A REPORT INTO RECENT PRACTICE FOLLOWING CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE AT HISTORIC PLACES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO BRIGHTON'S WEST PIER

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1 Introduction

1.1 Following fire damage to both the Pavilion and the Concert Hall at the West Pier in the Spring of 2003, Brighton and Hove City Council asked English Heritage for advice on whether the proposed repair/restoration of the pier should go ahead. In February 2003 planning permission had been granted, subject to the conclusion of an agreement under S. 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act for the restoration of the pier, funded in part by enabling development at the landward end. English Heritage had argued that the balance of advantage lay with the proposals at that stage – the harmful effect of the enabling development on the character of the Conservation Area was more than offset by the benefit to that character of the restoration of the West Pier.

1.2 The main issue for consideration by English Heritage has therefore been what framework to use to re-evaluate the situation following the fires. Research during the summer and autumn of 2003 has captured past policy following disasters at historic assets. This has allowed a process of comparison, so that our advice would not be inconsistent with similar circumstances elsewhere. In addition, knowing that the outcome would be of no little interest beyond Brighton, it was important that English Heritage's advice was situated in the context of international rather than just national approaches to conservation in the twenty-first century.

1.3 At the outset of our research, English Heritage's policy on repairing historic buildings dated from Christopher Brereton's 1995 book *The Repair of Historic Buildings*[1] while Government policy dated from 1994 (in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 Planning and the Historic Environment*[2] *Annex C.6).* The social and economic context of conservation has changed substantially since that publication, and it was soon clear that it would not provide the robust framework needed to advise on the proper future for the West Pier. A more recent policy (2001) has been agreed for restoration of ancient monuments which draws on a wider international debate on approaches to conservation – *Restoration, Reconstruction, and Speculative Recreation of Archaeological Sites including Ruins* [3]. Although use of this policy framework for the West Pier, as a listed building, was inappropriate, its approach reflected more current thinking, particularly in adopting the definitions and concepts of the Burra Charter, which itself derives from the Venice Charter [4]. Furthermore,

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1 C Brereton, *The Repair of Historic Buildings: Advice on Principles and Methods*, English Heritage, London, 1995.

2 PPG 15, *Planning and the Historic Environment*, Department of the Environment/Department of National Heritage, 1994

3 *Restoration, Reconstruction, and Speculative Recreation of Archaeological Sites including Ruins*, English Heritage Policy Statement, 2001.

4 ICOMOS Australia (1999), *Charter for the Conservation of Places of Conservation*

part of the context for the English Heritage policy for ancient monuments is the Riga Charter on *Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage* which addresses directly the sort of dilemma that the current study was set up to resolve[5].

1.4 Article 6 of the Riga Charter advises that

In exceptional circumstances, reconstruction[6] of cultural heritage lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable when the monument concerned has outstanding artistic, symbolic or environmental (whether urban or rural) significance for regional history and cultures [or] when used as an administrative measure to fight against purposeful destruction of cultural heritage provided that

(a) appropriate survey and historical documentation is available (including iconographic, archival or material evidence);
(b) the reconstruction does not falsify the overall urban or landscape context; and
(c) existing significant historic fabric will not be damaged; and

providing always that the need for reconstruction has been established through full and open consultations among national and local authorities and the community concerned.

1.5 In this document the following definitions are used:

Restoration means returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material.
Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material into the fabric.
Recreation means speculative creation of a presumed earlier state on the basis of surviving evidence from that place and other sites and on deductions drawn from that evidence, using new materials.
Replication means the construction of a copy of a structure or building, usually on another site or nearby.[7]

1.6 English Heritage believes that the three tests in the Riga Charter provide an internationally validated framework for the re-evaluation of the proposals for the West Pier. This report, therefore, explores these tests in relation to the pier and the proposals for which Brighton and Hove City Council was minded to grant conditional planning permission in February 2003. The report also relates the debate over the West Pier to previous similar circumstances so that consistency can be assessed. In particular, past practices set the benchmark for the appropriateness of survey and historical documentation required by the first test of the three and allow critical review of the outcomes in relation to the second and third tests.

Significance ('The Burra Charter'), Sydney, 1981. This built upon the earlier ICOMOS, *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* ('The Venice Charter'), Venice, 1964.

5 The Riga Charter on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage, agreed in Riga, 23-4 October, 2000.

6 See paragraph 1.5 for definitions

7 *Restoration, Reconstruction, and Speculative Recreation of Archaeological Sites including Ruins*, English Heritage Policy Statement, 2001, para 5.

1.7 Addressing the Riga tests allows a conclusion to be arrived at on *whether* reconstruction of the West Pier would respect national and international guidance. As the case studies demonstrate, however, a number of options exist for *how* to reconstruct. Discussion of this follows on from the discussion of the case studies.

1.8 Before embarking on the re-evaluation, however, it is worth considering why the case of the West Pier is such a contentious one for conservation practitioners, such that what seems to some to be a straightforward matter in fact takes a detailed study to resolve. This issue must be addressed head-on if the conclusions of this report are to be understood by the profession as well as by its wider audiences. Section 2 of this report therefore explores the development of thought on conservation practice with a view to tackling the central question of authenticity in relation to structures such as piers.

1.9 Throughout this report, reference is made to previous disasters at historic places. The case studies chosen were mostly those where reconstruction had been undertaken following fire damage (Hill Hall [SAM, Grade I]; York Minster [Grade I]; Hampton Court [Grade I]; Uppark [Grade I]; Prior Park [Grade I]; Windsor Castle [SAM, Grade I]; Harrington Hall [Grade I]; Holy Trinity, Buckfastleigh [Grade I]; High Street, Totnes [South Gate, Grade II*; rest Grade II]; Parliament Buildings, Stormont, [Grade I]; Bridge Street, Chester [all Grade II]; Cowgate, Edinburgh [conservation area listing] but two were due to terrorist action (the Baltic Exchange [Grade II*] and St Ethelburga, Bishopsgate, [Grade I] both City of London). The latter, although apparently not asking the same questions (neither was damaged by fire, so evidence was not physically consumed) actually required some of the same questions to be asked in terms of evidence, particularly at St Ethelburga's church, because the evidence was obfuscated by the catastrophic event.

