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Victorian values: past and present in the refurbishment of London's historic churches

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ABSTRACT

In 1842, *The Ecclesiologist*, a publication dedicated to the development of church architecture, suggested that 'to restore is to revive the original appearance ... lost by decay, accident, or ill-judged alteration.'¹ This sentiment informed the restoration of countless medieval churches over the nineteenth century and ultimately triggered the foundation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB); the body that would shape twentieth-century conservation philosophy. This article suggests that a number of recent church schemes in London illustrate a growing shift away from orthodox conservation principles towards creative restoration. Three Anglican churches that are currently undergoing a programme of refurbishment will be examined to shed light on emerging practices. Though none of the refurbishments have attempted to recreate the original church, all three have foregrounded the original shell and plan and, in doing so reflect *The Ecclesiologist's* position that 'we must, whether from existing evidences or from supposition, recover the original scheme of the edifice, as conceived by the first builder ...'² This article explores the factors that are influencing new approaches in church refurbishments, reading these against nineteenth-century debates on conservation and restoration.

KEYWORDS

Church; conservation; restoration; Victorian; theology; community

Introduction

The plight of an ever-increasing number of redundant historic churches has dominated discussion of church conservation in the UK in recent years. Debates have generally focused on Grade I and Grade II* listed churches and whether or how these can be adapted for secular reuse. Unlike redundant churches, those that continue as places of worship have 'ecclesiastical exemption' from listed building consent, which grants the diocese decision-making control through the faculty system.³ Many active places of worship are in urban centres where both the Anglican Church and other denominations have focused on growing congregations and attracting a new demographic of worshipper.⁴ Churches are increasingly investing in significant refurbishment and reordering of listed buildings to adapt them to innovative forms of worship and/or to integrate

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spaces for community use – often part of a process that the Church of England terms ‘revitalisation’.⁵ In the case of listed Anglican churches, the drive to adapt buildings to the new religious marketplace⁶ has loosened the tight grip that conservation standards once held over historic churches, reflecting wider trends in developer-led conservation schemes.⁷ This has offered a new creative freedom for both clergy and architects and a revision of conservation approaches.⁸

This article will discuss three Anglican churches in London that are currently being refurbished, examining the wider context and its impact on conservation strategies. The article suggests that the social, economic and theological factors that have driven these and similar contemporary projects, are redolent of those that shaped many mid-Victorian church restorations. To be clear, however, comparison is employed in this article as a useful rhetorical device rather than an attempt to directly map nineteenth-century practices onto contemporary ones – there are, plainly, significant differences in the way that these factors influenced church refurbishments. For example, the churches that concerned the Ecclesiological Society were Gothic and it was the specific synthesis of medieval rites and architectural style that the Society sought to restore. The churches explored in this article express different architectural styles and religious cultures. Indeed, two of the examples are Neo-Classical – the style which the Ecclesiological Society explicitly rejected. However, this article argues that, though the religious and aesthetic cultures are different, there is a shared principle in the drive to align theology, worship practices and restoration. In addition to the question of theology and style, there are also marked differences in the economic landscapes: though private philanthropy is a feature of both nineteenth and twenty-first century schemes, enabling development through the sale of church land is a relatively new practice. However, the fact of greater funds for some projects, combined with a desire to consolidate aesthetics and worship, has seen a rise in the status of church refurbishment in the twenty-first century that reflects its position in the hierarchy of Victorian practice. In using past practices to reflect on the present, the article offers an individual perspective on some current schemes, rather than a definitive account of contemporary church conservation.

The terms refurbishment and restoration are often used interchangeably in relation to historic buildings. In this article the term refurbishment is used to describe the alteration of a building either for functional or aesthetic reasons. The term restoration is used only in relation to the reinstatement or reconstruction of historic elements. The conservation of a building refers to the management of change and relates in this article to principles guiding the way a refurbishment is carried out, which may comprise maintaining historic layers, removing fabric or restoring features. The article does not discuss specialised techniques for the preservation or repair of fabric.

