

THE EARL OF EUSTON THE PRINCIPLES OF CONSERVATION AND REPAIR

The opportunity for discussion of the basic principles of the conservation of historical monuments recalls that in the early years of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, great attention was paid by William Morris, John Ruskin and their many friends to work on historic buildings, not only in England, but abroad. Great anxiety was expressed at the vigour with which what was described as "barbarous and stupid destruction under the pretext of restoration" was being pursued. So violent was the feeling and so well-nigh insurmountable the difficulties of effective action that papers explaining the Society's principles and protesting against the destruction were prepared, translated into Italian and other languages and circulated widely.

Our early Reports refer for instance to the destruction of the whole of the Mercato Vecchio, one of the most picturesque remaining portions of Florence, the concern felt for the old houses on the Ponte Vecchio which were threatened with demolition, and the restoration of the Fondaco dei Turchi, the noblest of all the early buildings of its kind in Venice. John Ruskin in his "Stones of Venice" had a great deal to say and his stormy comment "Restoration is a lie from beginning to end" became a kind of war-cry. It was destruction such as this in England, the restoration at St. Albans, and the threat to Tewkesbury Abbey, which brought about the foundation of The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877.

This was eighty-seven years ago, and a great deal has been achieved meanwhile in the increase of knowledge and by the constant and continuing study of methods designed to conserve a building and avoid the need of "restoration". Some people might question whether it is necessary in repairing work to be bound by principles, but as it so often applies, principles are in fact the foundations upon which to secure the satisfying and successful retention of the historical proof of an old building.

Old buildings are a source of interest and pleasure to all of us and particularly to those who care for history and art. There are very few things which may help the student to visualise the past as the buildings which the past has left to us.

Through them we discover the habits and customs as well as the religious and aesthetic feelings of their builders, and in destroying such buildings we destroy records as valuable as documents and books. A building needs not be destroyed by a house-breaker only; all its value as a work of art or an historic document can be just as effectively obliterated by restoration. The works which have been carried out under the name of "Restoration" have resulted in large numbers of ancient buildings losing so much of their authentic character that they have become not only of little value but actually misleading. The restorer professes to be able to bring an ancient building back to its original condition and appearance

by faithfully and minutely reproducing all that has been lost or destroyed, and by making the new work resemble the old as nearly as possible. Surely no great knowledge of art is needed to see the fallacy of this, to see that personal qualities and influences were the essence of the ancient work. To produce a Gothic Cathedral, for example, it would be necessary first to return to mediaeval faith and mediaeval thought.

These qualities and influences cannot be revived and what they produced can never be remade. In the Middle Ages, men learned to plan and design their comparatively simple buildings through working on stone or wood with hammer and chisel, and learned to design through their materials. The carvings done by the mason were the teaching aids of the Middle Ages as well as the embellishments. The mason hoped to become Master and to design buildings on principles inherited from schools by trial and error. He did not begin at the drawing board, but ended at it, and the plans and elevations he produced would nowadays be considered laughably inadequate. An these methods did not suddenly disappear in England at the Reformation. The Elizabethan mansion, the Cotswold village, the farms and barns and cottages scattered over the length and breadth of England were erected up till 1700, in the vast majority of cases, not by people whom we should now call architects, but by craftsmen.

Even when the Architect in the modern meaning of the word began to appear, at first of course only in the most important and costly buildings, drawings did not give the precise instructions that they do at present. Comparison of the drawings passed for St. Paul's Cathedral for example, with the building itself, show that a good deal of the designing was done as the building progressed. Wren's master craftsmen occupied a much more independent position with regard to the architect than their successors would do now.

Again, one of the charms of mediaeval architecture is that not two buildings are alike; for when we come to study the details we find that variety exists even where the features appear at first sight to be exact counterparts of one another. Therefore, it is *impossible* to reproduce ancient work even if it were desirable to do so, the only way in which we can truthfully restore is by putting back in its original position any actual object which has been found to be out of place. Even were it possible to reproduce lost work, in artistic matters, honesty is the best policy, just as much as in other affairs of life.

The restorer is in reality operating a forgery and if he succeeds in deceiving and makes people believe that his new work is an ancient work, he falsifies an historical record; if, on the other hand, he is unsuccessful and it can be seen that an old work has been tampered with, he raises a doubt as to the authenticity of the genuine work. Mediaeval builders altered the work of their predecessors, it is true, but it should be stressed that there is no sort of parallel between modern restorers and mediaeval builders. We all know that from early days constant alterations in, or additions to the building of churches were made, but in such cases, whatever was done was executed in the style prevailing at the time of the new work, and not in imitation of any former style. Mediaeval builders destroyed work which probably we should have wished them to retain; but at any rate they put in its place work which has the essential qualities possessed by every true work of art; and it is to a large extent their additions and alterations which made these buildings so historically valuable as showing the growth of the various styles. Unless original drawings in sufficient details have been preserved the restorer

can at best only hope to add to a building, or to put in the place of the work he destroys, a more or less conjectural copy in one of these styles of architecture, and the result, both as a work of art and as a record of the past, must of necessity be without value.