2 Philosophical Approaches

2.1 The philosophy lying behind Brereton (1995) and all the repair schemes reviewed to a greater or lesser extent was the very English Ruskinian-Morrisian tradition of *conservative repair*. It was developed over many years, first by Ruskin, then by Morris, Webb and their followers particularly in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. It has spread with English governmental and quasi-governmental support, so that it has now reached an international level where it has increasingly informed international charters and protocols.

2.2 Ruskin's views are contained in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, published in 1849. Morris's thoughts were codified in the preliminary statement of SPAB, originally made in 1877 and revised long after his death as the SPAB Manifesto in 1917. Ruskin's views were trenchant, as might be expected: 'Do not let us talk of restoration. The thing is a lie from beginning to end'.[8] W R Lethaby, architect, and friend and disciple of both Morris and Webb,

[8] J Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, London, 1849. It is noteworthy in the context of the pier that his strictures on restoration were applied to architecture. Elsewhere in *The Seven Lamps* he points out that buildings constructed in cast iron could not be architecture as they were constructed without marks of manufacture, ie making by hand.

summarised the Ruskinian-Morrisian tradition in his biography of Philip Webb.[9]

Old buildings are, as Morris said, 'wonderful treasures all the more priceless in this age of the world, when the newly invented story of living history is the chief joy of so many lives'. The England that we love is the England of old towns, tilled fields, little rivers, farms, churches and cottages. If by violently marring the fair country and vulgarizing the shy old buildings we obtain so much to love, what shall it profit? Without an England to love we cannot remain stout of heart and enduring. Civilization cannot be had merely as a word – it rests on foundations.

To some minds antiquity has a claim on their reverence and the marks of age are guarantees of authenticity; when once assurance is gone an ancient work of art is practically destroyed. To paint and sell sham Raphaels is forgery, and it should be recognized that to design and execute sham parts of buildings in association with the real thing is a fraud. Where an ancient building has inferior or less ancient parts, such parts are at least older than anything we can order to be done, and they are little disturbing, for we easily recognize them for what they are. It is wise to carry all forward together; there is one beauty of homogeneity and another beauty of complex accretion. To maintain continuity is the only proper policy. A building ceases to be ancient in the degree in which it is renewed and additions made to it. If, however, additions must (as we say) be made, they should be as unobtrusive as possible and frankly modern. Minor repairs which are workmanlike and obviously protective may almost give additional pleasure. The best repair is a sort of building surgery which aims at conservation. A building properly cared for will be all the more lovely because it bears the evidence that it is understood and valued. Such principles open up a whole new art of building conservation. A well done, unaffectedly modern piece of building cannot be offensive, and a study of old art should teach that every manner of building belonged to its own day only. Right understanding of the ancient would make us modern and produce a form of building art proper for today.

2.3 According to this philosophy, buildings and monuments should not be falsified during repairs by using inappropriate repair techniques, nor should additions and extensions be made which might mislead the onlooker into thinking that they were part of the original building (the widespread concern that additions should be carried out in a 'frankly modern' manner). Lost features should not be replaced unless there is clear evidence of what was there, no damage is done to the building as a 'complex accretion' and a justification is available which can be seen explicitly to override these various policies.

2.4 Although deeply ingrained in English architectural and conservation discourse, it is important to realise that conservative repair has not been and is not now the only philosophical approach to conservation. It was always unlikely to be so because, although resonant in its romantic call to Englishness, it was about the slow creep of time rather than architectural design, and architecture is as much an art of design as of emotion. Although both Ruskin and Morris were very interested in aesthetics, they were not really interested in design as a part of the architectural process. 'For Morris conservation was not the ethical duty described in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, it was a passionate attempt to protect something of emotional

[9] W R Lethaby, *Philip Webb and his Work*, Oxford, 1935, 156-7.

value'.[10] Viollet-le-Duc, the great French contemporary of Ruskin and Morris, realised that for buildings to survive they needed uses and he therefore accepted change. Of course, as has been pointed out, Viollet-le-Duc was a modern and can be expected to have differed from Ruskin and Morris who emphatically were not. 'He neither defied the march of time, nor celebrated its destructive power'.[11] While Ruskin and Morris were essentially interested in fabric, in buildings as examples of craftsmanship, Viollet was much more interested in them as designs, as works of the art of architecture.

2.5 Whereas it is often taken that conservative repair developed as implicit criticism of what is usually caricatured as Viollet's love of over-thorough restoration, his ideas were actually explicitly critical of conservative repair. In his writing on 'Restauration', having discussed a number of examples, he asks whether repair should maintain historic defects in buildings. 'No, certainly … Absolute principles may lead to absurdities.'[12] Viollet, in fact, took a middle way: 'it is as inadvisable to restore by reproducing a facsimile of all that we find in a building, as by presuming to substitute for later forms those that must have existed originally'.[13] He saw that buildings had to work: 'Since all the edifices whose restoration is undertaken have a special destination – a particular use – the role of restorer of antique arrangements, now obsolete, cannot be assumed to the utter exclusion of the question of actual utility. The edifice ought not to be less convenient when it leaves the architect's hands than it was before the restoration'.[14] And he was no speculator. 'The architect should not be thoroughly satisfied, nor set his men to work, until he has discovered the combination that best and most simply accords with the vestiges of ancient work; to decide on an arrangement *a priori*, without having gained all the information that should regulate it, is to fall into hypothesis; and in works of restoration nothing is so dangerous as hypothesis'.[15]

2.6 Viollet even wrote of the reconstruction of ruins. 'Hence, when, for example, the completion of a building partly in ruins is in question, before beginning it will be necessary to search for and examine all that remains; to collect the smallest fragments, taking care to note the point where they were found; and not to begin the work until their place and use have been assigned to all these remains, as with the pieces of a puzzle. If these precautions are neglected, the most annoying misconceptions may result, and a fragment discovered after the completion of a restoration may clearly prove that you were mistaken … In erecting the new constructions he should as far as possible replace these old remains even if injured; this will furnish a guarantee for the sincerity and exactitude of his investigations'.[16] Viollet would have appreciated the

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10 C Miele, The Life and Soul of Monuments and not Their Bodies Merely: William Morris and the SPAB, , *Proceedings of the ACO (IHBC) School, Canterbury*, 1997, 15.