Victorian church restoration

The combination of the religious revival from the 1820s and funding from the Church Building Acts of 1818 and 1824, started a wave of ecclesiastical building projects that continued throughout the nineteenth-century.⁹ In the Anglican Church, the growing prevalence of the Gothic style coincided with a theological schism that saw the establishment of the Tractarian faction, which reinstated pre-reformation rites. For the Tractarians, only medieval or medieval style churches were able to fully facilitate Anglo-Catholic

worship and, in 1839, the Cambridge Camden Society (later the Ecclesiological Society) was founded to advance the study of medieval church architecture and promote ecclesiastical restoration.¹⁰ In Tractarian ideology, the restoration of medieval churches was coterminous with the restoration of medieval rites. For the founding members – John Mason Neale, Benjamin Webb and Alexander Beresford Hope – the dual causes of Gothic architecture and Tractarian theology were indivisible. The Society's principles were discussed, formulated and disseminated in their official journal, *The Ecclesiologist*. On church restoration, the Society agreed that the 'destructive' method of restoring medieval churches was:

the only system which offers the logical possibility of working a building into a state of abstract perfection; for, of course, it logically follows upon the theory of architectural development [*sic*] that there can be only one perfect period of architecture, all others tending to or declining from it.¹¹

Not only did the Society promote certain projects, they also paid for some: Alexander Beresford Hope personally invested large sums in the Society's model church, All Saint's Margaret Street, designed in 1850 by William Butterfield. Other wealthy Anglo-Catholic philanthropists followed suit. The banker, Henry Mildmay, for example, commissioned the church architect J.D. Sedding to complete a number of restorations across South West England from the 1860s to 80s (Figure 1).¹² The approaches favoured by the Cambridge Camden Society broadly accepted the restoration principles set out by Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, summed up in his conviction that 'To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair, or rebuild it; it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time.'¹³ Though his name came to be synonymous in the twentieth century with the 'wrong' kind of conservation, historians often forget that Viollet-le-Duc exerted a powerful influence on Victorian architecture (in all its forms) as evidenced by his being awarded the RIBA gold medal in 1864.

The foundation of the SPAB was, famously, a reaction to the destructive impulses of Victorian church restorers. Indeed, it was specifically George Gilbert Scott's plans for Tewkesbury Abbey that were the catalyst for William Morris and Philip Webb's impassioned manifesto. For the SPAB, restoration was a 'feeble and lifeless forgery'; a sentiment that had been steadily gaining traction since John Ruskin declared in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* that it was 'as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture'.¹⁴ The manifesto urged an approach that, despite being impossible to apply to the letter became, nevertheless, the cornerstone of modern conservation philosophy:

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 ornament of the building as it stands.¹⁵

Morris and Webb's 'anti-scrape' principles gained ground over the twentieth century, with the effect that church restoration as a branch of architectural practice, diminished in status after the second world war – largely because the moral injunction against 'all tampering with either the fabric or ornament of the building as it stands' severely limited the scope for individual creativity.¹⁶ As a result, the status of this practice in nineteenth-century architecture is sometimes overlooked by architectural historians: not only



Figure 1. All Saint's Church, Holbeton, restored by John Dando Sedding, 1889 (source: Sirj Photography).

did the most celebrated Victorian architects – those such as George Gilbert Scott and G E Street – make a living out of church restorations, they also received wide critical acclaim for these. A mark of this historiographical shift is that J.D. Sedding is better known today for his original churches and contribution to the Arts and Crafts movement than for his extensive church restorations, which won much admiration in his time.

Church refurbishment and conservation theory in late modernity

Until recently, it was widely accepted that church conservation demanded the lightest of touches: conservation plans generally respected layers of history (if only theoretically) and efforts to restore original designs were largely eschewed.¹⁷ Indeed, current SPAB guidance, which continues to inform Historic England's conservation principles, states that:

The SPAB Approach ... stands against restorationist arguments that it is possible or worthwhile to return a building to its original – or imagined original – form. Equally, the SPAB Approach generally rejects arguments that original designs or cultural associations are more important than surviving fabric.¹⁸

However, there are signs that recent shifts in secular conservation practice (as opposed to principles), arguably wrought by market forces and weakened planning regulations, are beginning to influence church refurbishments. As Aylin Orbasli observes, 'There is ... a notable power shift from the collective body of the State authorities and largely middle-class supported amenity societies to the private sector developer, and the increasing influence developers have over the planning process to shape development.'¹⁹ For some churches, the 'increasing influence of the developer' has had the effect of unlocking greater sums of money to finance refurbishments through enabling developments, where church land is sold for housing. In some cases, additional sums have been gathered from wealthy private donors, keen to promote certain religious groups, in much the same way as their Victorian predecessors.

