



# **The Fabrication of Medieval History Archaeology and artifice at the Office of Works**

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**31 October 2007**

Well, how the public's understanding of the past has developed is a subject that's always interested me. So, few schoolchildren leave school now, with any idea of the great sweep of British history. Any understanding of it is largely self-taught, conveyed by books, films, the internet, and by visiting museums and historic places. All these routes to gaining historic knowledge have strengths and weaknesses as a way of opening a window on the past, but I guess that most people in this room would regard visiting a historic site as an activity that gets the public perhaps closer to the primary sources of history than most. Visiting a site removes the intermediary barriers between the public and history in the raw. After all, visiting a place like Fountains Abbey can communicate much more effectively than most books, or most films even, the wealth and sophistication of English monastic life and the appropriation and destruction of it by Henry VIII.

Yet, through a series of very closely linked events, little discussed and rarely publicised, monuments such as Fountains Abbey were deliberately and carefully remodelled by the state in the middle years of the 20th Century. What visitors see today bears little resemblance to the romantic ruins praised by Ruskin and Maurist. They are as groomed, as packaged, and as processed as any Hollywood blockbuster.

The story of how we got to this state of affairs begins in 1873, when Sir John Lubbock started his ten year campaign to give legal protection to our built heritage. This campaign led to the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act, which established the principle that the state, in the form of the Commissioners of the Board of Public Works, could take into their care any of an agreed list or agreed schedule of what were called ancient monuments. The schedule attached to this new bill listed 68 sites. The Act passed and Lubbock's father-in-law, General Pitt Rivers, the father of modern archaeology, was made the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and the transfer of sites from the schedule into public ownership began.

Pitt Rivers held the post of Chief Inspector until his death in 1900, and by 1890, he had seen 63 monuments pass into the care of the state. However, he became increasingly frustrated by the lack of commitment to pursuing the aims of the original Act, and by the limitations of what he could actually do, to the extent that he made a very unmodern gesture and felt obliged to decline the salary for his post.

But, Pitt Rivers needn't really have worried, because as the century turned, concern for the preservation of England's great monuments was greater than ever before. In the year of Pitt Rivers' death, mounting concern with the state of a number of medieval buildings, notably the Eleanor Crosses, led to the passage of another measure: this was the Ancient Monuments Protection Act. This saw the definition of sites which could be taken into the care of the state broadened. The definition was 'any structure, erection, of historical or architectural interest, or any remains thereof'. There were two exclusions: churches and occupied buildings. What this Act did was open the way for a whole new category of hitherto untouched buildings to be taken into state care, and of these, by far the most important ones were the monasteries dissolved at the Reformation and the castles which were slighted during the Civil War.

Pitt Rivers was succeeded by a new Inspector of Ancient Monuments named Charles Reed Peers. Unlike Lubbock and Pitt Rivers, Peers was not a pre-historian or even an archaeologist. He was an architect, but an architect with impeccable historical credentials. He had been the architectural editor of the Victoria County History. He had been editor of the Architectural Journal, and Secretary, and later President, of the Society of Antiquaries.

Peers immediately set to work, but he was operating in an entirely different climate by the 1910s, and unlike Pitt Rivers, was given the proper resources to carry out his job. These came, most importantly, in the form of funds to appoint a specialist Works Division for the repair and maintenance of the sites. This was quickly set up under the auspices of another Ministry of Works architect, Frank Baines. So between them, Baines and Peers set about taking into the care of the state a huge number of buildings and instituting, for the first time, a consistent regime for their treatment.

While the debate about exactly how historic buildings ought to be treated had raged during the 19th Century, it was, for the most part, a debate which had taken place between people whose ability to actually do anything was entirely limited. Ruskin, for instance, had lamented his own ability to have any real impact on buildings. But Peers and Baines were in a fundamentally different position. The greatest medieval ruins of the country were literally pouring into the Office of Works, and these two men had to decide, in an extremely practical way, what exactly they were going to do with them.

