Rebuilding, Moving and Restoration: the dilemmas of preserving historic buildings

by Peter Jamieson

In 1989 Uppark, the important 17th-century country house in West Sussex belonging to the National Trust, was gutted by fire. Following this disastrous event the decision was taken to restore the house by way of an exhaustive forensic study of the debris that remained. For the way that the floors had collapsed meant that the fragments of the building and its contents could be studied in great detail and their former location pinpointed. Also in terms of the insurance it was cheaper to rebuild than declare a total write off. In addition, the restoration work provided an opportunity for traditional skills to be disseminated. Visiting the restored house is a strange experience for on the one hand there is the prior knowledge about its trauma and on the other, without an expert's eye, it easy to pass from room to room oblivious to the reality of its current state.

Such an approach was not possible at Clandon, also a National Trust property, following the recent fire, which gutted the building. Here the approach will be more in line with the 'accepted' practice of conservation of what remains and other interventions being clearly of their time.

The decision to rebuild Uppark was a significant departure from the attitudes to such events in the UK, which following the precepts of William Morris in his manifesto and subsequent conservation 'philosophy,' held that historic buildings once lost should not be rebuilt or 'restored'.

Likewise the moving of a historic building from one site to another is considered to be

Above, Clandon Park, an early 18th-century Grade I-listed Palladian house near Guildford, Surrey. It was long a seat of the Onslow family, and since 1956 has been owned by the National Trust. Below, 17th-century Uppark: on 30th August 1989 the building was devastated by a fire caused by a workman's blow-torch whilst repairing lead flashing on the roof, just two days before the work was due to be completed.

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton, West Sussex. The Museum covers 50 acres (20 ha), with nearly fifty historic buildings dating from the 13th to 19th centuries, along with gardens, farm animals, walks and a lake.

unacceptable because the building is the response to a particular set of circumstances. In moving the structure, it is this attachment to its particular location and all its historic associations that are lost. Nevertheless this still happens for particular reasons, for instance the desire to preserve a threatened building's type of construction. The Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton, West Sussex, has assembled a large collection of rural buildings, which would otherwise have been lost.

In the Czech Republic similar pressures prevail. The Friends of Czech Heritage have recently been involved in the conservation of a field barn at the open air museum at Chanovice in south-western Bohemia. Like the Weald and Downland Museum it is intent on preserving rural buildings at risk, which can only survive in a museum, like some endangered species. In the Czech Republic this is more urgent because of its history of collectivisation during the communist times and

Museum of National History, Skanzen, Chanovice.

The open-air museum has a growing collection of rare and threatened agricultural buildings and has a well-developed educational progamme for visitors.

Our grant has assisted the repair of a barn's structure, see lower left.

the subsequent upheavals that revolutionised farming methods. Much has been lost and few examples survive.

Perhaps more common is the temptation to replace missing parts of buildings that have been lost in an attempt to return them to some pre-existing state for which generally no firm records exist. The Friends of Czech Heritage project at Červený Dvůr is a case in point. The Watchman's Cottage (Mauricovna) is an important feature in the English Landscape park where only the walls and the original design drawing survive. The approach has been to put back the lost elements using standard craft techniques, which are still practised regularly in the Czech Republic. The building thus appears in a reconstructed form similar to the original but is clearly going to be a product of its time when completed. Perhaps this is a form of 'creative restoration'.

The temptation to rebuild buildings lost in some catastrophic event is very strong and we in the UK, despite the losses we sustained particularly during WW2, have by and large not followed this route. An example of our caution was the decision to leave Coventry Cathedral as a ruin and to build the new Cathedral alongside it. The tension resulting from this juxtaposition perhaps reveals more about the loss and resurgence than by simply rebuilding the skeletal remains.

But others take a different view and their national trauma has resulted in a different outcome. I recently visited the Catherine Palace at Tsarskoe Selo outside St Petersburg, which was stripped and left a hulk by the retreating German forces in 1943. As at Uppark it is easy to follow the guide through the glittering *enfilade* of grand rooms where the descendants of Peter the Great entertained, and to be seduced into accepting the timelessness of the experience. Yet, beneath this lies the need to acknowledge the heroism of the Russian people, their defence of their cultural roots and the need for the Soviet regime to demonstrate its historic legitimacy. Only by reinstating an accurate facsimile of what had been there originally could this be achieved.

Likewise the rebuilding of the Old City of Warsaw was necessary for the Poles to re-establish their historic identity following the near total destruction of the city by the Nazis. Strangely, the Germans themselves have also felt it necessary to repossess their past by the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche

Coventry Cathedral following its destruction by bombing during the Second World War, seen here on the right. Begun in 1955 after a competition, the new cathedral was consecrated in 1962, having become an international symbol of regeneration and reconciliation. The ruins of the old cathedral are seen on the left of the photograph.

in Dresden, which was completed only in 2005. But its loss was one of the events that continues to resonate through their own communal memory of WW2. As with the building of the new Coventry Cathedral, part of the imperative for the rebuilding was to demonstrate the act of reconciliation. Buildings are thus hugely important to cultural continuity and identity even though they may only have the appearance of the original.

The techniques now available increasingly make the reinvention of lost buildings possible either in a real or virtual world. The recent laser-cut stone reproduction of a portion of the stone arch from Palmyra destroyed by ISIS, which was put on display in Trafalgar Square, points the way. To knowledgeable observers its crudity was obvious, but this is just the beginning of what might be possible with developing technology.

The Friends of Czech Heritage naturally tend towards the attitudes of conservation and 'restoration' that prevail in the UK, but it is clear that at the edges of this there are other pressures, which on occasion seek a more invasive response and challenge the soft touch approach preached by William Morris and his supporters.

Peter Jamieson *is an architect and the Chairman of The Friends of Czech Heritage*

Above: *Tsarskoye Selo. Catherine I, wife of Peter the Great, Empress of Russia (1725-27) started to develop the site as a royal country residence. Her daughter, Empress Elizabeth and her architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli built the Catherine Palace. Later Empress Catherine II of Russia and her Scottish architect Charles Cameron extended the palace building.*

Below: *Warsaw Old Town was the oldest part of the city. During the invasion of Poland in 1939 much of the district was badly damaged by the Luftwaffe, which targeted the city's residential areas and historic landmarks. Immediately after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 what had been left standing was systematically blown up by the Nazi regime.*

Below: *the Frauenkirche, built in the 18th century, was destroyed in the bombing of Dresden during World War II. The ruins were left for fifty years as a war memorial, according to the decision of local East German leaders. The church was rebuilt after the reunification of Germany, starting in 1994. The reconstruction of its exterior was completed in 2004, and the interior in 2005.*