The Charismatic Evangelical wing of the Church of England, particularly the Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) network, has been a particular beneficiary of private philanthropy. The growth of charismatic Anglicanism in the last decade has contributed to a marked expansion of the Church of England in London and a rise in the number of churches being adapted for the performative worship associated with this tradition.²⁰ These churches require unobstructed spaces that can accommodate large congregations (successful HTB churches in London attract regular worshippers from across and beyond the capital) and often need stages and PA systems for music-led services. Not only are traditional elements such as altar rails no longer written into specifications, they have become an active hindrance for some Anglican churches. The net result of less formal requirements, larger budgets and the relative freedom that ecclesiastical exemption allows, has seen greater creative opportunities for architects. The last decade has seen a marked increase in award-winning church refurbishments by high-profile architects and an observable rise in the status of church refurbishment as a practice.

This article does not suggest, of course, that major refurbishment and reordering of churches is a recent phenomenon. The post-war era saw large numbers of bomb-damaged churches rebuilt and repaired in range of different ways – some more conjectural than others. Indeed, it is much of these twentieth-century interventions that are currently being removed. Following the decrees of The Second Vatican Council between 1963 and 1965, changes to the liturgy, such as mass delivered with the priest facing the congregation, required the repositioning of altars in existing churches. Though these directives only applied directly to Roman Catholic churches, the drive to modernise worship spaces influenced both Anglican and Non-Conformist churches from the 1960s onwards. However, the emphasis throughout the 1960s and 1970s (not

only in the Anglican Church but also in Roman Catholic and Non-Conformist churches) tended to be on building new churches rather than refurbishing existing ones.²¹ Extensive remodelling increased in the 1980s when congregations began to dwindle, funds became scarcer and community facilities were incorporated into churches. In such cases, the emphasis was rarely on restoring the original church but rather on adapting the church to changing needs.

There have been some notable exceptions to this, however. For example, Quinlan Terry's refurbishment of St Helen's Bishopsgate, completed in 1995 was a self-conscious restoration (the word Terry himself uses) of the late Georgian interior of a medieval church. However, it should be noted that this scheme, unlike the case studies that follow, was part of the rebuilding of the church following damage caused by IRA bombs in 1992 and 1993, rather than a remodelling specifically designed to meet new demands. Terry's approach defied conservation orthodoxy – in the 1990s his work was generally out of step with both architectural currents (his Classical designs for Brentwood Roman Catholic Cathedral continue to divide opinion) and also conservation practice. Significantly, the scheme for St Helens, which saw the removal of J.L Pearson's High Church Victorian fittings and the creation of a new gallery at the west end, faced strong opposition from the City Corporation of London, the SPAB, English Heritage, The Victorian Society and the Ancient Monuments Society. This resulted in a Consistory Court hearing, which ultimately found in favour of Terry's scheme.²² In light of its particular history and architect, St Helen's cannot be considered representative of church refurbishments of the 1990s – indeed, it is noted for being distinctly unrepresentative. Of significance to this article, however, was that the restoration of the Georgian Low Church interior was explicitly connected to the Evangelical history of St Helen's – the church is now at the heart of the City's HTB network and Terry himself belongs to the Evangelical tradition.

This article does not argue that radical remodelling itself is an emerging phenomenon but rather a conservation approach that celebrates the original church and aims to restore it in spirit: an objective that was shared by Victorian restorationists.

Paring away: the church of St John-at-Hackney

The £6 million refurbishment of the Grade II* St John at Hackney in the Diocese of London, illustrates the impact of enabling development and religious culture on conservation approaches (Figure 2). In 2015 the then rector, Reverend Robert Wickham, secured a Heritage Lottery grant to carry out much-needed repairs to the historic fabric of the church and engaged the practice Thomas Ford and Partners (TFP). This was necessary not only to protect the building but also to enhance its existing profile as a concert venue. The TFP scheme allocated most of the budget on work to repair the building and rationalise the layout: the interior of the church, built in 1794 by James Spiller, had been remodelled in the 1950s by the noted church architect N.F. Cachemaille-Day, to include Festival of Britain-style fittings and the incorporation of community space.²³ The TFP scheme retained the community facilities within the main body of the church, partly because of the cost and practical limitations of relocating these. Though the project was relatively modest in ambition, additional funds were required and the company Thornsett was brought in to develop neighbouring church



Figure 2. St John at Hackney, James Spiller, 1794 (source: Sirj Photography).

land for housing, thus unlocking a considerable sum of money. In 2017, Reverend Wickham left and was replaced by Reverend Al Gordon, a clergyman from the HTB network who brought with him a lively charismatic tradition and an ambitious vision. Gordon approached the internationally acclaimed architect, John Pawson to work with TFP on what was to be Pawson's first church project in the UK. Engaging Pawson had the dual benefit of putting St John at Hackney on the map (the scheme had wide coverage in the architectural press) and modernising the space for the vibrant, performative worship that characterises HTB churches.

