



How has William Morris' Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings continued to influence remodels today?

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Introduction

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) founded in 1877 by William Morris, a craftsman and artist. Morris wanted to preserve old buildings by preventing unnecessary remodels, which would disrespect the buildings history. Morris felt that buildings representing the skills and ideas of the time that they were built in and preservation should be promoted before restoration to keep this sentimental value present. The manifesto, written in 1877, provided the backbone for the SPAB then and now. It is the oldest building conservation society in Europe, at over 140 years-old, and is one of the most influential in the world. The SPAB is still promoting the preservation of old buildings today and continue to display pride and follow the manifesto and *"is still involved in the everyday problems and battles that old buildings face today."* (Slocombe, s.d.:4)

In October 1834, a fire broke out in the Houses of Parliament, destroying the medieval building. The Commission, that organised the rebuilding of the building, decided that the building would be rebuilt in either Elizabethan or Gothic Revival styles. *"By selecting a gothic design for the new Houses of Parliament, the Commission symbolically reinforced the notion that one continuous body politic had existed from the medieval period to the present, and they did so at a moment when the very nature of Britain's representative branch of government was being actively contested."* (Kraft, 2009:2) This remodel was to show the traditional ideals of the government and suppress critical thinking of the policies of the Conservative party, which may have influenced the Gothic Revivalist movement of the nineteenth century, as the most powerful building moving back to traditional architecture movements. Architects have associated this style with the idea of power and wealth, although the medieval period was during a time when the country held less power. In addition, the new Houses of Parliament *"demanded resistance to what seemed like political extremism in certain facets of the labour movement, the Chartist movement, and the anti-Corn Leagues."* (Kraft, 2009:2) of which were socialist movements, which demanded economic equality for low-income people groups that promoted an *"increase of policies meant to help the poor, protect workers, and improve the lives of many continued throughout Victoria's Reign."* (Mometrix, 2018) Remodelling the Houses of Parliament to gothic revivalist was a push-back from a Conservative government to reduce the voices of the labour movements and significant to returning to the past, using architecture to promote anti-progressive movements.

The SPAB was formed due to Morris' frustration towards gothic revitalisation that sacrificed old buildings. Morris felt that preservation (using methods that respect the traditional craftsmanship and materials) to allow the building to hold memories of the building's life and history for interest to be preserved for the future. Motivated by the work of John Ruskin, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Morris started the movement against gothic revivalists to change the restoration processes of his time. As the SPAB is still practising the promotion of conservation methods, is Morris' manifesto continuing to influence the remodelling process today?

To investigate this question, this dissertation will focus on two case studies: Chipperfield's Neues Museum and Gehry's Nationale-Nederlanden, to understand if Morris' ideas and manifesto still applies to remodelling work today and in what ways they are present, or if these case studies work against the SPAB manifesto. Additionally, discussing in what ways these architects have preserved history honestly, as Morris felt *"that if the present treatment of them be continued, our descendants will find them useless for study and chilling to enthusiasm"* (Morris, 1877:1) with regards to old buildings. By understanding the history behind each respective building and how that has been regarded in the remodelled design, alongside the relation to the SPAB's principles, the appreciation of the SPAB during the last 30 years can be discussed. The Neues Museum and Nationale-Nederlanden building are contrasting examples of remodels as each architect uses different

perspectives when considering the design and how conservationist efforts could be reflected in the modern day.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

A goal of this dissertation is to understand the motivations and influences behind Morris' SPAB. One which he directly credits is Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which Ruskin creates a connection between the principle of architecture and their reflection upon seven moral ideals. Specifically, "*The Lamp of Memory*" reflects on the relationship between restoration with regards to a building's history and experience. Ruskin acknowledges that a building cannot be alive unless it has "*been witnesses of suffering, and its pillars rise out of the shadows of death, that its existence, more lasting as it is than that of the natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with even so much as these possess, of language and of life.*" (Ruskin, 1849:244) This indicates that a building can develop a sentient-like existence that coincides with the permanence of the walls of structure. Architecture can stand as an ever-changing storybook to many generations, reflecting on life once lived. It is described that anyone who disturbs this or writes over the story being told as a "*mob*" (Ruskin, 1849:256) and ends "*The Lamp of Memory*" with the statement "*Architecture is always destroyed causelessly.*" (Ruskin, 1849:256) These statements could have heavily influenced the creation of the SPAB by expressing frustration as the destruction of "*that deep sense of voicefulness*" (Ruskin, 1849:243) that has been ignored when remodeling buildings that could have been for causeless reasons.