11 D Brock, Jam Tomorrow and Jam Yesterday*, Proceedings of the ACO (IHBC) School, Canterbury*, 1997, 42.

12 E E Viollet-le-Duc, *The Architectural Theory of Viollet-le-Duc: Readings and Commentary*, ed. M F Hearn, Cambridge, Mass., 274. The section quoted there derives from the article on 'Restauration' from Viollet's *Dictionnaire Raisonné de l'Architecture Française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, Paris, 1854-68, translated by Gail Phillips.

13 Ibid., 270.

14 Ibid., 276. He goes on: 'Speculative archaeologists very often disregard present requirements and severely censure the architect for having made concessions to them; as if the building confided to his treatment were his own, and as if he were not pledged to carry out the programme given him'.

15 Ibid., 278.

16 Ibid., 278.

care with which decorative plasterwork was re-used and replaced in the ceilings at Uppark, and with which stonework was re-used in the masonry dome of the Frauenkirche in Dresden.[17]

2.7 Also often given less than its due in English conservation discourse is a visual/aesthetic tradition which developed around Gordon Cullen, among others. Deriving from conceptions of urban design, it provided the background to the development of conservation area policies, including both enhancement strategies and facadism, the latter conflicting, of course, with conservative repair philosophies as well as contemporary architectural mores.[18] Though the conservative repair tradition has a long history and has been widely publicised by a very successful body (SPAB) dedicated to its dissemination, visual/aesthetic approaches to conservation have never received the same attention.

2.8 In essence, the three philosphical camps characterised above privilege different attributes in historic places. For the Ruskinian/Morrisian camp, the fabric is the key to cultural value; for Viollet-le-Duc design is given pride of place and for Cullen it is relationships between all the elements in the environment that is the essence of cultural value. Discussion of conservation philosophies has been somewhat changed by the emergence of the unifying concept of *cultural significance*. This is a concept which began to be codified in the guidelines to the Burra Charter and which has found wider acceptance as part of the Conservation Plan process[19]. It should be stressed that such approaches generally post-date government and English Heritage guidance on the conservation of historic buildings and sites.

2.9 The Burra Charter suggested cultural significance as 'a concept which helps in estimating the value of places. The places that are likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations'. It went on to suggest value in terms of aesthetics, history, science and society and points out that 'more precise categories may be developed as understanding of a particular place increases'. Unlike the three camps discussed above, cultural significance privileges no one dimension of a historic place over another.

2.10 R D Pickard mentions cultural significance as perhaps the answer to problems of the interpretation of restoration.[20] He is, as might be expected of an English writer on the issue, very cautious in his views on the value of cultural significance to the issue of repair following catastrophic damage but points to it as potentially useful: ' … it will be extremely difficult to establish ground rules for cultural significance which is essentially an intangible matter. On the one hand, permitting this approach in so-called isolated situations may be the 'thin end of the wedge' leading in time to the 'floodgate' argument

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17 R Burger, Blick Frei auf ein Symbol, *Frankfurter Allgemeiner Zeitung*, 5 Sept. 2003, Nr. 206, 7. Gottfried Semper, the other great nineteenth century architectural thinker (and sometime head of the school of architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden), also wrote of restoration in advice to the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin on repairs to the castle in Schwerin. Broadly agreeing with the Viollet line, his memorandum is discussed by S Polenz, Sempers Konkurrenzentwurf für den Umbau des Schlosses Schwerin, in *Gottfried Semper 1803-1879*, Schriftenreihe der Sektion Architektur, Technischen Universität Dresden, 13. Dresden, 1979, 141-44.

18 J Pendlebury, United Kingdom, in *Policy and Law in Heritage Conservation*, ed R D Pickard, London, 2001, 301.

19 J S Kerr, *The Conservation Plan, National Trust of Australia (NSW), 2000 (5th Edn)*

20 R D Pickard, *Conservation in the Built Environment*, Harlow, 1996, 147-50.

resulting. On the other, restoration may be acceptable in limited situations such as where a fire has destroyed a building of recognised national importance. Thus a compromise may sensibly be achieved.'[21]

2.11 This is certainly too cautious an approach. The Burra Charter is useful in suggesting discussion and consensus as to where cultural significance lies in a particular case. It should therefore be able to assess whether decisions following catastrophic damage should be based on conservative repair – that is on authenticity of fabric – more than on any other consideration. For instance, to return to Lethaby's definitions, where the significance of a building derives from 'beauty of complex accretion', it would be wholly appropriate for authenticity of fabric to be a major consideration; on the other hand, where 'beauty of homogeneity' is a greater cultural significance, it may not. Relatively minor additions may get in the way of the appreciation of the building.

2.12 This is only one of the many sliding scales (there are, of course, other 'beauties'), but in broad terms in such cases, the arguments against restoration are more telling where a building is a complex accretion, where authenticity of fabric may be important, than where it is homogeneous. Indeed, there exist cases not only where alteration/extension in a different style may not be appropriate but also where any alteration/extension may be problematic.

