

STROUD & DISTRICT NEWSWoodchester: *Restoration work starts*

£285,000 staircase project begins

11/8/97.

CRAFTSMEN have just started work on a £285,000 project to repair the grand stair at Woodchester Mansion.

The work is part of a vision to restore the unfinished mansion which is widely regarded as a time capsule showing the anatomy of Victorian building techniques.

The repairs to the grand staircase, expected to last 18 months, are some of the most extensive and challenging ever carried out on stone vaulting in the UK.

The craftsmen will have to partially dismantle and replace the unusual stone vault which forms a sloping ceiling over the staircase.

As well as undertaking the restoration work, Lichfield-based company Linford-Bridgeman will also have a rare opportunity to rediscover some of the lost skills and techniques employed by its Victorian predecessors.

Its craftsmen will later offer a series of training masterclasses, in

by Sue Painter

conjunction with the Woodchester Mansion Trust, to share this knowledge with new generations of students and craftsmen.

Woodchester Mansion was commissioned by the wealthy Roman Catholic businessman William Leigh in 1854 and was designed by Benjamin Bucknall as a synthesis of French Gothic revival theory and the local Cotswold tradition.

Work on the mansion took place over 14 years until, for some unknown reason, the workmen downed tools when it was three-quarters complete.

Some say Leigh ran out of money while others believe that his doctor advised him not to live in the damp valley.

Today the unfinished mansion is home to a colony of bats and cared for by the Woodchester Mansion Trust.

The building is opened to the



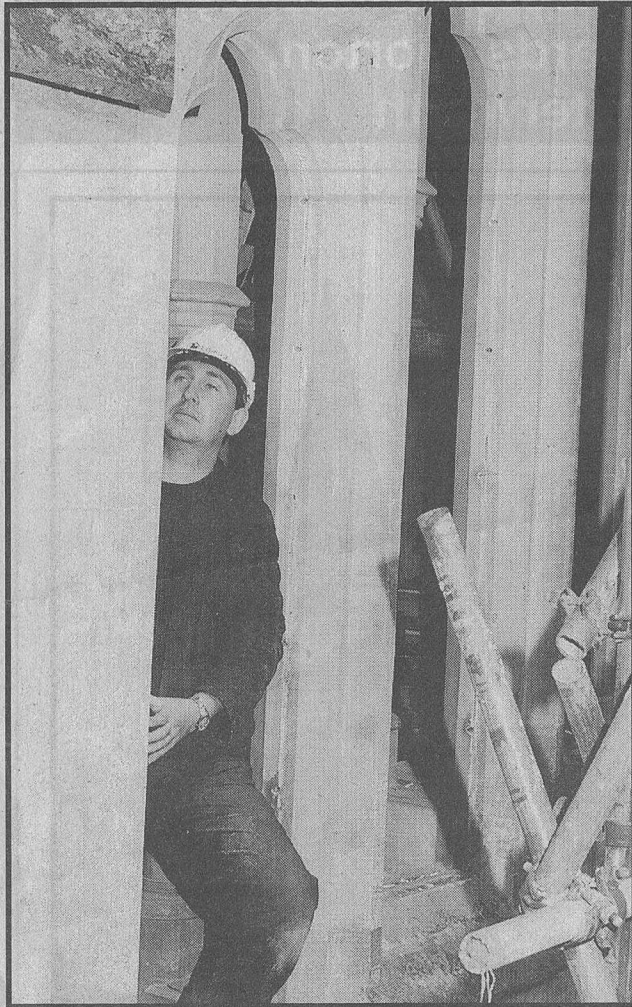
■ Woodchester Mansion – unfinished Victorian architectural masterpiece. ★

public at weekends during the summer.

The money for the restoration of the grand stair is part of a £815,000 grant from the National Lottery's Heritage Fund.

The aim of the trust is not to

complete the mansion, but to ensure it is restored to the same condition as when it was abandoned so that it will remain forever as an "unfinished masterpiece" of value to students of historical building techniques and of interest to the public.



■ Site agent Andy Chamberlain checks the condition of one of the arched windows flanking the grand stair at Woodchester Mansion. ★