More recently, the SPAB have referenced the work of Ruskin by saying "*The SPAB 's ideas stem from the thoughts of John Ruskin.*" (Slocombe, s.d.:8) in *The SPAB Approach: to the conservation and care of old buildings*, agreeing with the point that Ruskin believes restoration is "*a lie from beginning to end*" (Ruskin, 1849 cited in Slocombe, s.d.:8) pointing to the idea that restoration is not always needed, and when it is not it creates a deception of the life of the building, destroying the physical impact of its history. The SPAB "*aims to promote the value and good sense of caring for the fabric of old buildings*" (Slocombe, s.d.:7) as they encourage maintenance on old buildings, rather than restoration, allowing the buildings structure and, therefore, life to remain with dignity while opposing the need for altering the story for multiple conflicting narratives.

Studies on the life and work of William Morris are prevalent, however the dissertation *William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: Nineteenth and twentieth century historic preservation in Europe* written by Yount has explored the aspects of society in the 1800s which led to the creation of the SPAB and how that has influenced the platform for remodeling old buildings into the present day. "*The remarkable impact that Morris and the SPAB have made against 'restoration' and for the preservation of historic buildings and sites throughout Britain and the world has been under-appreciated because limited historic research and analysis.*" (Yount, 2005:3) Yount had written a book-length piece discussing the origins and impact of the SPAB, now a 140-year-old organisation, as well as providing case studies of remodels alongside an analysis of how Morris thought of that restoration.

On the other hand, other writings somewhat-oppose Morris' view of maintenance before restoration, such as Rodolfo's *Old Buildings as Palimpsest*, which suggest that remodels should be undertaken if the "*temporal/special coexistence of past, content, and building accounts for the remarkable characteristics that the notion of cultural context takes in remodeling.*" (Rodolfo, 1976:49) Rodolfo uses a collection of metaphors to explain that compare architectural design to literature, meaning that remodeling would be comparable to rewriting or to continue writing the story of the building. Therefore, old buildings should be seen as palimpsest. "*The juxtaposition*" of different architectural languages "*produces a natural 'estrangement'*" (Rodolfo, 1976:49) identifying that the architect needs to carefully consider respect in a remodel, otherwise the choices they make can cause conflict.

Chapter 2: William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

In 1877, William Morris established the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings which “*sought to preserve the integrity of historic buildings by preventing unnecessary changes and additions.*” (Yount 2005:1) Morris’s manifesto promotes the preservation of old buildings by using methods to not distract from the buildings structure but allow it to be structurally sound and remain in the historical place and time it was built in, as oppose to remodelling the building. Morris felt that “*this double process of destruction and addition*” would leave “*the appearance of antiquity is taken away from such old parts of the fabric as are left, and there is no laying to rest in the spectator the suspicion of what may have been lost; and in short, a feeble and lifeless forgery is the result of all the wasted labour.*” (Morris 1877:2) The construction of a building related to the period it was built in, as well as the economic and social value of the structure: the elegance of the craftsmanship would indicate a higher value. This can be seen in buildings such as the Pittville Pump Room, Cheltenham (fig. 1), a Grecian neo-classicist style building where the craftsmanship is particularly evident in the capitals of the ionic column. The Pump Room was intended to be the most prestigious spa in Cheltenham, and the centre of the new town of Pittville. The level of craftsmanship with the neo-classicist style help to determine that the building was intended to be important to the town and that the location held a prestige. If a careless remodel were to strip the building of these features – it would reduce the value of the buildings craftsmanship and care. During the time that Pittville Pump Room was constructed and the SPAB was created, Britain was leading the world in industrialisation meaning that the country wanted to be recognised for their power with their profits and one of the ways of achieving this recognition was through architecture.