3 Philosophy and practice

3.1 The decisions taken in the cases studied for this report were not generally informed by the full breadth of cultural significance, but rather by the doctrine of conservative repair, which was at that time the dominant conservation approach to works to historic buildings in England. Authenticity of fabric was therefore the first concern in the repair of these buildings following their various disasters. Most of the buildings considered for this report were of late C17/C18/early C19 date (Hampton Court, Uppark, Prior Park, Harrington Hall, Belle Isle), and even the buildings damaged in the two town fires considered were externally largely of that era rather than more obviously earlier. Windsor Castle, in its bones and foundations medieval, is very much of that period, having been largely altered in the later C17 and in the early C19 (indeed, before the fire it was thought that little medieval fabric survived). Not only do these buildings hide their construction in a way that the two churches in the sample do not, but their character as buildings of many different dates is also hidden. This makes pragmatic decisions about hidden structure much easier (as at Windsor, particularly, but also at Harrington Hall and Prior Park). To return to Lethaby's dichotomy with the hindsight of the Burra Charter, although some of these buildings may have been complex accretions, their homogeneity as works of architecture was implicitly judged to be of greater cultural significance than their state of alteration. This made issues of authenticity easier to deal with.

3.2 As implied above, churches proved a different matter when it came to considering authenticity. At Buckfastleigh church, English Heritage's preferred option was the repair of the shell of the building, with the arcades retained,

[21] R D Pickard, ibid., 150.

and the re-use of the building as a church.[22] Full reinstatement seems never to have been discussed. In part, this appears to have been due to a sympathetic approach being taken by English Heritage in its dealings with a religious congregation and their wishes regarding their place of worship. It was also due, however, to arguments over authenticity, which, in distinction from the late C17/C18/early C19 houses discussed above (paragraph 3.1) can be highlighted in the case of a church where the works relate to visible and once ancient structure. Medieval churches are 'complex accretions' *par excellence*. At Buckfastleigh not only would the roof structure, one of the most prominent features of a medieval church, have needed replication *in toto*, but much else besides would have seen re-construction. That such a course of action does not seem to have been suggested, even at the outset, is of particular interest. Buckfastleigh church is very much the kind of building which Ruskin and Morris had in mind when deploring 'restoration'.

3.3 The same thinking was behind both the reconstruction of the roof of south transept of York Minster after fire in 1984, and of the church of St Ethelburga, Bishopsgate, City of London, after terrorist action in 1993. The roof at York Minster was essentially eighteenth century in date and the architect, in a lengthy article in *SPAB News* in 1985, wrote of the decision to use timber to a modified design so as to fulfil a number of detailed requirements which the previous roof had not had to satisfy.[23] The history of decision-making at St Ethelburga, Bishopsgate, was complex, but the masonry parts of the building were repaired or reconstructed as necessary, with the timber-frame of the bell-turret on the tower reconstructed from surviving fragments (new timber pieced in as necessary for structural stability) and the main church roof re-built in steel.[24] In both cases the issue of authenticity was in the mind of all concerned in decision-making.

3.4 It would be misleading to suggest, however, that a reasonable approach to repair was precluded in these cases by the primacy afforded to authenticity. It is entirely appropriate, particularly in dealing with the control of change but also in terms of repair, to assess cases against the test of reasonableness, particularly as conservation law is set within a framework of national law where reasonableness has a high place. Traditionally such pragmatism is a wise course where authenticity is in doubt, and/or alterations would in other circumstances (i.e. a normal application for listed building consent) be permissible, and where such alterations would increase usefulness for owner and/or user.

3.5 English Heritage, while tending towards conservative repair, has itself on occasion taken a less than dogmatic approach. Hill Hall in Essex is a case in point.[25] A mid-C16 courtyard house of a very advanced kind of classicism for its time and place, it was later altered in such a way as to mask much of its architectural significance, including the re-rendering and other alteration of the columnar articulation of the courtyard. So as to allow the reconstruction of that prescient classical articulation, it was decided during repair works to return most of the building to its appearance during a phase of alterations in the early C18, even though other parts of the building were not. Interiors were to be reconstructed along the lines of the Blomfield interiors of the early

22 English Heritage file ref. ABN/6326.
23 Dr C Brown, York – Up from the Ashes, *SPAB News*, Vol 6, no 2, April 1985, 6-12.
24 English Heritage file ref. PK/12184.
25 English Heritage file ref. AA/40460.

C20, and the west range outer elevation, reconstructed in the C19, was left. It could be argued, therefore, that history has been effectively falsified, and a date chosen for the return of the building which is essentially artificial. Would it, however, be disingenuous to say anything other than that a reasonable decision was taken in difficult circumstances? Rigid adherence to philosophical principles as demanding as those behind conservative repair will always be difficult, and government policy and international charters therefore allow the kind of pragmatic approaches which were taken at Hill Hall.

3.6 English Heritage's involvement in disasters at other historic places illustrates this obligation to provide reasonable advice. Research for this report (see Appendix) shows that ownership and finance were key issues in deciding approaches to repair in many of the cases. At Uppark, the National Trust had full insurance for repair and strongly took the view that, as the contents survived, the most significant interiors (i.e. those with salvaged contents and which had been open to the public, including both state rooms on the ground floor and the servants' rooms in the basement) should be fully repaired to their condition before the fire. English Heritage was persuaded by the argument. So too at Prior Park, where the interiors were strongly indicative of the interests of the original builder and his architect in the use of stone, was the school able to repair as fully as was wished due to its having full insurance. At Harrington Hall, however, the privately-owned house was less well known and the owner took the view, advised by his architect, that a reduced scheme was an appropriate alternative where evidence particularly of structure, but also of room finishes, was not available.