Well, Peers made it very clear at the outset that he was going to adopt an approach and that this approach would not be one of abstinence. He was a very methodical man, keen on establishing agreed procedures. In his first annual report to the Commissioners of the Board of Works, he set out the measures which he intended to adopt to the sites which came into his care. He considered these to be as follows: first, the undertaking of structural and superficial repairs, including the removal of ivy and weeds; second, the enclosure of the site by fencing; third, the institution of a regime of maintenance, including grass cutting; fourth, the preparation of complete measured plans and elevations; fifth, the taking of photographs; and sixth, the compilation of a guidebook.

What the report did not say was that his approach was also to apply a very rigid intellectual framework to the sites which came into his care with what I believe were rather unfortunate consequences. I will come onto this point in a minute as it is really the subject of my paper tonight, but first I want to take a quick look at a couple of other aspects of Peers' philosophy.

For Peers, the charm and visual appeal of the buildings was not in their tumbledown, ivy-strewn decay, but in what lay beneath. In his words, 'What remains must be set off to best advantage, if only for the mere pleasure of doing so and for the revelation of the beauties long hidden in their own ruins.' For most people today, the Ministry of Works' approach is most clearly characterised in their aesthetic: the loving creation of cricket pitch lawns, which usually replaced the wild, bumpy topography of the raw sites. On the one hand, this was due to the importance given to literally unearthing and making permanently readable the plan of the site; on the other, it was the result of a very practical consideration - the motorised lawnmower, a new invention, which made it cheap and easy to maintain these sites in pristine condition. But perhaps more than either of these, this approach was borne of aesthetics. The Ministry view that mown grass against stone is aesthetically pleasing was one which attracted general support, and almost certainly came from Peers himself, because Charles Peers was actually an avid gardener, and the gardens of his house at Chiselhampton in Oxfordshire were widely admired. His love of flawless lawns and bright floral borders had a clear influence on the buildings in his care, and Peers' view of the aesthetic of ruins, I should say, still influences the perception of sites run by English Heritage today.

But now let us turn to the process adopted by the men from the Ministry. When a site came into care, Peers and Baines' first step was to clear the vegetation and repair the structure. This was not just simply a case of cutting a path through the undergrowth; it usually involved the removal of all organic material from the masonry and the extraction of tons of soil in order to reveal the complete remaining ground plan of the site. Indeed, at Rievaulx Abbey, and at many other sites, the Ministry set up a railway to carry away hundreds of tons of earth that had built up since the Reformation.

This involved Peers and Baines in some complex and ingenious engineering feats. The view was that the introduction of modern materials and techniques to keep the masonry standing was absolutely essential, and so at great abbeys, like Rievaulx, extensive use of concrete and steel was used to keep the building standing and prolong the remaining standing elements for the future.

Well, having cleared the site and repaired the buildings, revealing as much as possible, turf was laid around the masonry, simple labels were attached to its walls, and the site was opened to the public.

The results of this approach I think should be known to probably most people in this room, but I think it might be useful just to look at a couple of examples on the ground to remind us what it actually meant these sites started to look like.

I have already mentioned Rievaulx Abbey, the first and greatest Cistercian foundation in Northern England, which came into the guardianship of the state in 1917. Peers directed the full force of his philosophy on the ruins that it was. A vast quantity of soil was cleared, sometimes as much as sixteen feet deep, as were various post-medieval structures - trees and other elements. A great programme of repairs was undertaken, so that the south side of the choir, for instance, where masonry was precariously overhanging, was secured with great longitudinal steel ties, anchored into the bases of the vaults. Unsteady piers were taken apart, the cores were filled with reinforced concrete, and then carefully rebuilt back in the form in which the Ministry had found them. Great care was taken in the course of this to ensure that, in the end, absolutely no trace of their intervention could be seen. So, as Baines proudly noted in 1922, 'In the twelve months which have transpired since the completion of the work, no trace of what has been undertaken is observable.' Work done, and turf laid, the site was given the appearance which it still retains today.