Fig. 1 Pittville Pump Room (2020)

Morris created the SPAB motivated by gothic revivalists of the mid-nineteenth century, with many restorations being completed in the gothic style. At the time, Morris found that all remodels at their worst “*meant the reckless stripping a building of some of its most interesting material features*” (Morris, 1877:2) leading to the removal of essential aspects of the life that the building held. The “*reckless stripping*” (Morris, 1877:2) suggested a lack of respect towards the building and an uninformed and destructive nature towards the remodelled design, such that it would attempt to erase an element of the past and replacing it with a romanticised ideal, being gothic revivalist. This approach to remodeling was seen by Morris as “*unoriginal and thoughtless*” (Morris, 1877:2), Morris objected to unneeded remodelling of buildings as during his time completed by Gothic Revivalists, who rejected the principles of the original design to replace it with what they felt was fitting. “*The original SPAB manifesto, written by Morris in 1877, refers the restoration as ‘forgery’ and criticises the ‘civilized world of the nineteenth century’ for ‘having no style of its own amidst its wide knowledge of the styles of other centuries.’*” (Yount, 2005:14) In extreme cases, where a restoration would be required to maintain the old building’s structural integrity “*that it should be secured by contemporary means in a contemporary style and done so minimally.*” (Yount, 2005:13) This implies a segregation between the new and the old, while the new remodel is still able to respect the architectural past. It can also give the notion of timelessness in the building, as time-appropriate styles have been carefully added into the old, while still being distinguishable.

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* by John Ruskin, in which Ruskin relates seven attributes of architectural design. In particular, the chapter: *The Lamp of Memory*, outlines the idea that buildings have a history, legacy, and memory which should be protected against remodeling, which was a lie by the old building. “*Ruskin argued that restoration is an impossibility, first because it must at some point rest (...) on mere conjecture about an imagined earlier state.*” (Miele, 1995:73) Meaning that restoration was only based on an idealist concept of the past, so (at the time of writing) the remodels of the old building were not progressive styles but idealised traditionalist. Ruskin focused on churches in his piece, as roughly seven-thousand medieval churches, between 1840 and 1873, “*were restored, rebuilt, or enlarged. This was almost three times the number of new churches built over the period, and the total bill for restorations was far higher than that for new church construction.*” (Miele, 1995:73) Which Ruskin felt that the restoration of churches would “*sacrifice of the essential characters of architectural art*” (Ruskin, 1849:22) as these churches used reflected the time in which they were built and their communities’ representation of religion. The nature of the gothic revivalist movement on churches would strip the structure of the craftsmanship, that would have correlated with the time it was built, and would “*be direct deceit, and altogether unpardonable.*” (Ruskin, 1849:62) Morris relayed this protest the mass-restoration of old buildings by incorporating Ruskin’s work into the SPAB manifesto in 1877.

In recent years, significant writing or remodelling have been released, a prominent example being *Old Buildings As Palimpsest* by Rodolfo Machado written in 1976. In this piece, Machado describes remodels as a series of metaphors. “*The already-built (the ‘real world’), by means of its own existence and as a result of the mythical value the old takes in our culture, becomes institutionalized as ‘true’ and ‘normal,’ as ‘common sense.’*” (Machado, 1976:49) The use of “*mythical*” relates to the idea that through remodelling, architects have romanticised the past, now resulting as the modern-day view that contrasts the reality of the average person’s quality of life, because of the decision of the architect. This statement relates to Morris’ idea of how the remodelling of his time would change the implications and interest in history of the future and “*takes ... our culture.*” (Machado, 1976:49)

Today, the SPAB prides itself on its world-admired conservation efforts of old buildings, being the oldest organisation to protect old buildings. A reason for the society’s long life “*is its founding, not on commercial or political ground, but on a philosophy that offers proven and sustainable conservation ideas.*” (Slocombe, s.d.:4)

Chapter 3: Case Studies

In March 1945, Berlin's infrastructure was sacrificed when the US Eighth Air Force aimed for the city. This, supporting the Russian attack on rail services and tank factories, was the largest wartime raid on Berlin. It is estimated the Berlin lost approximately three-thousand citizens during this raid.