3.7 At the Baltic Exchange in the City of London, site-value contributed to making it unreasonable for English Heritage to impose a strategy of full repair, though the argument was in any case somewhat undermined by the variable quality of the building, its recent date (late C19/C20) and by existing consents for change of use and extension made necessary by its passing out of use for its primary function.[26]

4 The Windsor Castle experience

4.1 Windsor Castle deserves special consideration since the solution arrived at in its circumstances represents a milestone in English conservation. At Windsor, the general approach to authenticity was affected by both institutional and financial considerations (the popularity of the royal family being a consideration high in the mind of those with notional authority over the repairs). The alternatives were spelled out in the January 1993 Options Report. Although other alternatives were discussed, the options were eventually reduced to three, Authentic Restoration, Equivalent Restoration and Contemporary Redesign. For pragmatic and financial reasons, as well as an awareness that Windsor 'has a certain fictive quality, a sense that a theatrical performance is being put on', it was felt that a surface restoration would be sufficient.[27]

4.2 The repair of the State Dining Room and the Octagon Dining Room at Windsor appear to be the major examples of re-instatement of buildings or

[26] English Heritage file ref. LEG/001412

[27] Sir William Whitfield, quoted in A Nicolson, 1997, 78.

interiors which had been completely consumed by fire (they stand on the first floors of the Brunswick and Prince of Wales Towers which acted more or less as chimneys during the fire). Indeed the continuous oak-leaf plaster decoration on the pilasters of the State Dining Room had been removed at some time before the fire. Reconstruction according to the 'Equivalent Restoration' policy adopted for Windsor was therefore carried out on the basis of careful consideration of photographic evidence – virtually no physical evidence survived the fire. It was the argument of the Surveyor of the Queen's Works of Art that prevailed against proposals for contemporary redesign even though there was so little left of the historic fabric of the interior of, particularly, the State Dining Room. He argued that 'the area that Wyatville remodelled, before the fire, was a superb and unrivalled sequence of rooms widely regarded as the finest and most complete expression of later Georgian taste. The three styles of architecture selected by Wyatville and King George IV – Classical, Gothic and Rococo – were deliberately and carefully orchestrated throughout the building to emphasize the function of the different rooms and to harmonize with the furniture chosen or designed for them'. Thus the integrity of the architectural design was regarded as at least as important as authenticity of fabric.

4.3 The experience at Buckfastleigh, when compared to those of the houses and particularly Windsor, suggests that one test must be visibility. If a thing to be replicated is hidden, then it may not be unreasonable to replace it in a different form, perhaps cheaper, perhaps more functionally useful. However, the decision process at Windsor also points to the original intention of the designer. Where the material to be replicated was not only part of a greater whole but considered to be a thing in its own right, it would be reasonable to suggest that replication should be avoided. Where, however, the building or structure was part of a greater whole which was no more than a setting for some other building or activity, it would not be appropriate to use an over-elaborate philosophy of repair on it.

4.4 Given that Equivalent Restoration (actually Equivalent Reconstruction according to the definitions used here) was the policy used for the repair of the State Dining Room, it was clearly the surfaces of the room which were regarded as significant, their importance as setting and backdrop which overrode concerns about authenticity. The decoration of the room is essentially two-dimensional and the State Dining Room is therefore not unlike the two buildings at the West Pier which are both also buildings for which surface was the important factor (particularly following the alterations of the 1930s to the interior of the Pavilion).

5 Reconstruction versus Authenticity

5.1 Reconstruction (returning a place to an earlier known state involving the introduction of new material) was always likely to be the most contentious aspect of each repair case. Although the general policy was to avoid it, in some cases reconstruction was felt to be a reasonable solution to a problem, even though it was likely that the original details of mouldings could not be achieved and thus that details would be simplified. At Harrington Hall, for instance, although the Entrance Hall and porch were returned to their previous state, it seems that the interiors of the Library, Staircase, Morning Room and Drawing Room were effectively replicated as so little original

material had survived.[28] At Windsor it seems that some of Wyatville's mouldings which cased the timbers of the medieval kitchen roof (one of the major discoveries resulting from the fire) were replicated as approximations, and there may have been others. Few such instances, however, appear to have resulted at Hampton Court, where the interiors were particularly well-known, or at Uppark on the ground and basement floors, or indeed at Prior Park where much of the interior articulation was actually in stone.[29]

5.2 Replication becomes much more of an issue in buildings of a lesser interest where owners and the controlling authorities can be less exacting in their concern for authenticity. Thus following the fire in the Chester Rows, the internal layout of 61 Bridge Street (71-73 Bridge Street Row) has been rebuilt and the mid-C18 staircase effectively replicated.[30] It can also be important where buildings are visually part of a group. The recent Planning Brief for the Cowgate/South Bridge site in Edinburgh suggests that a 'faithful historical reconstruction' of the now almost completely demolished fourth corner block of Kay's scheme against the bridge would be acceptable (though 'a pastiche approach would not be supported').[31]

5.3 In one species of building type reconstruction has a long and illustrious pedigree: buildings that are part of designed landscapes. Indeed such buildings have been reconstructed in part, even large part, with English Heritage grant. Thus the dome of the William Kent temple at Shotover was re-created during the 1980s, and the structure of the grotto at Painshill, once one of the most important of such buildings, was rebuilt from archaeological analysis of the demolished building and from late C18 records of its form.[32] Both projects were grant-aided by English Heritage. Furthermore, not only was the Chinese Bridge at Painshill rebuilt completely, without re-using a vestige of original fabric (though enough of the original survived *ex-situ* to ensure that the replication was accurate), but the Turkish Tent was reconstructed from the evidence of the surviving brick floor and a small number of contemporary views showing it in the landscape. The actual tent was constructed of synthetic materials.

5.4 The Grotto itself caused something of a stir at the time within English Heritage as grant was at first refused for the reconstruction of the roof because it would have been based on speculation. In 1982-83, however, the interior of the main chamber had been excavated and recorded archaeologically and this showed that some evidence survived. To say that it constituted the full evidence which English Heritage policy for individual buildings required would be pushing at the limits of credibility. It would be fair to point out, of course, that what survived was of some value and would continue to deteriorate through the lack of a roof.

5.5 The main reasons, however, that garden buildings are often considered to be special cases may be twofold. Firstly, garden buildings were often designed to be part of a group, one moreover set within a designed landscape, perhaps didactic in nature. They thus contribute to a wider whole which would be

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28 English Heritage file ref. HB/5310/728/17.

29 For Hampton Court, see M Fishlock, *The Great Fire at Hampton Court*, London 1992. The English Heritage file, CB/029, is closed.