The speed at which these sites were taken into state guardianship and then given the Baines' and Peers' makeover was remarkable. In 1910, there were 89 properties in care and their numbers grew steeply in the following years. In 1913 alone, 22 more sites were added to the list, all of which were ruined abbeys and castles. In fact, by Peers' death in 1952, 400 sites in Britain had been taken into the care of the state.

But for many of these monuments, the Ministry of Works' treatment was fundamentally distorting, because for Peers and Baines, the monuments in their care were essentially products of the Middle Ages or earlier. Their mission was to reveal as much as still remained to be shown of the fabric of the pre-Reformation period. In Baines' own words, his job was 'to sink his individuality to the uttermost and merely throw up the distinctive character and individuality of the medieval constructor'. Post-medieval uses and additions were looked on unfavourably, and at abbeys like Byland and Rievaulx, what we would now consider to be integral parts of the history of the site, such as cottages, hostelries and farm buildings, were thought of as accretions and were simply demolished and removed. Peers and his colleagues showed little anxiety at such clearances, safe in the knowledge that their concern was to reveal the beauty and truth that lay in the work of the medieval constructor.

This approach partly sprung from a belief that almost all sites had one fundamentally defining period and that the Ministry's job was to uncover, decide and decode what remained from that time, no matter what had to be demolished to allow it. However, it also came from a belief, shared with Ruskin, that buildings were documents or texts, and they saw the Ministry of Works as the institutional repository for Britain's historic monuments, rather like the Public Record Office was the repository for the nation's manuscripts and documents, and in order for the meaning of the sites to be deciphered and their secrets to be learned, they needed to be legible - legible in their phasing, but most of all, legible in their plan.

So, at a site like Hales Abbey, where all that really remained standing by the early 20th Century were some sections of the cloister arcade. Large scale clearance was undertaken in order to reveal the plan of the site, which was laid out on the grass.

Peers' own interest in the importance of the basic plan of medieval sites is easily discernible in this approach. The Victoria County History, from 1903, he had worked on a number of great medieval buildings, including Winchester and Peterborough Cathedrals and Farnham and Porchester Castles, and he was responsible for establishing the form and use of phase plans for individual sites and geographical areas, establishing principles and conventions that would later be developed by the Royal Commission on Historic Buildings and Monuments.

This rationalisation and categorisation led to an archaeological philosophy that saw castles and abbeys built to a standard plan, where each site could be interpreted in relation to that plan.

Let us take Lindisfarne Priory as an example. Here we have a seminally important ruin, not only in architectural and archaeological terms, but in the history of Christianity in Britain. In the early 20th Century, the Ministry interpreted the Priory as having a classic monastic layout, rather than being based on a secular great house, which is what we believe now. The consequence of this was that, to explain the site, it was labelled up with signs on the lawns and the ruins showing where parts of the complex would have been. A sign saying 'A Chapter House' was placed in the undercroft of a domestic lodging range, and a hall, with its central hearth, was identified as the 'Monastic Refectory'.

At Haughmond Abbey in Shropshire, a similar fiction was created in order to get the buildings to fit this sort of pre-conceived layout. Haughmond was a house of Augustinian canons, founded in the first decades of the 12th Century. The majority of the Abbey was erected in the 12th and early 13th Centuries, although at the southern end of the site, there is a fine hall, erected for the abbot's personal use, as his private

accommodation. A chamber block was added to this, with a rather fine bay window, in the 15th Century. But the abbot's lavish lodgings were actually interpreted as the infirmary, because abbeys had infirmaries and this was the only building which was large enough to have been one.