The Neues Museum was closed to the public at the beginning of the Second World War, which resulted in the inevitable bombing of the Museum (fig. 2). Forty per-cent of the building was left to a *"romantic overgrown ruin, decaying and vandalised, a constant reminder of the past at a time when so much else was gradually being transformed."* (s.d., 2009:815) This included the Grand Staircase, known as the *"shocking void"* (Unknown, 2009:815) (fig. 3) when it was destroyed. Over fifty years after the war, with the Museum having not been opened to the public, and international competition was held for the remodelling and renovation of the building, won by David Chipperfield Architect's *"known for his restrained classic-modernist style"* (s.d., 2009:815)

For the remodel of the Neues Museum, Chipperfield had to consider the history of the building as well as the country and how that could have been represented in the restoration of the structure. *"There was also the consideration of whether a strict restoration would carry the right kind of historico-political symbolism (as is evident in the rebuilt Frauenkirche in Dresden)."* (s.d., 2009:815) Chipperfield needed to create a distance from the past, as the Nazi party leadership had demonised the entire German population (with stigma continuing post-denazification) and the allied partnerships were sceptical of how the country would progress to attempt to repent from the damages it had caused. This meant that the new design would have to be able to reflect on the past while representing the progressive policies of the German government, allowing the remodel to be apologetic of the ruins. An example of this would be the new entrance of the Neues Museum (fig. 4), this new addition to the building created the new Simon James Gallery as well as a new address for the entire Museum, which Chipperfield addresses as what *"the project aims"* (2014) to accomplish. Chipperfield creating a new address for the building indicates that idea of the future for Germany has figuratively and literally moved away from its fascist past.



Fig. 2 The Neues Museum



Fig. 3 The Neues Museum



Fig. 4 The Neues Museum

A second example of this is the Great Staircase (fig. 5), which was left a “*shocking void*” (s.d., 2009:815) post-war. Chipperfield has been able to allow remaining walls to continue to survive while accepting and mimicking the geometries of the original staircase. *“The surviving historic parts of the building express the original architecture, defining a material palette for preservation; while the stair defines Chipperfield’s architectural approach of contemporary rebuilding, and the relationship between old and new.”* (NG, 2014) Chipperfield has respected the original core elements of the building and has being able to alter them, introducing the new into the building seamlessly. Chipperfield’s style of classic-modernist is seen as an optimistic approach (as modernism was a movement to celebrate the future and reject the past.)



Fig. 5 The Neues Museum

The remodel of the Neues Museum by David Chipperfield has shown his appreciation of the past and historical context in his design. Chipperfield was able to reflect heavily on the past life of the ruin and allow it to apologise for the horrific place in time which it was ruined. *“Morris felt that architecture was a dynamic entity, one that needed to adapt to changing influences.”* (Yount, 2005:13) With the incredible economic and political change that was occurring in the country at the time of the remodel of the Neues Museum, it was important that the new design was able to show an increased progression from the past. The respect for the existing features alongside the past geometries recreated with an optimistic style integrated together allowed *“the resurrection of the Museum’s history (without recourse to portentous nostalgia) exists seamlessly with the demands of the future.”* (s.d., 2009)

The site of Frank Gehry and Milunic’s Nationale-Nederlande (also known as ‘Dancing House’ and ‘Fred and Ginger’) (fig. 6) is situated on the edge of the Vitava River, the original building was once bombed in 1945, with its remodel completed in 1996. The *“American bomb devastated a handsome Neo-Classical apartment block on the corner of two streets (Jiraskovo namesti and Rasinovo nabrezi) narrowly missing the neighbouring Art Nouveau house of Vaclav Havel, the distinguished writer and future president of the Czech Republic.”* (Miklosko, 1997) The architects first considered a single tower, however Gehry felt that to be *“too overtly masculine”* (Miklosko, 1997), so the idea of a more feminine partner was formed, leaning on the masculine (‘Fred’) tower. Fred appears to stand on a singular column and becomes wider at its tallest point. Whereas the feminine (‘Ginger’) hosts a forest of columns at street level and leans into Fred, giving a sense of fluidity introduced to the building.