30 John Healey, Chester City Council Conservation Officer, pers. comm.

31 Edinburgh City Council, *Cowgate/South Bridge – Planning Brief*, 2 October 2003.

32 Shotover – English Heritage file ref. PK/3183. Painshill – English Heritage file ref. PK/7158.

permanently impaired were elements to be lost. It may be fairer, therefore, to consider them as 'lost features' in the context of Brereton's 1995[33] exposition of English Heritage policy on reconstruction. Secondly, it is not unnatural that garden buildings, often having been designs of a very personal nature, have lost much of their meaning once the builder has died or sold up. Garden buildings may be attractive but having no beneficial use beyond offering focuses for landscape views and shelters for pleasurable activities, their use and therefore their maintenance may lapse. This has been reinforced by an almost puritanical view in the England of the past century and a half that garden buildings, being largely designed for selfish pleasure, were not entirely wholesome.

5.6 There is also a wider point. In designed landscape terms the ravages of time can be restored relatively simply (the restoration following the impact of the 1987 hurricane on the pleasure grounds at Petworth, for instance, or indeed the recreation of the arboreal Amphitheatre at Painshill). It would seem odd to suggest that one could take a relaxed line on the recreation of landscape features composed of living elements, but balk at a similar attitude towards buildings. The Privy Garden at Hampton Court, recreated on the basis of archaeological analysis and good documentary evidence, is a case in point. To relate the case studies back to the discussion of philosophies in Section 2 above, it is clear that the philosophical tradition of designed landscapes is closer to the camp of Viollet-le-Duc than to Ruskin/Morris traditions, with design being privileged over fabric.

5.7 In general, although authentic repair was the main aim of most of the repair schemes reviewed (with the notable exception of Windsor, see Section 4 above), it is important to note that it was tempered in many cases by an undogmatic view of authenticity. Indeed in the case of Windsor Castle, the decision not to go for authentic repair was wholly pragmatic. Many of the cases studied show examples of this approach. Thus the first floor rooms and the roof space at Uppark, which had been largely destroyed and which were not open to the public, were re-planned to some extent and were not repaired in quite the authentic manner of the ground floor and the basement. Although perhaps less significant than the more highly decorated rooms below, without the depth of interest in terms of furnishings, they were still of some importance.[34] At Prior Park, the top two floors (the mezzanine in the cornice, and the attic above that), which were themselves the result of reconstruction after the 1836 fire, were again re-planned as a music school with replacement in modern materials.[35] At Windsor the staff bedrooms on upper floors were re-planned and the buildings in the Kitchen Court were replaced anew. Indeed the private chapel and St George's Hall were to a greater or lesser extent redesigned in what the Options Report refers to as Contemporary Redesign.[36] At Belle Isle in Cumbria, the third floor was rebuilt with the domed roof remade with different openings and internal structure, and with the internal stair replaced.[37]

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33 C. Brereton op. cit.

34 English Heritage file ref. PK/9022. See also C Rowell and J M Robinson, *Uppark Restored*, London 1996.

35 English Heritage file ref. PK/4716.

36 English Heritage file ref. AA/8823/366A. The Windsor Castle files are closed but the story is well told in A Nicolson, *Restoration: The Rebuilding of Windsor Castle*, 1997. The Options Report is discussed *inter alia* at pp 76-82.

37 English Heritage file ref. PK/6571.

5.8 Only at Hampton Court, a historic royal palace open to the public, and Uppark, owned by the National Trust and again open to the public, was an attempt made at authentic restoration and only at Hampton Court was the roof reconstructed to the original form (because so much was known of Wren's roof from other sections which survived; Wren's interest in innovative timber structures is well known). At Uppark, steel was mooted but a simplified (i.e. non-historic) timber roof structure was used largely because timber has a predictable behaviour pattern. It is interesting to note that timber was used for the roof structure at Harrington Hall for the same reason but that English Heritage agreed to the use of steel for the floor structures because steel would cause less disturbance to the fabric of the brick walls. At Prior Park the roof structure had been replaced after the major fire of 1836 and, although this structure was not without interest itself, being largely made up of members which had come from the C18 Hunstrete Manor, it was felt that a steel roof structure would not be inappropriate.[38] At Belle Isle, a steel roof structure was used.

5.9 We have seen, therefore, that the dominant paradigm for English Heritage's response to disasters at historic buildings has been conservative repair, but that the solutions in each case have not been dogmatic. Instead, factors such as the owner's preferences, the integrity of an architectural design, the availability of finances and the reasonableness of a solution maximising authenticity have all been accommodated in the eventual decision. Authenticity of fabric has evidently not been the prevailing factor that common conception would lead us to believe. What, then, of the case of the West Pier at Brighton?

6 Authenticity and The West Pier

6.1 We have for some time considered that the problem posed by the repair of the West Pier is actually twofold. Firstly the repair of the pier, as we have pointed out before, presents a problem quite unlike that of the repair of buildings on land. Apart from cast iron, which performs very well in a salt-laden maritime atmosphere, all other materials from which piers are constructed are essentially fugitive and in normal circumstances are replaced as time goes on, usually with more modern materials and to more modern details. At the West Pier it seems likely that many of the main trusses, braces and deck-beams, as well as the timber deck itself, have been replaced during the twentieth century – indeed had maintenance of the pier not stopped in mid-century, it is certain that very little of the original sub-structure would survive today. Like all other piers, authenticity in the sub-structure of the West Pier can only relate to faithfulness to the design. It is clearly necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach to the replacement of members, upgrading them where necessary to allow them longer life, and so forth. Nonetheless, where original materials do still perform (such as the cast iron columns), they play an important role as direct connections with Birch's genius and as what Viollet-le-Duc referred to as 'guarantor of exactitude' in any replacements.

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[38] Arnold Root, Historic Buildings Architect, South West Region, English Heritage, and the late Gus Astley, Senior Conservation Architect, Bath City Council, pers. comms. Most of the EH files relating to listed building control work for Prior Park appear to have been destroyed.

