

# Exodus from Historic Scotland amid allegations of management bullying

Mike Wade

Historic Scotland, the agency responsible for the country's ancient buildings, has been hit by allegations of bullying after the departure of several high-ranking staff.

An investigation by *The Times* has discovered that five of the most senior officials at Historic Scotland have left over the past 18 months. At least two have privately alleged that they were bullied while others were off sick or on medication due to stress before quitting.

A sixth official, Linda Ellison, the finance director, is expected to leave the organisation soon, while a senior archaeologist is believed to be absent from work with a stress-related illness.

The departures have been accompanied by trenchant criticisms of management, under the leadership of Ruth Parsons, the chief executive.

In an organisation whose self-proclaimed purpose is to "safeguard the nation's historic environment", critics allege that few of the remaining senior management have appropriate qualifications for their roles.

"The overall culture of the organisation changed very significantly with the arrival of a new chief executive, a former employee said. "A number of senior staff felt intimidated, bullied and sidelined. When this was reported to the human resources department, very little if any weight was placed on the report and instead those staff drew more attention to themselves. At no stage did I feel I was given any support for the issues I had raised."

Last night Historic Scotland hit back, insisting that the welfare of its staff was paramount. "As an organisation, we operate on a transparent and open basis and recently took part in both a staff well-being survey and the Civil Service Employee Survey, publishing the results on our website," said a spokesman.

"Historic Scotland takes allegations of bullying extremely seriously and operates a zero-tolerance policy. We are proactively addressing any issues raised in the surveys with staff."

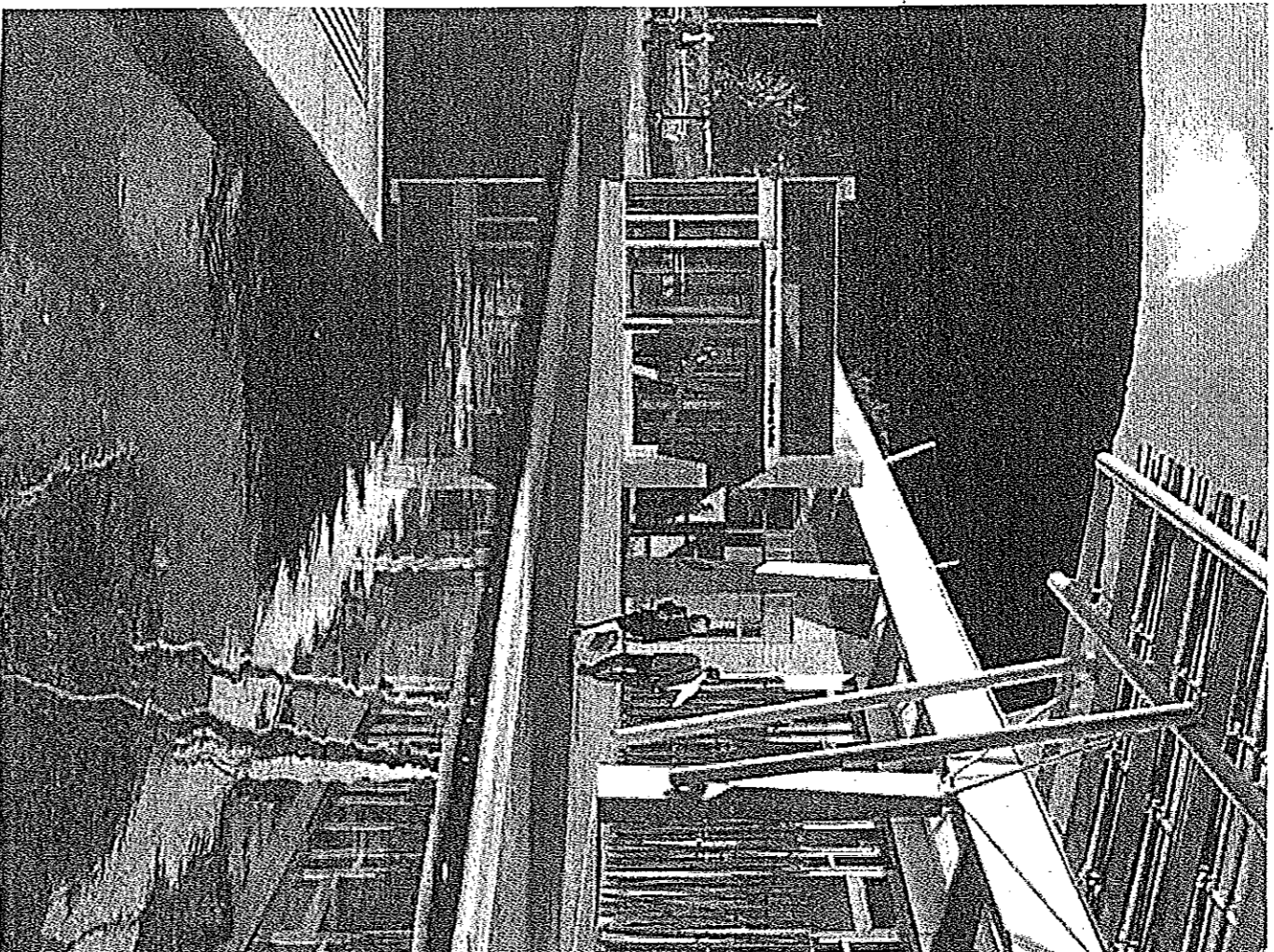
That task appears daunting. The well-being survey, conducted in October by an independent consultancy found that 53 individuals had reported some form of bullying. Five people said they were often subject to bullying, while two said they were "always bullied".