Fig. 6 Frank O. Gehry, “Ginger & Fred, the Dancing Couple,” Prague

The building is seen as *“a bold symbol of Prague’s architectural, economic and political renewal”* (Miklosko, 1997) as it shows the dynamic flow of the city’s architectural styles, from neo-classical to art nouveau. However, this building does not reflect the significance of the city in present day, by taking aspects from past styles littered around the city by twisting past styles to represent progression, but Gehry’s building appears as a criticism of the past and traditional culture of the city, personified in architecture. Gehry’s lack of harmony with respect to the city in Fred and Ginger lets it act as an obstruction of the

streets, distracting passers-by from the scattered nature of Prague's history within its architecture. Milunic explains the architecture of this area of Prague as: *"Heterogeneity typifies this corner of Prague as it does the whole city: "We have no architectural unity," observes Milunic"* (Giovannini, 1997) This statement explains that the new building contradicts the surrounding structures however The Dancing House does not contribute to the visible progression of socio-economic and political standing of Czechia's history. *"The overall effect of Gehry's anthropomorphic collage is slightly disorientating."* (Miklosko, 1997)

Chapter 4: The Appreciation of the SPAB

Chipperfield's Neues Museum was to reunite the Museum with the four other reconstructed buildings on the island in the centre of Berlin. Before remodelling, it was *"a contrast that demonstrated ideas of history and decay in a compelling and powerful way, although throughout the building the degree of destruction varied greatly."* (Chipperfield, 2014) The island is a great tourist attraction and a statement of Germany's national pride, the island's destruction during the war somewhat represented the decay of national pride and its allyship with the world. The reconstruction and regeneration of the country aligned with the denazification and regaining economic success of the country after the war. The complete remodelling of Museum Island signified a complete reunification of Berlin and the establishment of Germany on the world stage.

When remodelling the Neues Museum, Chipperfield chose to preserve the original Museum by creating a shell which *"the building both houses a museum and is in itself a museum, an artefact skilfully created as a memento of what was, what has been, and what has emerged."* (NG, 2014) Chipperfield's remodelling used a contemporary style to acknowledge the Museum's history, by allowing the damages of the past to remain, as well as following the geometries that remain. *"The contrast of the smooth concrete and the rough brick of the walls sets a tone that is continued throughout the building with new meeting old in unapologetically clean lines. While the 'spectacle' of the architecture in this entrance space is an expression of the contemporary, the focus of the architectural experience is on the ruin."* (NG, 2014) The respect towards preserving the ruins by not returning it to the past does not set *"out to turn back the clock or to recreate the past."* (Slocombe, s.d.:12) Instead, Chipperfield uses contemporary styles to show a progression in the changes the country had overcome. As well as that, *"the restoration of the Neues Museum follows a principle of conservation rather than reconstruction"* (Chipperfield, 2014) adding to the architect's respect of Morris's principle in the SPAB which has not led to the *"stripping a building of some of its most interesting material features"* (Morris, 1877:2).

However, in the design of the Nationale-Nederlande building, Gehry did not choose to keep the ruins of the original building, unlike Chipperfield's remodelling of the Neues Museum. Gehry, instead chose to hide the past destruction and history of Prague represented in the building and has joked that the towers should not exist in Prague: *"'Fred and Ginger grew up and moved to Toronto,' Gehry jokes. 'In a way, two towers feel better. It's not so crowded.'"* (Gehry, cited in Hume, 2014) Which presents the idea that the towers are not complimented by their own human experience, and therefore felt the need to move. This is contrasted with the fact that the remodelling of the Neues Museum was designed for the museum island in Berlin. The Gesellschaft Historisches (historical society) Berlin had made *"a truce had been forged between those who cared primarily for the preservation of a historic structure"* (s.d., 2009) when considering remodelling the old building. This was so that preservation of one of the most historically significant sites in the world, as: *"no building stood as witness to this concentration of history more poignantly than the Neues Museum."* (s.d., 2009)