It was to oppose this process of so-called "restoration" and to urge that protection should take its place, that the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was founded.

It should never be forgotten that our ancient architecture is limited in quantity, and that by no expenditure of money and skill can it be increased or replaced. What remains therefore, must be preserved with the utmost care. To attain this end the Society has always urged that old buildings should be made fit for the purpose for which they were originally built, and kept in use, elaborate alterations or additions not being recommended. We hold that when additions are essential the existing building should not be tampered with, but the modern work should be simple and unpretentious, of good material and workmanship and frankly the production of the present day. Modern work attached to an ancient building if undertaken simply and directly, without attempting to copy any particular style, is far less injurious to the expression of the structure than any more learned and self-asserting efforts to imitate the older work. The question of the enlargement or alteration of an ancient building is one requiring the most careful consideration before a decision is come to.

Finally, if we want to retain in our old buildings the indescribable charm which every genuine work of art possesses, it is essential to preserve, not only their more elaborate and ornamental details, but also the simplest portions, such as plain wall surfaces, clear glass, old brick, stone or tile paving, rough-cast and the like, for all these are part of an artistic whole, the beauty of which we cannot hope to increase, but may easily injure or destroy.

On founding the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings William Morris drew up the Manifesto which forms the historical basis upon which the Society works, and in it he wrote:

"It is for all buildings, therefore, of all times and styles, that we plead, and call upon those who have to deal with them, to put Protection in the place of Restoration, to stave off decay by daily care, to prop a perilous wall or mend a leaky roof by such means as are obviously meant for support or covering, and show no pretence of other art, and otherwise to resist all tampering with either the fabric or ornament of the building as it stands; if it has become inconvenient for its present use, to raise another building rather than alter or enlarge the old one; in fine to treat our ancient buildings as monuments of a bygone art, created by bygone masters, that modern art cannot meddle with without destroying.

"Thus, and thus only, shall we escape the reproach of our learning being turned into a snare to us; thus, and thus only can we protect our ancient buildings, and hand them down instructive and venerable to those that come after us".

THE EARL OF EUSTON
LES PRINCIPES DE CONSERVATION ET DE RESTAURATION
RÉSUMÉ.

L'inquiétude pour l'avenir des monuments historiques en Angleterre ou ailleurs et le besoin qui se fait sentir de les protéger contre les dégradations atteignirent un point culminant en 1877 avec l'institution, en Angleterre, de la Société pour la protection des Monuments anciens. Son fondateur, William Morris, souligna les principes qui devaient être suivis pour la conservation et la réparation des vieux monuments dans le Manifeste qu'il écrivit lorsqu'il instaura la Société, et il dit notamment;

« C'est pour tous les monuments donc, de tous les temps et de tous les styles, que nous plaidons et attirons l'attention de tous ceux qui s'y intéressent. Il faut protéger au lieu de restaurer afin de les soustraire au délabrement, par des soins de chaque jour: soutenir un mur qui va tomber, réparer un toit qui présente des fuites et, par tous les moyens appropriés à l'échafaudage et à la couverture, et sans prétendre à faire oeuvre d'artiste. A part cela, il faut résister à la tentation d'altérer en ajoutant des ouvrages ou des ornements à l'édifice qui doit rester tel qu'il est. Si cela n'est pas possible à cause de la destination de l'édifice, il faut élever un autre ouvrage sans altérer ou élargir l'ancien. Enfin, il faut traiter nos anciens monuments comme des monuments de l'art de jadis, créés par des Maîtres de jadis que l'art moderne ne peut toucher sans les détruire. »

Beaucoup de travaux ont été exécutés depuis que le mouvement a commencé et la connaissance des experts en architecture médiévale s'est accrue à la suite de l'étude constante et continue des méthodes préconisées pour conserver les monuments anciens, protéger avec succès et conserver à notre satisfaction les preuves historiques que sont les vieux monuments.

Le célèbre livre de Ruskin Les pierres de Venise contient ce commentaire: « La restauration est un mensonge du commencement à la fin ». Ce véritable « cri de guerre » comporte et résume les buts et les objets de l'activité de la Société pour la Protection des monuments anciens.