6.2 The buildings on the pier, however, were not subject to the same stresses and were therefore not rebuilt in the same way. Nor are they of identical significance to the pier itself. Although they remained interesting historic buildings in their own right (as survivals they were certainly rare, the pier being one of the few which had survived without much alteration since the First World War), they were essentially secondary structures, important as much as anything for the festive air they gave the skyline of the Pier as part of the seafront. Their significance is therefore largely visual and their reconstruction can therefore be said to be important in terms of the visual qualities of the place.

6.3 As Windsor has shown, the fabric of a building can be of importance less in its own right than as setting. As the interiors at Windsor were designed as fitting settings for furniture and as the backdrop to state occasions, so the two buildings at the West Pier were designed as much as setting as individual buildings in their own right. It is not easy to suggest that their first purpose was as a more serious architecture. Like other architecture of the entertainment industry, the architecture used was intended to be splendid and lavish rather than earnest. Their most important purpose was to be attractive in commercial terms and thus they partake of something of the ethos of the rooms at Windsor for which the decoration needed to have 'sheer, spectacular effect' rather than be beautifully crafted. Slavish adherence to the materials used to create effect would be superfluous.

6.4 Indeed, one could fairly argue that, just as the repair of the State Dining Room was based on its importance as a decorated surface, and not as a structure with depth, it would be valid to consider the two pier buildings as little more than highly decorated shells. As the interior of neither building at the time of the fires was of great interest, external repair of the shells could not be claimed to be inappropriate. Reconstruction which ignores authentic repair imperatives would thus be seen to be as valid at the West Pier as at Windsor, or indeed at Belle Isle.

7 The Riga tests

7.1 We have seen that the Riga Charter gives several tests for reconstruction in cases where a monument of outstanding significance has been destroyed 'through disaster, whether of natural or human origin':

- appropriate survey and historical documentation should be available (including iconographic, archival or material evidence);
- the reconstruction should not falsify the overall urban or landscape context;
- existing significant historic fabric should not be damaged;

and providing always that the need for reconstruction has been established through full and open consultations among national and local authorities and the community concerned.[39]

7.2 The first step, therefore, is to confirm that the pier is of outstanding significance. The relative significance of seaside pleasure piers was considered by the Council for British Archaeology's Panel on Industrial Monuments in 1975 and it found the West Pier in Brighton to be the most

[39] Riga Charter, 2000, op. cit.

significant such pier to have been constructed. The Historic Buildings Council for England concurred in 1976.

7.3 Our review has found nothing to dilute the case. Using Kerr's[40] approach to articulating cultural significance, we consider that the West Pier demonstrates to an outstanding degree that it was:

- Climactic

  The West Pier was not the first pier designed according to its general structural arrangement, but Birch's intention to produce a much more elegant structure than those which had come before, with a lightness of structure using the smallest number of columns possible and without raking columns, is manifest in this pier. In that sense it is the culmination of a development which Birch had begun at Margate Pier (1853-7, where he first used screw piles) and at Blackpool North Pier (1862-3). At the West Pier he perfected screw piles (he used two sorts, the earlier type, though appropriate for anchoring into sand as at Margate and Blackpool, proved not to be sufficient for chalk, and was superseded during building).

- Seminal

  At the West Pier (1863-66), Eugenius Birch for the first time built the lightest, most elegant pier structure then possible in iron and timber and did it at a scale which was commensurate to its setting. Prior to the West Pier, only Birch's Blackpool North Pier of a couple of years previously was of similar size and this was built with a less elegant substructure. The West Pier, in its use of larger kiosks than earlier piers, was also the essential precursor to Hastings Pier (1869-72) which was the first pier to have been built with an integral pier-head pavilion. The West Pier is furthermore the pier which introduced festive architecture to the seaside. It was not the first building to be built at the seaside which took this line, but it was the building which made it almost obligatory to build in 'fun' styles for leisure buildings at the seaside.

- Architecturally ambitious

  Architecturally also the pier was of greater aspiration than those that had come before, and indeed those that came later. It was designed much more with monumentality in mind than earlier piers and it is one of the very few that was consciously laid out as part of a grand ensemble. Firstly, instead of making the transition to the lower level of the pier from the seafront by a ramp alone, it used spacious flights of steps (although side ramps were provided for bath chairs). Secondly, the pier is also one of the few which was consciously placed so as to part of a greater whole. The building is arranged symmetrically along the centre line of Regency Square, so that the pier reads as part of a much larger, and much more monumental, piece of town-planning than was usual for piers which were generally sited for commercial rather than architectural impact. Thirdly, it was constructed of cast iron of the highest quality, the quality of the moulding being very high. Birch modelled its buildings (the various kiosks) and its architectural features on styles which were not only locally available but of the greatest celebrity – largely and freely from the Royal Pavilion.

[40] J S Kerr, 2000, op.cit.

- Socially fashionable.

  The building of the West Pier during the mid-1860s was a mark of the concern that was felt over the possible loss by Brighton of its social cachet as a fashionable resort. Changes in the market for leisure in seaside resorts, cheaper travel, the introduction of education and particularly of Bank holidays during the 1870s and 1880s, meant, however, that Brighton generally and the West Pier in particular later needed to change their approach to visitors. Like all piers, facilities were added, especially under competition from the Palace (now Brighton) Pier which replaced the Chain Pier from 1891. It is no surprise to find that the Pavilion was built at the same time as the new pier. The Concert Hall followed during the First World War. It remains the acme of pleasure piers.

7.4 Having established the significance, we turn next to the three tests of the Riga Charter. The research we have carried out into recent practice in response to disaster allows the first test to be applied to the West Pier in a proper context. In particular, the appropriateness of the documentation can be benchmarked against the standards accepted elsewhere.