So this sort of belief in a straightforward, standardised world, where buildings were essentially of a single phase, was expressed in the wonderful and insightful series of Ministry of Works' guidebooks, the Blue Guides, and I am sure many of you have got copies of these on your shelves at home. These guides essentially ignored any finds that might have been recovered during the clearance of the site, and concentrated on the core buildings rather than the wider context. Many of the guardianship deeds, the legal documents setting out the area of land under the care of the Ministry of Works, had their boundaries drawn only three feet away from the monument, and so, in dozens of cases, the Ministry of Works took only part of a monastic site into guardianship, leaving many parts that were built or embellished in the early modern period, after the Reformation, quite separate from their earlier phases. In extreme cases, these later buildings were simply demolished as unimportant. I will give you a couple of examples.

At Much Wenlock Priory only the part of the Priory was really interesting to the Ministry of Works because it was the early medieval part of the Abbey. What they were not interested in, which is just on the other side of the fence, is the abbot's lodging, which was developed in the post-Reformation period as a house.

This was repeated at Buildwas Abbey where the state was only interested in the early Norman and later structure. What they were not interested in was the part that was turned into the post-Reformation house and is now the social club of the nearby Buildwas Power Station and has nothing to do with the site open to the public.

Gloucester Blackfriars was an important monastic house, which was actually converted into a mansion after the Reformation. Because of this, the state decided to completely remove these later phases, leaving only a gutted shell, where the splendid 16th and 17th Century interiors have been removed, in their entirety, to expose what remained of the monastic church. What was left was a scarred space, perhaps virtually meaningless, I would suggest, in historical terms. This was not the crossing of the priory church, it was not the hall of the post-Reformation house, but it was actually an upstanding archaeological site.

In a sense, what we are seeing here is a perpetuation of the Gothic revival. As the architectural impetus died out at the final and most archaeological phase of the Gothic revival in the years before the First World War, the intensity of enquiry that had provided a platform for the best Gothic architecture switched to existing monuments. Places like Lindisfarne Castle, Leeds Castle, or Hever Castle, all these buildings were restored and converted into residences in this exact same period. These were not houses built from new; they were restorations of existing, altered, and partly ruined originals. As I have already pointed out, the early inspectors of ancient monuments were not in fact archaeologists or historians, they were originally architects. So Charles Peers, Breakspear, and after the War, George Chettle, were all architects, to name but a few. These were people obsessed with the Middle Ages; moreover, an idealised notion of the Middle Ages that was no more real than that envisioned by the Victorians.

Now, what I would like to do now for a few minutes is to expand on this point by using some very interesting recent research that English Heritage has been undertaking into Helmsley Castle in North Yorkshire. In many ways, Helmsley has a history that is predictable: a major medieval castle, modernised in the 16th Century and slighted during the Civil War; thereafter, it was abandoned and it became a Gothic folly in the grounds of a splendid 18th Century mansion; in 1923, the owners gave up on it, and it passed into the guardianship of the Ministry of Works. Soon after it was safely in the care of the men from the Ministry, a programme of restoration was inaugurated. Essentially, this programme, led by Sir Charles Peers, saw Helmsley town in a series of mental compartments: there was the castle which conforms to the sort of standard view of a medieval fortress, built for defence, with a series of moats and walls; then there was the town nearby, at the castle's gate; and somewhere to the west were the castle lands. It seems quite clear really... but in fact, it is utterly misleading! Let's see why.

First of all, let's consider the castle. Peers was responsible for clearing away a huge amount of fallen masonry, recovering the plan of the original site, and restoring the upstanding buildings. This he did largely neglecting the evidence of the surrounding landscapes. The private apartments of the castle are on the west hand side and overlooking an area known as 'La Hay', which is lies on the rising ground to the west, and forms the killing arena of the West Park. The boundary of 'La Hay' can actually be seen still today by a low earthwork. From the windows of the great first floor chamber, the non-hunting members of the lord's entourage could view the last part of the hunt as the beasts were driven here for the final kill. But more than this, a stairway led down from this chamber up to a doorway which opens, now, above a sheer drop

into the inner ditch. This has always been a bit of a source of puzzlement, but we now think that there was a bridge across it from the castle onto this bank, which was used as a private viewing platform for witnessing the end of the hunt. So you see, the castle and the park worked together to create a private landscape of lordly pleasure.

