

Advantages and disadvantages of building restoration



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Using examples explore the advantages and disadvantages of allowing redevelopment and reconstruction of historic buildings.

For the purposes of this discussion it is primarily important to determine what is meant by historic and to rationalize the terms redevelopment and reconstruction. The terms will be used in the context of preserving and conserving buildings. This includes maintaining their predominant features and characteristics, whilst enhancing new features in keeping with the style and building constraints relating to traditional use of materials and resources. According to English Heritage buildings exist across the UK that span over a thousand years.

They also work with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and local authorities to allocate buildings such as these according to their criteria for listing – or categorizing for the purposes of their historic importance. These are identified using the following criteria:

- Those having architectural interest: buildings which are nationally important for the interest of their architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship; also important examples of particular building types and techniques.
- Those deemed of historic interest: this includes buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history.
- A variety of places that have a close historical association with nationally important buildings or events.

- Places which have group value, especially where buildings are part of an important architectural or historic group or are a fine example of planning (such as squares, terraces and model villages) ^[1]

English Heritage define historic in relation to a number of factors. All buildings constructed before 1700 are automatically listed. Similarly this is the case with most properties up to 1840. A number of post 1945 buildings are also included in these terms. A comprehensive breakdown of listed buildings statistics across the UK is illustrated below:

- 38% are domestic dwellings
- 15% date from before 1600
- nearly 20% date from the 17th century
- 31% from the 18th century
- 32% from the 19th century
- 3% from 1900-1944
- 0.2% from 1945 or later ^[2]

Introducing conventional features can have negative consequences on properties such as those defined above. Not only for cosmetic or domestic purposes but also in relation to implementing safety measures into a property. and accessibility by way of lifts and hand rails etc for the benefit of people with disabilities.

There is also a trend for interpreting properties of historical interest into entertainment or ‘edutainment’ orientated experiences which can be argued devalues the historic importance and often encourages historical inaccuracy from the learning perspective. The final consideration to be made in relation

to this essay question is the notion of whether old buildings should remain preserved exactly as they are without any enhancement, improvements, additions or restorations. That they should reflect the period they were constructed in and be immortalized as a historical or scientific study.

This paper will seek to exemplify many of these issues relating to the redevelopment and reconstruction of historic buildings which covers a broad argument for discussion.

The English Tourist Board published a paper in 1991 entitled ' Maintaining the Balance' which proposed new schemes designed to ensure that historic town environments worked in sync with their communities whilst providing the visitor with a traditional experience. Visitor Management Plans were adopted and Town Centre Managers were recruited as means of taking these initiatives forward. The conservation and preservation of built heritage often involves maintaining tight restrictions and limited planning opportunities which is not conducive to new housing projects or business opportunities which could generate enterprise and economic benefits. Instead many of the UK's classified historic towns remain stagnant and non progressive. ^[3]

Similarly there are currently plans to renovate and restore the city centre of Amsterdam in keeping with its cultural heritage. The city centre is divided by two groups of residents. One enjoys the aesthetic benefits of living in this area, while the second are simply living centrally for the purposes of work and being close to amenities. This second group is unconcerned with the historical importance of the city and is not prepared to invest in maintaining or developing it as such. Often when areas such as this are under

preservation orders high costs are incurred for maintenance and renovation in the style accustomed to the period. This in turn raises the rents of properties which become too high for existing residents to afford, eventually forcing them out of their homes, as is feared in Amsterdam. [4]

When considering the practical aspects of individual houses, when a building is disassembled or exposed for the purposes of renovation or reconstruction, a great many vital elements which are original to its heritage can be lost. This might include clay or lime mortars used in between joist, foundations and chimney linings. Wooden frames held together by pegs can fracture if disengaged and it is crucial that that high levels of carpentry skills and traditional craftsmanship techniques are applied when rebuilding and renovating buildings. [5]

There are an abundance of sites, Museums and stately homes which are testaments to 'living history' and function for the benefit of the public across the world today. Colonial Williamsburg and the Historic Charleston Foundation in the United States, Slave Forts in Africa and Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in the UK to name a few. They all encourage the preservation of old buildings. With this redevelopment comes the opportunity of numerous availability of grants and Heritage Lottery funding to help with this process. They enable people to remain aware of what is important historically and that reflects the lives and communities from which we all originate. People managing these processes need the necessary expertise with which to achieve these renovations and reconstructions. Acquiring documentation of age is essential as is being true to the period in