7.5 Analysis of the records of the pier buildings has established that not only has the pier been sufficiently photographed and drawn, but its nature as a pre-fabricated building means that much of the structure can be replicated from information given by members that have been removed and which are in store. In a small number of minor cases there are lacunae but research is ongoing and difficulties are not expected. The following are the only areas where information is thought to be missing:

- Detail of timber panelled doors and flanking windows in square-domed porches at north and south ends of the Concert Hall (altered/replaced long since)
- Detail of zinc pressings to upper part of round windows above doors in north and south Concert Hall porches
- Detail of original doors to rectangular (Birch) kiosks (altered/replaced long since)
- Detail of timber door from cupolas of octagonal (Birch) kiosks onto roof
- Boarded soffit detail for weather screens including that incorporated in rotunda
- Detail of junction of plate girder balustrade and seating not known (pier currently inaccessible)
- Seating bay divisions for peripheral seating to pier not known in all cases (pier currently inaccessible)
- Historic construction details for zinc roofing to Concert Hall.

7.6 Of these, none is crucial. Most arise because of the alteration of the pier buildings in the past, before more recent survey photography (changes to doors, typically). In these cases, decisions would have to be made on replacement doors even if the buildings had survived. Details of the junction of the plate girder balustrade and the seating, and the actual seating bay divisions, should become clear on inspecting the pier itself. The historic construction details for the zinc roofing to the Concert Hall are not currently known but would only be reproduced if appropriate. It is entirely normal in historic building conservation to up-date such details according to modern best practice (this is comparable to current practice in leadwork for roofing). The details of mouldings, for instance of the decorative details on the Concert

Hall and the Pavilion, are largely known. Very large-scale photographs of the Pavilion exist, for instance, from which such details can be derived.

7.7 Given the various precedents of other major cases, but particularly of the repairs to Windsor Castle, it is reasonable to conclude that reconstruction on the basis largely of photographic evidence should be considered wholly appropriate on this occasion.

7.8 Turning to the second test – that the reconstruction should not falsify the overall urban or landscape context – we must consider whether or not the decline of the West Pier is a process that should be considered to be an essential part of the urban context. A hypothetical example would be a proposal to adapt a house near Pudding Lane, London – source of the Great Fire – to its recorded pre-fire condition. The effect would be to misrepresent the physical scale of the fire, which razed vast areas of London, and to confuse the observer.

7.9 This is the clause against which the repair of buildings as diverse as the bridge at Mostar in Bosnia-Herzogovina (currently being rebuilt), Dubrovnik or the Frauenkirche in Dresden (which was largely destroyed as long ago as 1945) should be tested. There is a sense that querying whether it was right for the inhabitants of Ypres to rebuild the Cloth Hall after four years of heavy shelling in the Ypres Salient, or the Poles to rebuild in facsimile the castle and historic centre of their capital city after deliberate and malicious destruction by the Nazis, is impertinent.[41] Nonetheless, the decision to preserve Coventry Cathedral as a bombed ruin and to renew the place of worship nearby is an example where reconstruction would arguably have denied the terrible events of 1940.

7.10 The decline of the West Pier is not the consequence of an event of momentous importance such that it should be commemorated. Nor has the physical context of which it was a part – Regency Square in particular – changed such that its reconstruction would no longer make sense in the current townscape.

7.11 The third of the Riga tests requires that existing significant historic fabric should not be damaged in the course of reconstruction. Much of the proposed scheme is repair rather than reconstruction, although the balance has shifted towards reconstruction following the fires of 2003. This test is satisfied provided the raising of the deck level to accommodate rising sea levels is not considered to constitute damage. In a conventional, terrestrial building the dismantling of the structure and its replication at a different level would normally be considered to be damaging. For the West Pier, and indeed for other buildings constructed from metal components bolted together, the same does not apply. The restoration proposals do not put at risk existing significant fabric. Rather, they will result in the removal of elements which would be considered to be harmful to the significance of the pier, particularly the multiplicity of secondary columns added beneath the pier that detract from the grace of the Birch structure.

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41 For Warsaw, see M Lewicka, *The Old Town in Warsaw: Atlas of Architecture*, Warsaw, 1992.

8 Conclusions

8.1 In the case of the West Pier, we believe that prior to the fires of April and May 2003 the proposals for restoration and repair were grounded in sound conservation approaches. We have been consistent in our belief that authenticity cannot be treated in the same way for a pier as for conventional terrestrial buildings, since without continuous replacement of the fabric they are doomed to rapid failure. Our analysis of the significance of the pier indicated that repair was warranted and practicable, and that the evidence existed on which to base restoration of the missing elements that completed the architectural effect of the buildings. In our view, the harmful effect of the enabling development on the character of the Conservation Area was more than offset by the benefit to that character of the restoration and repair of the pier.

8.2 Our review following the disastrous fires of April and May has demonstrated that they did not affect the key significances of the pier – the West Pier was the most important pleasure pier ever built in terms of its climactic and seminal engineering design, its architectural ambition and as an enduring social symbol of Brighton as the acme of seaside resorts. Repair and reconstruction would allow these significances to be appreciated.

8.3 The fires did have an impact on the nature of the project, which has turned from one in which repair was in the majority and reconstruction the minority to one in which the reverse applied. The review precipitated a reconsideration of the adequacy of English Heritage published policy on reconstruction, and found international opinion to support the reconstruction of important structures after disasters of natural or human origin.

8.4 The Riga Charter commends three tests, each of which has been applied in the circumstances of the West Pier and each of which has been passed in our view.

8.5 English Heritage therefore concludes that the February 2003 proposals for repair and reconstruction, albeit now altered in balance by the fires, are consistent with internationally accepted conservation principles.

8.6 We recommend that as much surviving salvaged fabric as is practicable should be incorporated into the repair and restoration of the sub-structure and deck furniture, both to preserve at least some of the historic character of the pier and to act as ‘guarantor of exactitude’ in any replacements. This material does survive, both for the pier itself and the buildings.

8.7 With regard to the proposed reconstructed buildings, we recommend that ‘Equivalent Restoration [Reconstruction]’ should be adopted as the approach for these structures, where significance lies not in the materials and techniques but in the overall effect. Nonetheless, high standards of accuracy in the reconstruction of the exteriors should be demanded.

8.8 Finally, it should be noted that the caveat attached to the Riga tests regarding the need for reconstruction is not for English Heritage to decide but for the planning authority itself to consider.