But there was also another hunting park, the East Park, which is not visible from the castle, but linked to it by a route which came down a hill from the south-east towards the castle. The approaching visitor appeared to be going straight for the entrance, but in reality, when you come into this great gatehouse, you cannot get there because there is a huge bank of earth in the way. In fact, this bank of earth means that you have to be taken round to the west and go round the castle, passing the great gatehouse, glimpsing to the right, moving on, beneath the great tower, and up to the top point, looking upwards and admiring the scale of the tower, coming round the top here, taking a glimpse back at the great keep, and looking back at the residential rooms, and then coming right the way down the side, looking up at the towers of the gatehouse, before finally entering the castle from this side.

The central point here is that approaching Helmsley from the south-west was not a question of entering through a massive fortified entrance into a castle. The visitor was deliberately led on a ceremonious dance, during which the castle's finer points were shown off. This was not a culture of brute, military might, but it was a culture of ceremonial.

Now, here we come to the misleading bit. In 1923, Peers and his fellows considered Helmsley as a major military site, with massive defence earthworks. When he began the clearance of these, he found, to his intense confusion, that there was a gap in the banks of the south corner of the defences. This did not conform to his model. How could these ditches be filled with water when there was a massive hole in them? And the circuit of defences could not possibly have formed an adequate defence, and so strong was his paradigm that he decided to fill in the gap, at the south-western corner, with a great bank, in fact, of course, completely changing the nature of the castle. Peers' reconstruction of the banks at Helmsley, I think, was quite astonishing for a man who would not have dreamt of adding a single re-carved quatrefoil to a damaged window, because he was worried that it might, in some way, contaminate the original fabric. But of course, once you recognise that the earthworks are about ceremonial entry, they are about viewing hunting, they are about showing off the castle to visitors, the original gap in the earthworks becomes quite explicable, as it allowed the visitor a tantalising glimpse of the rock-cut ditch beyond. Of course, rock cutting is a very expensive activity, a status symbol, and shorn of the weeds that it has today, the white-grey surface of the rock would have been incredibly impressive glinting in the afternoon sun.

And so, in understanding better the nature of the castle, we get closer to the builder, and closer to his age. Walter Espec came into position of Helmsley in about 1120. There was a castle there at the time, but we know very little about it. The first significant survival is this great East Tower. Espec is often considered primarily as a warrior, largely because of the panegyric account of his involvement in the Battle of the Standard in 1138, in which England gained victory over the Scots. This was written by Aelred of Rievaulx, not exactly a dispassionate account because Espec was a major patron of Rievaulx Abbey. But he did other things: Espec patronised the Cistercians at Rievaulx, the Augustinians not so far at Kirkham Abbey; he was also justiciar of the forests and justiciar of Northern England, both under Henry I. Even Aelred though makes Walter give a speech, saying that 'Rather than engage in battle, he preferred to spend his time hunting or playing chess or having the deeds of his ancestors read to him.' In fact, we now know that, far from being a military thug, he was one of the pioneers of chivalric culture in England, and was closely associated with Geoffrey Gaimar, the author of 'The History of the English'. All of this puts Helmsley Castle firmly into a chivalric world, centred on display and ceremony. But I think there is more.

We no longer think of the castle with the town lying at its gates. Why? Because this simply is not the case. Unlike most castles, Helmsley is to one side of the town. In fact, it lies between the tenantry on the east and the world of lordly pleasure on the west. The fortress needed to present a dominant, lordly face to the town, to overawe the tenants, but a more sophisticated face to the park, where the private pleasures were to be enjoyed. Once you understand this, you begin to understand much more about the castle's history.