The report noted: "Given that the Health and Safety Executive promotes a zero-tolerance attitude to bullying, these statistics need to be seriously considered."

Ms Parsons, who spent two decades working for HM Customs and Excise, was appointed chief executive of Historic Scotland in October 2009, by Mike Russell, the then Culture Secretary.

Over the past 18 months, Doreen Grove, the head of understanding and access and Peter Bromley, the director of properties in care, have left the agency. Malcolm Cooper, chief inspector, quit last year after a stress-related illness, while Pat Connor, head of communications, took retirement at very short notice. Deborah Mays, head of policy and outreach, left early last month. It is known that others have been absent from work with stress-related illnesses.

"The reduction in senior staff at Historic Scotland isn't about cost-saving because they are replacing them with



## Critics angry at Holyrood's 'bonkers' £5m security hit

The Scottish Parliament, a £400 million classic of 21st-century architecture in concrete and bamboo, is to have a new security entrance that critics believe will destroy its distinctive appearance (Mike Wade writes).

Opponents are outraged that the £5 million construction will add a distinctive Scottish "hobby" to the front of the Stirling Prize-winning structure designed by the late Enric Miralles, one of the greatest Catalan architects of his generation.

According to Lee Boyd, the architect, the extension will be "respectful of the original architectural intent and influenced by the strong lines in the landscape". The

principal wall will be clad in granite, while the entrance area will be glazed.

Critics of the scheme question whether it is required at all. They complain that the demands of security have already led to the siting of scores of bollards along the front of the building against the possibility of ram raiders and the construction of new turnstiles, at a total cost of about £1.8 million.

Lord Steel of Aikwood, the former presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament, described the new scheme as "more than bonkers" last night.

"Probably what happened is that a security expert arrived from London with London ideas, and said 'You must do this' and they just rolled over."

he said: "Whatever you think of the Miralles building, for it or against it, it is a distinctive building on its own. You can't just stick a block in front of it."

George Reid, Lord Steel's successor, said: "My concerns are twofold. Firstly it seems a very significant sum of money at a time of financial stringency. Secondly, there is a consistency about Miralles' design. I'm not sure that this does anything but detract from it."

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) defended the proposed extension. The work had been awarded to Lee Boyd after a design competition, in which EMBT, Miralles' former firm, is said to have taken part.

"The security advice offered to be listened to. If it wasn't, and there was an incident, someone would be hung out to dry," said an RIAS spokesman.



Ruth Parsons, appointed chief executive in 2009

highly salaried civil servants," said an informed source. "Historic Scotland's approach is incompetent, characterised by a complete lack of knowledge, skills, background and capability, and therefore totally ill-suited to fulfil the role required under legislation."

This picture of fractious management-staff relations has emerged as Historic Scotland faces huge financial and organisational challenges. The agency took a 25 per cent cut in autumn's budget, announced by John Swinney, the Finance Secretary, slashing its funding from £47 million to £35.7 million in 2014-15.

At the same time, the agency is conducting an appraisal of the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland, an independent body that for the past century has recorded Scotland's built heritage.

Many critics fear that the appraisal will lead to a takeover, justified by Historic Scotland as a necessary move in straitened times.

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