



# A modern tragedy

One of Scotland's great post-war buildings lies derelict – but a dedicated band of campaigners aims to make sure there is a happy ending, finds *Caroline Ednie*

**M**urray Grigor, one of Scotland's foremost film directors, is urging me to do something against my lily-livered nature: scale and penetrate a perimeter fence that's obviously there for a reason. "Sneak in through the fence, it's quite an adventure," he says. After some thought, I take his advice and cast my caution aside. It's the only way I'll be able to check out what is, according to Grigor, "one of the most significant modern buildings in the UK".

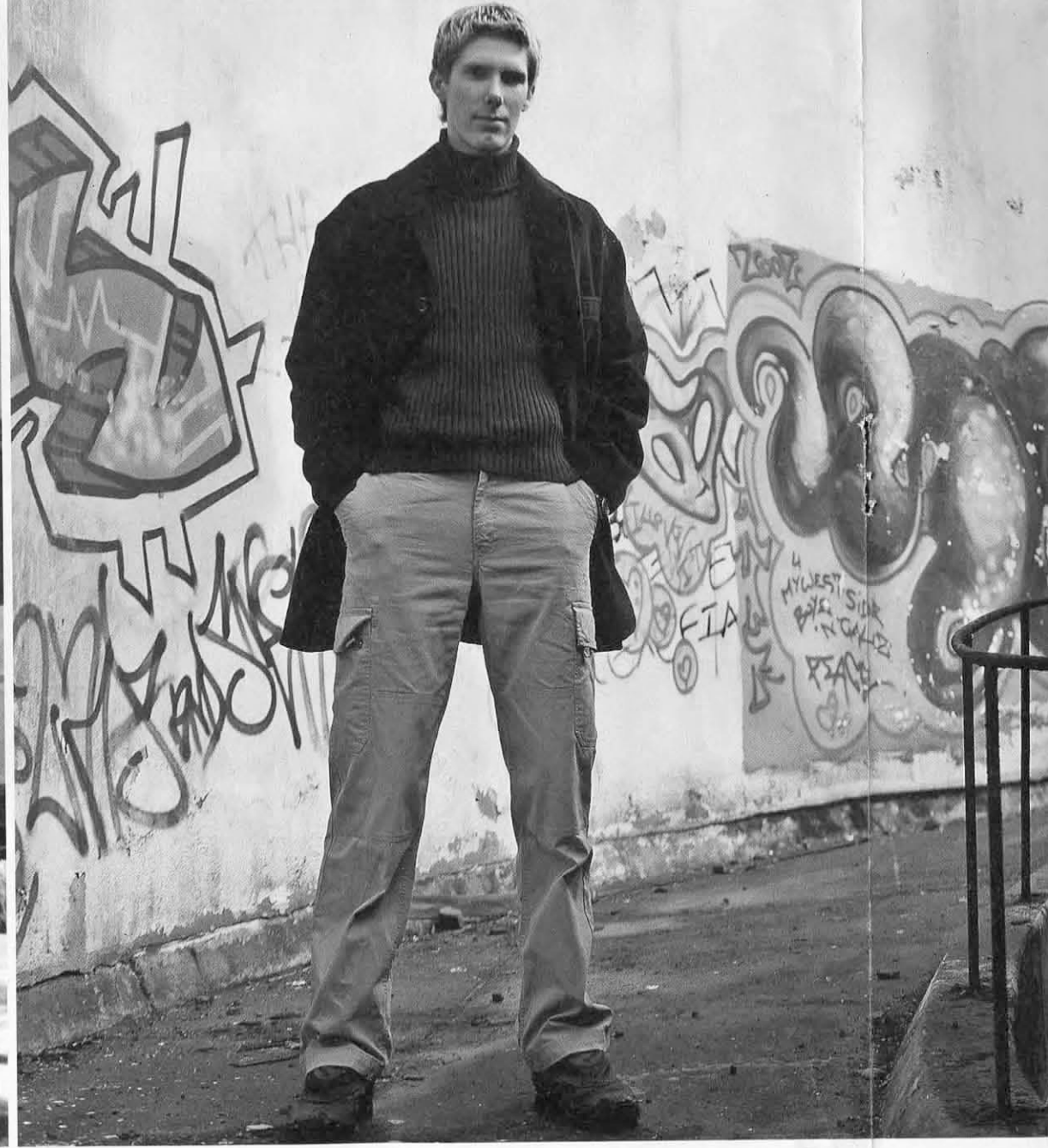
The perimeter fence in question isn't there merely to keep out the riff-raff. It's there primarily for safety reasons, as I discover when I reach the end of a mossy woodland path in Cardross. The "masterpiece of modernism" I'm here to see, namely St Peter's Seminary – designed and built in the 1960s by the Glasgow-based architectural practice Gillespie, Kidd and Coia – is now a crumbling, derelict ruin.

Indeed, as we walk through its now tangled ruins, my enthusiastic guide John Deffenbaugh, a recent architecture graduate with a passion for the building, constantly points out recent fallen timbers and new graffiti. He even concedes that "it looks like someone must have been up here recently with a pickaxe". Yet, despite having been at the mercy of vandals, inclement elements and the occasional arsonist since it closed its doors to student priests in 1980, St Peter's refuses to go away, both physically and as a presence in the consciousness of the country's creative community.

So why is the seminary so enduring, and indeed endearing? Well, the building did mark one of the high points in the extraordinarily fertile relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and Gillespie, Kidd and Coia, which spanned a period of around 40 years from 1931 to 1972. Designed in 1961 and completed in 1966, St Peter's is generally considered an expression of the

confidence of post-war Catholicism in the west of Scotland. It used the architectural language of the modern movement to achieve this: its sculptural expressiveness and its use of space and light evoked a sense of the sacred, and it had more than a passing nod to the extraordinary late-period religious buildings of Le Corbusier.

As a fully fledged living and breathing functional building, St Peter's wasn't without its problems. The influence of the Second Vatican Council of the sixties, with its ideals of a more outward-looking church, was somewhat at odds with the monastic nature of the seminary's design. And with the dramatic decline in the 1960s of young men entering into the priesthood, the building housed only around 50 student priests at its peak, even though it was designed for 100. There were also technical difficulties with the building, including some serious problems with water penetration; all of this led to a situation where,



It is estimated that one historic or architecturally important British building or monument has been lost through neglect every day since the end of the Second World War