The revised Pawson/TFP scheme saw the community facilities removed from the church and incorporated into the new residential development, Hackney Gardens. This arrangement had the advantage, from the point of view of the client and architects, that the internal space could be opened up and Spiller's Greek cross plan reinstated. The completed interior is voluminous, light and sparse and features a large stage, state-of-the-art PA system and bar for serving drinks (Figure 3).

Pawson is noted for his minimalist style and the refurbishment is immediately reminiscent of his austere makeover of Moritzkirche, Augsburg, rebuilt in 1946 by Dominikus Böhm and remodelled internally over the twentieth century. The Moritzkirche refurbishment involved, in Pawson's words, the 'meticulous paring away of selected elements of the church's complex fabric' (Figure 4).²⁴ At St John at Hackney, the project architect Stefan Dold was keen to emphasise that the scheme did not simply roll out Pawson-brand minimalism but instead sought to reinstate the Georgian plan and spirit of the original church by removing subsequent alterations.²⁵ There is little doubt that this was genuinely the intention of both TFP and Pawson. As TFP's website describes, 'later additions, dating mainly from the 1950s, have been carefully stripped away to



Figure 3. St John at Hackney, interior remodelled by TFP and John Pawson, 2020 (source: Sirj Photography).

reveal the original simplicity of the Nave²⁶ This objective was not lost on the critics, with the architectural journal, *Dezeen* praising the refurbishment's successful revival:

The overhaul, which is Pawson's first church project in the UK, focuses on reinstating and accentuating the Grade II*-listed building's original design that was hidden by past renovations.²⁷

The almost-completed scheme at St John at Hackney has been widely praised for its sophisticated and sensitive aesthetic. The complete removal of the Cachemaille-Day fittings and decorative scheme was welcomed without objection from any heritage bodies, including the statutory consultee, the Twentieth Century Society. Here, the opportunity to reinstate the original plan and Georgian low-church spirit has justified a significant shift away from orthodox conservation approaches: those which seek to retain some evidence of successive alterations. This scheme highlights not only the role of the developer and the turn from SPAB principles but also the priorities of headline-grabbing church refurbishments: of significance here, is that vital repairs to the roof, which were factored into the initial budget, remain to be done and the Church is currently seeking funds through the time-honoured route of congregational tithes to pay for this.

Original vision: St John's Church, waterloo

In contrast to St John at Hackney, the renovation of the grade II* St John's Church in the Diocese of Southwark, has been scaled back as a result of a campaign to save the 1950s remodelling and fittings (Figure 5). The original Greek Revival building,



Figure 4. Moritzkirche, Augsburg, Dominikus Boehm 1946, remodelled by John Pawson, 2013 (source: Susanne Bauer).

designed by Francis Octavius Bedford in 1824, was one of four churches in Southwark built to celebrate the end of the Napoleonic wars and funded by the New Churches Building Act of 1818. St John's underwent a series of subsequent renovations: first by Reginald Blomfeld in 1885 then by John Ninian Comper in 1924²⁸ and finally, following significant bomb damage during the blitz, by the Southwark Diocesan architect, Thomas Ford in 1950. The 1950 refurbishment saw a new Greek-inspired decorative scheme; the creation of two chapels; a lectern, altar and 'double-decker' pulpit; and the installation of a mural by Hans Feibusch, the artist favoured by



Figure 5. St John's Waterloo, Francis Octavius Bedford, 1824 (source: Sirj Photography).

Thomas Ford (Figure 6). The scheme also saw the removal of the original galleries, which had the effect of widening the nave with the consequent loss of the original axial plan.²⁹ St John's was designated the official Festival of Britain church in 1951 – a move that conferred a seal of approval on the interior design and established



Figure 6. St John's Waterloo, interior remodelled by Thomas Ford, 1950 (source: Sirj Photography).

its historical significance. Indeed, the current listing description focuses equally on the original building and 1950s interior.