The East Tower - the keep, if you like - was built in 1190 by Robert 'Fursan' de Roos, facing the town as a potent symbol of his wealth and power. The main room sat above a vaulted chamber. But in the 14th Century, the tower was heightened. Why was this tower raised? Well, the answer to this question can be found not just by looking at the castle in isolation, but by looking at the development of the town, because when we started work on analysing how the town developed, we understood that the original marketplace, the economic dynamo of the town, was situated just here, and trading literally took place

under the eye of the lord and his tower, in the shadow of the tower in fact. In the 14th Century, new rents were laid out on the east of the castle, and the marketplace moved further out, to where it is today. What this meant was that the new houses completely obscured the tower from the marketplace, and so to maintain its dominance, it was necessary to raise it, so its symbolic and physical presence continued to loom over the town.

So without a holistic understanding of the landscape in which this castle was built, it is impossible to explain either the town or the castle itself. This, I suppose, is really my criticism of the Ministry of Works. While it would be hard to find fault with their meticulous recording and conservation of these sites, the focus was very tight, both spatially and in terms of period, and this is why the men from the Ministry did such damage.

But it is also difficult to forgive them for the extensive demolition of later phases, a philosophy that was not restricted to fortification and monasteries; it extended to post-medieval buildings too. One of my favourite English Heritage sites is Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire, which came into guardianship in 1930. It is an extraordinary house, built for the Hatton family in the 1570s but added to during the course of the 17th and 18th Centuries. Though the buildings were partially roofless, some ranges, including the Great Hall were still roofed and there were extensive remains inside of 17th and 18th Century woodwork, including panelling, balconies and pillars.

But the Ministry took out all this panelling because it was considered as later accretions and the key Elizabethan period was obscured by them. The idea was, in their eyes, a sensible move which enabled visitors to read the building and see the bones of its construction, unencumbered by 17th Century panelling. This perhaps to us seems like extraordinary vandalism, and the last decade at Kirby has seen some of these bits of wood, where we find them, being put back.

The Peers' approach to the setting of Kirby was exactly the same as at Helmsley, so while one lot of Ministry men were stripping out the woodwork in the great rooms, another lot were improving the grounds.

Another interesting example is Appuldurcombe House on the Isle of Wight. This house was built by Sir Robert Worsley in the early 18th Century. It had actually been inhabited until 1909. But like many houses, it suffered neglect during the early decades of the 20th Century, but in 1939 it was still roofed and glazed.

One section of the roof was actually partially damaged in 1943, with the fall of a land mine, and after the War, the house was taken into guardianship of the state. At this stage, I think the obvious route would have been to repair the very minor damage and to keep the building roofed and open it to the public. However, in the Ministry canon, the received wisdom was that re-roofing was not done - a philosophy developed in response to an estate of sites that had been roofless for hundreds of years. So, instead of re-roofing Appuldurcombe, the Ministry removed the roofs that had not been damaged, and five years after being taken into guardianship, the shell looked like a ruin. The sash windows were taken out, the roofs off, the floors taken out too. But in 1986 the process of doing what the Ministry had not done in the 1950s eventually started, and the building is gradually now being roofed again and the windows put back in again.

Finally, there is the extraordinary example of Wharram Percy in Yorkshire. Wharram, if you haven't been there, is one of the most astonishing and beautiful medieval sites in England. It is a deserted medieval village, with a medieval church at its core. This settlement has been the site of extensive archaeological examination since the 1950s, and we now understand it better perhaps than any comparable site I think.

By the 20th Century, the largest element of the site to remain standing above the ground was St Martin's Church, which had actually remained in active use long after the village had been abandoned - the church actually only passed out of liturgical use in the 1950s. When the site came into the care of the state, it still had a roof on and could have been used for worship. Inside in fact, the walls were covered with plasterwork, adorned with mid-17th Century wall paintings.

While the excavation of medieval domestic buildings that surrounded it was underway in 1959, there was a partial collapse in the tower of the church, and so the decision was taken to finish the job. The roof was taken off the rest of the church, the plasterwork, which was described as later, was hacked off, so that you could see the complex phasing of the church unencumbered by the boring 17th Century wall paintings. So it was that a building which could easily have continued in use was turned into a monument.

