the city takes pride in. There was a publication again at the opening after the refurbishment in a local newspaper where a local politician says thankfully it was listed, which is quite astonishing considering the history and it's it's again rewarding saying that you know, you, you and all the people who are involved in these kind of cases, you don't do that for some kind of personal benefit. It's because through your profession or through some sort of involvement, you just see a little bit ahead. You're not smarter. You're not. It's not that you know everything, but it's an area where you've worked in and and you can see ahead that there is potential.

So it's amazing to see how the building is actually loved. It's embraced at some point. I think it was April 2012, when the that was still that, that that period where things were up in the air completely, but it was chosen the the big apron at the front of the building was chosen for the major BBC programme for Easter, and again at that point, we were pointing out you see the potential for the city. This is that if you look after the building and you look after the area around this is potential for the city centre and this is being celebrated now with the refurbishment, one of the two aprons because they're on the on both. They used to be on both long sides of the building, you would have bus, bus is parking there and now only one is being used and the other one is a public square and it's that potential being brought to fruition.

And from what I read in publications and every time I visit there are architectural tools. There are people who go and visit specifically to see the the building.

You can see that this is coming to fruition and and and the city is enjoying now this as an asset which is exactly what we've been saying. It's not a problem, it's an asset.

Following its listing, Preston bus station was refurbished extensively and its current history is clearly reflecting this amazing refurbishment. It's a great two building and what's being done overall it's very positive. The main reaction is A: the building is standing. and B: it's being looked after and it's been looked after very well. People who use it are happy, they feel safer and all this kind of measures seem to have a a major impact on that. And then at a more official level, you have all this kind of reactions that are positive, overwhelmingly positive. There are articles throughout national press or professional press praising the refurbishment and and it's worth all the praise.

The most fascinating news was that in addition to having the building listed after a 15 year campaign, we also won an award for that effort and it was definitely a collective award. It was awarded to safe Preston Bus Station, the Facebook group that was bringing together all these disparate individuals and groups that were working for it. And it was by the Heritage Alliance, it's called the Heritage Heroes award and we were joint winners in 2014.

So here we are from being threatened for demolition to safe listed refurbished, still in its original use, which is again a major win, and seven awards so far.