In 2015, the diocese agreed that the church needed to be updated to meet its growing needs as both a place of worship and concert venue and engaged Eric Parry Architects, noted for their award-winning refurbishment of St Martin-in-the-Fields. The practice drew up radical plans that would see most of the 1950s interior stripped out: the two chapels were to be removed and new galleries constructed either side of the nave, replacing those that had been lost in Thomas Ford's remodelling. The galleries were not replicas of the original ones but rather a modern interpretation, having angled walls and storage space beneath. In addition to this, the 1950s fittings and artwork were to be removed, with only the Feibusch mural being retained.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee consulted the appropriate amenity societies before making a judgment on whether to grant a faculty (the equivalent of listed building consent under ecclesiastical exemption). The plans were challenged by the Twentieth Century Society, who felt that Thomas Ford's interior was central to the historic value of the church. Both the architect and vicar of St John's, Canon Giles Goddard, continued to defend the plans and the dispute resulted in a Consistory Court Hearing in 2016. The scheme was defended on the basis that the remodelling was necessary to make the church usable and also that reinstating the galleries would 'return the church to Bedford's original vision'.³⁰ The hearing resulted in the Chancellor of the Diocese of Southwark upholding the Twentieth Century Society's objection on the grounds that 'the proposed Eric Parry scheme would cause serious harm to the listed building and that the public benefits of

the proposed scheme were insufficient to outweigh the harm.³¹ The reworked plans were granted a faculty in 2018 and, though much of the decorative scheme, including the murals either side of the reredos will be removed, the 1950s configuration will remain with some of the fittings retained.³² The Festival of Britain colour scheme will be repainted white, in line with a general minimalist trend in church interiors.

Though the ruling was ultimately in favour of a conservative approach, the scale of the proposed renovation of this listed building and both Canon Goddard's and the architect's emphatic defence (such that they chose to invest in a legal hearing rather than alter the scheme) of the removal of significant twentieth century fittings, is at variance with orthodox conservation approaches – indeed, this approach was markedly different from that taken by Eric Parry Architects at St Martin-in-the-Fields. With the exception of the East window, redesigned by Shirazeh Houshiary, the refurbishment of the main church building at St Martin's, completed in 2008, retained most of the existing fabric (Figure 7). As the project architect for St Martin's, Robert Kennett was keen to stress, this is a 'renewal, not a restoration'.³³

Eclecticism and diversity: St Anselm's Church, Kennington

Elsewhere, church refurbishments have taken an eclectic approach that generates conversation between different phases of a building. Plans drawn up by Dow Jones Architects for the Grade II St Anselm's church in Kennington, bring into dialogue a radical reconfiguration of the liturgical space with not only the existing church but also the ghost of an earlier, unexecuted design (Figure 8). The new scheme, which will be funded through enabling development, draws influence from the earliest plans for St Anselm, produced in 1912 by the practice Adshead and Ramsey (Figure 9). This unexecuted plan was for a centralised, Latin cross church with a dome. Though the foundation stone was laid in 1914 and work began on construction of the walls, this was interrupted by the First World War. It was completely redesigned by Adshead and Ramsay nearly twenty years later and the building that stands today is an Early Christian style church with a basilican plan, completed in 1933.³⁴ The current scheme, which reduces the existing nave and chancel by a third to create four levels of new space, proposes a novel liturgical arrangement. This will see double doors at ground floor, replacing the reredos, with dead space behind the east wall opened up to operate as a retro choir during services and as a community space at other times. According to the architect, the new layout will constitute 'a reordering of the church in line with its original [unexecuted] plan as a Latin Cross basilica...' but the reinstatement of the original plan is, of course, theoretical as it does not and never has existed. Here it operates as a creative starting point for a flexible scheme that has been designed to serve both worship and community needs.³⁵ Some existing fittings and artwork will be retained in the refurbishment, although not necessarily in the same place: the baldacchino, for example, will be moved outside the building. Others may not be retained: the reconfiguration may see the removal of large murals by the Royal Academician, Norman Adams, commissioned for the church in 1971 (Figure 10).



Figure 7. St Martin-in-the-Fields, James Gibbs, 1724. Interior refurbished by Eric Parry Architects, 2008 (source: Sirj Photography).

The church, which belongs to the Liberal Anglican tradition, has a socially mixed congregation and actively promotes inclusion and diversity. Though the culture of Liberal Anglicanism is socially progressive, the style of worship is more traditional than the charismatic wing and it is not experiencing similar growth: unlike churches such as St John at



Figure 8. St Anselms, Kennington, Adshead and Ramsay, 1933 (source: Sirj Photography).

Hackney, the community requires a building that has to adapt to a shrinking number of worshippers. Despite this, St Anselm's has a growing range of outreach activities, which the new scheme is designed to accommodate.