The irony of this, I think, is striking, when one remembers a speech in which J. J. Stephenson gave to the RIBA in 1877 berating the Gothic Revival architects for the destruction they were wreaking, sweeping away box pews, Jacobean monuments and 18th Century galleries, in order to make room for their modern

medieval embellishments. 'Now, another generation of enthusiasts were scraping away the post-medieval to uncover what they saw as the original fabric that lay beneath.'

I do not mean to give the impression that somehow the Ministry of Works turned bad in the mid-20th Century. As a historian, one always must be careful not to patronise the past. I am sure that historians in the future will look at the buildings which I have been involved in in my career and ask critical questions. But my point is that the buildings and monuments, that had undoubtedly been saved by Lubbock, Peers, and their colleagues, were moulded and defined by an approach to medieval history that was actually fundamentally distorting. Abbeys and priories in particular faced a gross distortion of the realities of monastic life.

Lilleshall Abbey had been excavated in the 1930s and in the 1950s, and quite extensive remains were found in the south, and a very interesting Lady Chapel was found in the north of the site. Neither of these areas, which were fully excavated, were ever laid out on the grass in the sort of Ministry of Works plan because they did not fit the preconceived notion. They are simply buried beneath the grass; you would never know they had been excavated. When you look at the southern refectory range, the post-medieval alterations which saw the conversion of this range into a house were rigidly interpreted as alterations that had happened in the monastic period.

What the Ministry were doing was always giving the greatest prominence to the early phases of monastic history. The church and the main cloistral ranges were always displayed and interpreted as if they represented the complex in its heyday, and yet of course we know that, through the 14th and 15th and into the early 16th Century, these buildings were altered and changed and embellished.

Of course this built-in distortion is misleading for visitors to the sites today, but the actions of the men from the Ministry were actually more far-reaching than perhaps they ever realised, because for the whole of the period, up until really only about ten years ago, the Ministry of Works' photo library was the principal source of illustration for literally hundreds of books about the Middle Ages, about castles, about monastic life, etc. Book after book, article after article, used precisely the same photographs of the same misleading sites, further perpetuating a distorted view of the physical remains of the Middle Ages. In this way, the work of Peers and Baines penetrated the heart of the academic establishment for a period of nearly forty years. Well - what a tricky situation!

Today, English Heritage cares for this collection of buildings, with all their confusing recent history. In fact, since 1952, only a handful of sites have been added to our portfolio, so the majority of the buildings that we show to the public have suffered at the hands of our predecessors. This I think partly explains the extreme reaction of the 1990s, when 'preserve as found' carried a heavy threat behind it.

Brodsworth House in Yorkshire was saved for the nation in 1990 and passed into the care of English Heritage. It was decided to keep it exactly as it was: holes in the carpets; jam jars in the kitchens; pill bottles in the medicine cabinets; even the dog urine on the carpet was analysed and preserved.

Inspectors of ancient monuments began to discuss amongst themselves the legacy of their predecessors. They began to face the presentational problems of semi-demolished buildings, like Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire, at first glance a Tudor farmhouse, but inside, a shattered shell, exposing the remains of a 12th Century abbey. Gradually, we have come to realise that we had to start owning up to what has happened and present it as part of the history of these sites.

In 2006, English Heritage launched a new series of guidebooks to replace the old blue-backed guidebooks; we call these 'the red series'. These new guidebooks face up to the post-medieval history of these sites, including the efforts of the men from the Ministry, but it has to be said it is an uphill struggle, as visitors come to these sites wanting to see the Middle Ages. They do not want to see a history of attitudes to restoration.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I think there is a salutary lesson here. My direct predecessors, in their zeal to promote the understanding of our history, made a series of decisions that now make it impossible to fully understand and appreciate that very history. Whatever we do in our generation should bear in mind that our zeal might do the same for the future. Thank you.

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