

## THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF ANCIENT BUILD- INGS AS SET FORTH UPON ITS FOUND- ATION IN 1877

A Society coming before the public with such a name as that above written must needs explain how and why it proposes to protect those ancient buildings which to most people doubtless seem to have so many and such excellent protectors. This then is the explanation we offer.

No doubt within the last fifty years a new interest, almost like another sense, has arisen in these ancient monuments of art; and they have become the subject of one of the most interesting of studies, and of an enthusiasm, religious, historical, artistic, which is one of the undoubted gains of our time; yet we think that if the present treatment of them be continued our descendants will find them useless for study and chilling to enthusiasm. We think that those last fifty years of knowledge and attention have done more for their destruction than all the foregoing centuries of revolution, violence, and contempt.

For Architecture, long decaying, died out, as a popular art at least, just as the knowledge of mediæval art was born. So that the civilised world of the nineteenth century has no style of its own amidst its wide knowledge of the styles of other centuries. From this lack and this gain arose in men's minds the strange idea of the restoration of ancient buildings; a strange and most fatal idea, which by its very name implies that it is possible to strip from a building this that and the other part of its history, of its life that is, and then to

stay the hand at some arbitrary point, and leave it still historical, living, and even as it once was.

In early times this kind of forgery was impossible, because knowledge failed the builders, or perhaps because instinct held them back. If repairs were needed, if ambition or piety pricked on to change, that change was of necessity wrought in the unmistakable fashion of the time; a church of the eleventh century might be added to or altered in the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, or even the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; but every change, whatever history it destroyed, left history in the gap, and was alive with the spirit of the deeds done amidst its fashioning. The result of all this was often a building in which the many changes, though harsh and visible enough, were by their very contrast interesting and instructive and could by no possibility mislead. But those who make the changes wrought in our day under the name of restoration, while professing to bring back a building to the best time of its history, have no guide but each his own individual whim to point out to them what is admirable and what contemptible: while the very nature of their task compels them to destroy something, and to supply the gap by imagining what the earlier builders should or might have done. Moreover, in the course of this double process of destruction and addition the whole surface of the building is necessarily tampered with; so that 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 final result of all the wasted labour.

It is sad to say, that in this manner most of the bigger Minsters, and a vast number of more humble buildings, both in England and on the Continent, have been dealt with by men, of talent often, and worthy of

better employment, but deaf to the claims of poetry and history in the highest sense of the words.

For what is left we plead before our architects themselves, before the official guardians of buildings, and before the public generally, and we pray them to remember how much is gone of the religion, thought and manners of time past, never, by almost universal consent, to be restored; and to consider whether it be possible to restore those buildings, the living spirit of which, it cannot be too often repeated, was an inseparable part of that religion and thought and those past manners. For our part we assure them fearlessly that of all the restorations yet undertaken the worst have meant the reckless stripping a building of some of its most interesting material features; while the best have their exact analogy in the restoration of an old picture, where the partly perished work of the ancient craftsman has been made neat and smooth by the tricky hand of some unoriginal and thoughtless hack of to-day. If, for the rest, it be asked us to specify what kind or amount of art, style, or other interest in a building makes it worth protecting, we answer: Anything which can be looked on as artistic, picturesque, historical, antique, or substantial: any work, in short, over which educated artistic people would think it worth while to argue at all.

It is for all these buildings therefore, of all times and styles, that we plead, and call upon those who have to deal with them, to put protection in the place of restoration, to stave off decay by daily care, to prop a perilous wall or mend a leaky roof by such means as are obviously meant for support or covering and show no pretence of other art, and otherwise to resist all tampering with either the fabric or the ornament of the building as it stands; if it has become inconvenient for its present use, to raise another building rather than alter or enlarge the old one; in fine to treat our ancient

## APPENDIX

buildings as monuments of a bygone art, created by bygone manners, that modern art cannot meddle with without destroying.

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

The Offices of the Society are : 10 Buckingham Street, Strand, London, W.C. Those who agree with its principles as here set forth, and are willing to become members, are requested to communicate with the Secretary at the above address.

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## NOTES ON THE REPAIR OF ANCIENT BUILDINGS

ISSUED BY THE SOCIETY FOR  
THE PROTECTION OF ANCIENT  
BUILDINGS

LONDON: Published by the Committee,  
and sold on their behalf by B. T. Batsford, 94  
High Holborn. February 1903.