Dow Jones's plans for St Anselm's raise existential questions about what it means to restore lost elements of a building. Here the notion of restoration is interpreted



Figure 9. 1912 design for St Anselm's, Adshead and Ramsay (Source: Sirj Photography).

imaginatively rather than literally, as no original elements are being reconstructed and nothing has been removed to reinstate an original plan. Instead, the refurbishment proposes an entirely different configuration, inspired by the unexecuted 1912 design. Though the scheme is highly unconventional, Dow Jones's track record has gained them the trust of the Southwark Diocesan Advisory Committee: their work has gathered a series of prestigious awards for intelligent refurbishments of Hawksmoor's Christchurch Spitalfields, G.E. Street's St Mary Magdalene, Paddington, as well as the acclaimed refurbishment of the Garden Museum in the former church St Mary at Lambeth.



Figure 10. St Anselms, interior (source: Sirj Photography).

Conclusion

These examples do not suggest a widespread transformation in approaches to historic churches but they do highlight an emerging taste in some of London's Anglican churches for radical refurbishments that draw from the original shell and plan of the buildings. This is significant as the Church is the custodian of the largest number of listed buildings in England and thus establishes general standards for conservation. Similarly, though the culture and theology of the churches examined in this article do not represent all congregations, they offer a snapshot of contemporary Anglican worship in the capital and of how architecture is being used to facilitate and build this. The increasing role of historic buildings in the Church's mission will have a bearing in the future on how the Church uses the faculty system to balance conservation principles against congregational growth: radical refurbishments that attract more worshippers may ultimately prove to be more valuable than observing restrictive conservation standards. In this matter, the example of St John's Waterloo is valuable as an indication that dioceses are willing to invest resources in defending radical schemes if they feel that the needs of parish demand it. The close relationship between theology, mission and historic architecture that is emerging here, clearly mirrors that which shaped the Victorian church.

The notion of restoration has been employed and interpreted loosely in the schemes described in the article and no attempt in any has been made to faithfully return the building to its original form or a moment in time, as Quinlan Terry intended with St Helen's, Bishopsgate; none of the case studies in this article have reinstated fittings such as altar rails, box pews, galleries or pulpits. Rather, the objective has been to capture the authentic *spirit* of the building, either by stripping away accretion or by

bringing the original church into dialogue with the present. This perhaps reflects the emergence of 'spirit theory' in contemporary conservation, where the notion of spirit as an element that can somehow be conserved or retrieved is gaining currency.³⁶ As an intangible value, capturing the spirit of a building rests on creative and conjectural interpretations of the first architect's intentions and as such it is highly evocative of Viollet-le-Duc's conviction that 'to restore a building ... is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time'. Victorian restorers also engaged this logic to allow a free interpretation of what a medieval building should look like – no Victorian restorations were intended to be precise replicas of the original building and all employed some level of 'supposition' in addition to 'existing evidences' of original buildings. In doing so, restorations such as G.G. Scott's work at St Alban's Abbey or Chester Cathedral staged conversations across time in much the same way as the case studies described in this article.

The individual creativity afforded Victorian architects in restoring churches is demonstrated by the status of this branch of architecture in the nineteenth century and the acclaim that restoration projects received from many contemporary critics. In the twenty-first century, church refurbishment is emerging once more as a creative practice that attracts prestigious architects. Indeed, the prospect of engaging John Pawson to refurbish a relatively unremarkable parish church would have been inconceivable at the turn of the twenty-first century.³⁷ This is due in part to the fact that budgets for church refurbishments in the past have rarely been sufficient to fund the schemes discussed in this article, all of which cost (or will cost) between £4 million and £6 million. The examples above are, of course, exceptions: few churches in the UK can raise such funds and, for most, the struggle to remain financially viable continues. The churches discussed here, however, illustrate the growing practice of liquidating long-term assets in areas where land value is high and/or raising money from private donors who are keen to promote certain theologies – largely Evangelicalism in the case of London.³⁸ For churches who have the funds, the benefits of employing high-profile architects to undertake refurbishments that beckon the attention of the press and bring in new (often younger) worshippers are manifest. There is a growing awareness in the Church of England that sophisticated architecture is a valuable part of the missionary tool kit, just as it was for nineteenth-century Tractarians.

The increase in funding for some schemes raises an important question: why choose to refurbish an existing church, over building a new one? Though there are some new churches being built in London, the preference has been to refurbish extant buildings. The reasons for this are not necessarily driven by budget: in some cases it would be more cost-effective to sell a historic building and construct a new church.³⁹ Although each refurbishment scheme is different, a thread draws many of these together: the desire to reinforce historical and spiritual continuity. This was implicit in Quinlan Terry's restoration of St Helen's and has been explicit in recent examples, such as the HTB church Holy Trinity, Clapham, which has promoted the refurbishment as a way of connecting the Evangelical tradition of the current community with the church's history as the site of the foundation of the Clapham Sect.⁴⁰ At Holy Trinity, the desire to establish symbolic links and a sense of continuity, echoes the objectives of the Cambridge Camden Society to restore religious sensibilities by restoring churches.