which it was built architecturally. Architectural historians in the United States for example have divided buildings into around half a dozen significant periods of half a century each. These phases are then sub-divided into overlapping periods. Even then not all of these categories are universally recognized. ^[6] This suggests reason enough for ensuring that each building selected for re-development is accurately assessed and renovated accordingly and appropriately. It is important also to remember that this is not a new phenomenon. In 1877 the painter and writer William Morris wrote a manifesto against the proposed restoration of Tewkesbury Abbey. During this and subsequent periods architects considered restoration to be about changing a building for the purposes of altering it to reflect its key historical importance. For example during the late nineteenth century many Anglo-Saxon churches in the UK were ‘restored’ into Gothic interpretations. This was a reflection of people’s attitudes then surrounding medieval masons, who were deemed uninitiated into religion. Consequently the Gothic form and design purported to purist representations and was in essence closer to God. ^[7]

It is important then to remember that when renovating buildings they do not become exploited for the benefit of contemporary tastes and trends. It can be argued that many of these ‘living history’ experiences have become just that and are able to be devalued very easily.

Accuracy based on the facts available to the architects is what should remain of paramount importance when reconstructing any historic building.

One of the most exceptional examples of reconstruction to be seen today is with the city of Warsaw in Poland. During the Second World War over 85% of the city centre was destroyed. A huge campaign and total restoration took place over a number of years. The results of which stand today including replica churches, palaces and a market places all sensitively and historically representative of a history which spans some eight hundred years in its reconstruction. [8]

On the other hand reconstruction is never going to be entirely accurate in some instances and it is these examples that encourage debate. Take for example the tourist reconstruction site at Mount Vernon in Washington where the coach house, slave quarters/ greenhouse and 'stercorary' have all been restored following fire damage that occurred in the mid nineteenth century. Some of which was based on documents and reminiscence accounts from past generations. Parts of the stercorary were rebuilt in 2001 incorporating the original cobbled stones and brickwork uncovered by archaeologists with research sourcing a drawing from 1807 which provided structural accuracy to be maintained. However when builders came to reconstruct the blacksmiths shop the old plantation ledgers illustrated detailed records pertaining to its location and activities. Whilst other archives provided details relating to the working blacksmiths themselves. Nonetheless contradictions began to appear relating to the shop's exact location and its appearance during the year 1799. This contention has raged for over fifty years and has raised all the issues regarding physical reconstruction and the amount of evidence that is required in order to

support the justification for re-building the property without sufficient authenticity. [9]

Another similar example of this where reconstruction has been curtailed is with the handling of Franklin Court in Philadelphia, the residencies of the former President Benjamin Franklin. During the 1970's an extensive programme of research both archaeological and archival was carried out on the assumption that the house and grounds would be renovated and fully furnished into an interpretative museum. But the research revealed little evidence of any pictures or drawings of what the house had actually looked like. Consequently no reconstruction took place other than the outbuildings and grounds which had retained more documented evidence. Proving that accuracy is reassuringly not always taken for granted in this type of work.

Future functional requirements of a building are also aspects of development to consider within a historic building, as the law now governs that public buildings need to comply with the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) by ensuring they have accessible routes both internal and external as well as ramps, lifts and toilets where necessary. This legislative requirement has had an impact on the way in which many historic buildings have had to alter their environment, which is of course an enormous and necessary benefit for people with a disability; although it remains one more area of concern where public renovations and redevelopments are taking place.

The most heated debate in terms of redevelopment of historic buildings is of course a matter of architectural and archaeological appreciation. Some sites are considered simply not available to be rebuilt. Sites such as Pompeii for <https://assignbuster.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-building-restoration/>

example or the Pyramids of Egypt. They are revered as preserved examples of the past, museums in their own right. They consist of ruins which are fragile and vulnerable. If these ruins become too fragile or it becomes impossible to maintain them then it is understandable that some sort of structure may have to be built around them. This may of course eventually decrease the visual enjoyment of a historical building which is why so many sites of importance are now being re-built. Such historical monuments are now able to be reconstructed far more easily by way of digitization. Several digital projects of this type exist for educational purposes and are becoming more widespread. In addition many historic houses like the Queens House in Greenwich, London provide significant 3D models that demonstrate the different architectural development of the construction and alterations over time. ^[10] Technology has become so precise and truthful in its interpretations that this may prevail as the preferred method of reconstruction and development in the future.

Many historic buildings get demolished just because they are old, so the modern appreciation for rebuilding and conserving these properties are essential to maintaining the cultural heritage of nations throughout the world. However it is important that the historic environment from which they have descended is fully understood. The right skills, techniques and materials from an archaeological perspective are fundamental to ensuring this process is achieved accurately and sensitively.

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