Fred and Ginger have somewhat contradicted the SPAB's work to protect old buildings. *"The SPAB Approach calls for an understanding of history, design and construction. Buildings are the product of decisions made at the time of their construction and in every era since."* (Slocombe, s.d.:11) Gehry distorted the original architect's decisions to personify the street to enhance the social aspects of the city as he feels that *"architecture to be the quest to transfer the feelings of humanity through inert materials ... to create a feeling or emotional response that is not only comforting but enlightening."* (Masterclass, 2020) However, by distorting the pre-existing character of the building that was destroyed, Gehry has created a sculpture-like building which contradicts Morris by

conflicting with Prague's past. However, he has taken the surrounding buildings and personified them. *"It is difficult to comprehend how anymore could find it fitting to extinguish a piece of history without consideration of the involvement of the community, even the nation."* (Yount, 2005:11) Gehry has taken his progressive styles as well as the elective mix of Prague's architectural environment to represent the historical, classical culture in a way in which only a modern society could create, due to the progression of ideas and technologies. Despite rejecting many principles of the SPAB, Gehry has used his contemporary style to establish a connection between a classical, higher-class society to the inclusive and expressive ideas of today.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that William Morris' ideas when approaching the SPAB continue to be respected in remodels of architecture. This is shown by Chipperfield's remodel of the Neues Museum – in which he chose to respect the ruins by allowing them to be displayed in the new design. Chipperfield has designed the Museum as if it were and exhibit itself, he has been able to display the ruins of the Museum in a way that allows the visitor to understand the buildings history, by preserving the bomb damages that remain safely within the structure of the building. This contrasts with Fred and Ginger by Frank Gehry, which Gehry had ignored the past and the damages of the original building, this was so that he could create a complete restoration of the street corner in Prague. However, this restoration process sacrificed the history that was presented on that location, by installing a mockery of the existing architect, personifying, and contradicting the neo-classicist influence buildings along that street. Although Prague has no continuous style of architecture (the style of buildings expresses the individual time and economic, political and social issue the city is presented with) Fred and Ginger tries to romanticise the architecture of the past rather than adding a contemporary style that would reflect the time period of today while complimenting the surrounding buildings. Chipperfield's remodel of the Neues Museum has shown that Morris' legacy with the SPAB can be found in the agreement between Chipperfield and the Gesellschaft Historisches, making the presence of the bomb damages and trauma the building had lived through a requirement of the design, in which Chipperfield succeeded. Morris' influence may be due to *"In the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of scholars that have acknowledged the importance of Morris's historic preservation career"* (Yount, 2005:19) leading to an increased awareness in practice of Morris' work. The Neues Museum was completed in 2014, after the SPAB's awareness was increased. He also integrated the original building with a contemporary style, which appreciated the structure of the building and displayed elements appropriately. This case study, in contrast to Gehry's Fred and Ginger, shows a decreased empathy towards history of the building which translated into the structure, it was *"a form of destruction falsely packaged as the reconstruction or representation of original form."* (Dellheim, 1982, cited in Yount, 2005:13-14)

The influence of the SPAB in the late twentieth to twenty-first century is clear in the fact that remodels are displaying the history of the building within their contemporary architectural style. The original manifesto still stands, as Morris wrote in 1877, and *"the Society's protection of old buildings from demolition, damage and decay and continues to be the basis of all good conservation in Britain and in many other countries."* (West, 2002:3-4) It seems that older architectural styles are valued more greatly now rather than during the industrialisation of Britain. The history of a place is valued to show the progression of technologies and the social, political and economic climate of the time.

Overall, it is apparent that Morris' work can be seen in remodels of buildings as there is an appreciation for buildings like the award-winning Neues Museum that integrate the past and the present works clearly and respectfully. Ruins *"can be picturesque and beautiful"* (Slocombe, unknown:21) and can tell the story of an important historical event or the buildings respect over its lifetime, therefore should be preserved in a remodel, this leads to the increasing understanding that an architect would need to understand and conserve the physical representations of a building's history, especially when the intention of the building is to display history. Morris' influence has created a standard for remodelling historical sites and ruins, he has illustrated the importance of the preservation of the past in one of the oldest ancient building preservation societies in the world whose values are recognised in many remodelling works today.

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