In his study of the conservation and adaptation of urban churches, the architectural historian Matthew Steele suggests that there is an absence of ‘academic accounts of conservation practices balanced with community need in the context of historic places of worship’.⁴¹ Such an oversight means that discussions of church conservation, focused as they often are on redundant churches, repairs and lack of funds, often fail to capture the full picture and therefore miss the ways in which conservation theory is evolving – in some cases this is, counter-intuitively, the result of having more money to spend on ambitious projects. While the principles embedded in the faculty system generally align with those of Historic England at present, this article suggests that new practices and theologies, and the increasing role of private developers, are likely to inflect these in the future. In drawing comparisons between Victorian church restorations and contemporary refurbishments, this article invokes the past as a way of understanding the present and suggests that church conservation continues to be a surprisingly dynamic practice.

Notes

1. The Ecclesiologist, 1842, quoted in James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 159.
2. Ibid.
3. In the faculty system, the Diocesan Advisory Committees, National Amenity Societies and Historic England must be consulted on refurbishments of listed churches. Plans can be challenged by these bodies through Consistory Court hearings. Changes to church interiors are governed by the faculty system but planning permission is required for any external material changes.
4. David Goodhew, ed., *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
5. The Church of England’s growth through ‘church planting’ is specifically described as ‘revitalisation’. The strategy is described in Ric Thorpe, *Resource Churches: A Story of Church Planting and Revitalisation Across the Nation*, (London: The Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication, 2021).
6. Grace Davie and others have discussed the competition between faiths to attract worshipper in what she describes as a ‘marketplace’. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, 2nd ed., (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) 161.
7. In relation to funding and historic churches, the CoE suggests that ‘The value judgements surrounding the legislation relating to the built environment, and the priorities for expenditure, are now more propitious to the Church’s own need to evolve and grow than they have been for a very long time’, ‘A Future for Church buildings’, Report by the Church Heritage Forum, May, 2003, 33.
8. The Church of England’s website ‘a Christian Presence in Every Community’ states ‘We want to encourage you to make wider, more imaginative and more strategic use of your church building, opening it up to all in your community and giving people new reasons to cross the threshold’ <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/sharing-your-building-and-finding> (accessed on the 6th March, 2022).
9. Janet. A Null, ‘Restorers, Villains and Vandals’ *Bulletin for the Association of Preservation Technology* 1, no. 3/4 (1985): 26-41, 28.
10. Eliot Rose, ‘The Stone Table in the Round Church and the Crisis of the Cambridge Camden Society’ *Victorian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1966): 119-144. 120.
11. The Ecclesiologist, 1847 quoted in Jonathan Conlin, ‘Development or Destruction: E.A. Freeman and the Debate on Church Restoration, 1839-51’, *Oxoniensia*, 77 (2012): 142.

12. Though Sedding's church restorations won much acclaim in his lifetime, attitudes changed sharply following his death in 1891 with his former pupil, Ernest Gimson complaining that. 'it is poor old J.D. that is responsible for the spoiling of all the churches'. Annette Carruthers, Barley Roscoe, Mary Greensted, Ernest Gimson: Arts and Crafts Designer and Architect, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2019). 40. Sedding is now better known for his contribution to Arts and Crafts architecture.
13. Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, 1866 quoted in Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*. 2nd ed., (London and New York: Routledge) 183.
14. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, (Kent: George Allen, 1889): 194.
15. William Morris and Phillip Webb, *SPAB Manifesto*, 1877. <https://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/spab-approach> (accessed on the 5th March, 2022).
16. Some celebrated architects continued to work on church refurbishments in the first half of the twentieth century. These included, Sir John Ninian Comper, Charles Nicholson and to a lesser degree Giles Gilbert Scott. Stephen Dykes Bower continued to work on church restorations after the war, notably on bomb-damaged buildings and on Westminster Abbey as Surveyor of the Fabric.
17. Writing in 1979, James F. White suggested that, in the mid-nineteenth century, the 'Conservative school had few adherents, though today, almost all church restorers would claim allegiance to it'. *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival*. 168.
18. Morris and Webb, *SPAB Manifesto*, 1877.
19. Aylin Orbasli, 'Conservation theory in the twenty-first century: slow evolution or paradigm shift?' *Journal of Architectural Conservation* 23, no. 3 (2017): 157-170. 164.
20. Bob Jackson offers figures for the growth of charismatic Anglican 'brands' *The Descularisation of the City: London's Church, 1980 to the Present*, ed. D. Goodhew, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 271.
21. Michael Yelton and John Salmon, *Anglican Church-Building in London, 1946-2012* (Reading: Spire Books, 2013).
22. Interview with Quinlan Terry in 'Quinlan Terry: The Survival of Classicism', *The Institute for Sacred Architecture*, https://www.sacredarchitecture.org/articles/quinlan_terry (accessed on the 28th April 2022)
23. Though the 1950s intervention was commissioned to repair bomb damage, the statutory listing description's characterisation of this as a 'restoration' is inaccurate.
24. 'Moritzkirche', John Pawson website, <http://www.johnpawson.com/works/moritzkirche>, (accessed on 5th March, 2022).
25. Stefan Dold (Associate Architect at John Pawson), in discussion with the author, 15th December, 2020
26. 'St John at Hackney', Thomas Ford and Partners website <https://www.thomasford.co.uk/projects-2/ST-JOHN-AT-HACKNEY> (accessed on 5th March, 2022).
27. Lizzie Crook, 'John Pawson strips back 18th-century church in London to celebrate original features' *Dezeen*, 21st December, 2020.
28. Comper's baldachino was a casualty of the bomb that struck St John's in December 1940. 'Church of St John the Evangelist' *Survey of London*, Vol 23, Lambeth: South Bank and Vauxhall <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol23/pp32-36> (accessed on the 28th of April 2022)
29. Matthew Steele, 'The Conservation and Adaptation of Historic Anglican Churches in England for Secular Community Use and Continued Worship, post 1945' (PhD Diss., Open University, 2012).
30. 'Consistory Court Hearing' website of St John's and St Andrews at Waterloo <https://stjohnswaterloo.org/blog/18108> (accessed on 6th March, 2022).
31. 'Court Ruling to Save Festival of Britain Interior' website of the Twentieth Century Society <https://c20society.org.uk/news/court-ruling-to-save-festival-of-britain-interior-at-st-johns-waterloo> (accessed on 6th March, 2022).
32. The works are scheduled to be completed in spring 2022.
33. Stephen Bailey, 'A second coming for St Martin' *The Guardian*, 30th September 2007.

34. 'Our History' North Lambeth Parish website, <https://northlambethparish.org/our-history-1> accessed 05/03/2022
35. Biba Dow (Director at Dow Jones Architects), in discussion with the author, March 2nd, 2022.
36. Aylin Orbasli suggests that in 'spirit theory' 'the 'spirit of the time' is a decisive element in the production of the built environment'. Orbasli, 'Conservation theory in the twenty-first century',¹⁶⁷. This theory reflects the 2008 ICOMOS Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of Spirit of Place which defines spirit as the 'physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place'. In response to this guidance, the National Trust now issues a 'Spirit of Place' statement for their properties.
37. The University of Westminster hosted a conference entitled 'Sacred, Spiritual, Secular: the architecture of faith in modern Britain' in 2019 that explored the rise of faith architecture in contemporary architectural practice. The conference featured presentations from architects discussing this phenomenon. This was followed by an exhibition staged by the Architecture Foundation, entitled 'Congregation' which emphasised the same point, The exhibition featured a model of the (then) unfinished refurbishment of St John-at-Hackney,
38. The practice of developer-led ecclesiastical projects, particularly those by the developer Thornsett, has been documented by a number of commentators. See, for example, Oliver Wainwright, 'Holy Housing Developments, How God is Getting into Construction', The Guardian, 25 February 2020 (accessed on the 28th April 2022).
39. The Edwardian St Barnabas's church in North Finchley was sold and redeveloped as luxury housing. The congregation relocated to a nearby 1990s office block which now serves as the church.
40. The 'Revitalise 250' project at Holy Trinity, proposes an 'extensive reimagination of the building' that 'looks back, 250 years, to its foundation'. 'Enhancing our heritage' Holy Trinity Brompton website. <https://www.holytrinityclapham.org/revitalise250/blog/2020/11/11/enhancing-our-heritage> (accessed on the 5th March, 2022).
41. Steele, 'The Conservation and Adaptation of Historic Anglican Churches for Secular Community Use and Continued Worship post-1945' (PhD Diss., The Open University 2021)

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