

Unravelling Heritage

Assessment 2

Option 2; should historic buildings be managed to prioritise their historical or present function and what are the potential consequences for each decision?

My initial viewpoint is that historical buildings may, for pragmatic reasons alone require a hybrid approach to ensure conservation.

To facilitate a multi-dimensional approach I shall, for the purposes of this assessment refer to historic buildings and structures that are either partially or fully accessible to the public and not subject to extended periods of complete closure whilst repairs or restoration are undertaken. I do realise many historic buildings will need to be closed to allow for even routine maintenance but for simplicity I shall assume regular public access/inhabitation is possible.

Which takes me to ask myself what is an historic building?

Appearances can be deceptive. This summer I visited Arundel Castle for the first time. A large imposing structure which I have driven past hundreds of times as it is close to the main south coast route for trains and motor traffic. Arundel Castle has all the attributes of the stereo typical castle; moat, crenelations, arrow slits, curtain walls and much more. When inside medieval suits of armour, pikestaffs, muskets, soldier's uniforms, oil paintings, heraldic shields etc plus a multitude of artifacts. Whilst you examine these treasures on display in many halls, corridors and rooms to recall one passes under the gaze of men who held the incumbent title of Duke of Norfolk. So, it was of surprise that when reading the brochure that although based on a 1067 building between the 1870s and 1890s the site was almost completely rebuilt in Gothic style. arundelcastle.org

Hitherto I had never given much thought to Arundel Castle but as I had signed up for this MA I began to question why I had not noticed what was staring me in the face for sixty plus years? My learned Irish companion on that day succinctly stated *"same in Ireland. The paying tourist visits a castle, sees an old castle, can buy souvenirs to take home and the place pays it's way"*. We did enjoy our visit. But the irony having assumed Arundel Castle was ancient briefly rankled.

Arundel Castle may be an extreme example. Yet, later recalling a 10-credit archaeology undergraduate module I took at Lampeter called Castles in Context during the 1990s reminded me that additions and alterations are commonplace. During one lecture Professor David Austin explained that changes to castles and other fortified buildings were routinely required. For example, in response to evolving munition technology. www.learnedsociety.wales/fellow/david-austin

I would argue that historic buildings may need to evolve to suit contemporary economic realities too. For 120 years or so in Britain the introduction of inheritance taxes on property etc altered the ownership profile of many of the larger private estates and country houses. Post WW2 saw a period of significant social change in Britain which impacted the labour market and created staffing issues in the broader agricultural and in-service domestic sector upon which the viability of stately homes and their often linked revenue producing estates depended. www.elysian-estates.co.uk/theriseandfallandriseofthebritishstatelyhome

To preserve some of these historic buildings, potteries etc and estates from abandonment, demolition or unsympathetic alterations in the present day there has evolved a relationship based on entrance fees or subscription in exchange for regulated access. In England the National Trust are a prominent organisation which acts as a facilitator/agent between owners and organisations who wish to advertise and benefit economically from paying visitors. www.historichouses.org www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Sometimes the National Trust manages properties that were donated to them or as in the case of Tyntesfield, Wroxall near Bristol purchase outright.

Using castles as my focus initially I wish to examine the various management approaches in respect of historical function.

In Britain amongst the primary functions of castles was to provide strategic defence. Coastal castles often for controlled a navigable river mouth, estuary or ford. Nearby Laugharne Castle cadw.gov.uk is a good example of an historic building whose original function is still readily apparent. Yet clearly the River Taf over which Laugharne Castle presides no longer requires military protection.

Presumably to maintain Laugharne Castle in a safe condition it needs to have a funding stream. Cadw who manage this partially ruined castle cannot offer lucrative medieval enactments which demonstrate its defensive and offensive capabilities have instead sought to derive revenue from a gift shop, function room hire, events, exhibitions and charging for filming in and around the impressive building, ruins and setting. Cadw offer in their online brochure a 5% discount for tickets bought 24 hours in advance but then go on to boldly state entry is free. I hope to discover more this spring.

Throughout my online searches and recollection of visits to historic or tourist sites in Britain and abroad the link to access and revenue has in my experience been invariably present. Sometimes in the form of a voluntary donation but more often as a straightforward monetary exchange. It occurs to me that these can be no meaningful distinction between historic and tourist sites from an advertising perspective as one persons entrance fee or donation counts the same. However, heritage tourism when responsibly and sympathetically undertaken allows for a range of experiences at the same venue.

Therefore, the necessary relationship between site management and revenue to be successful would seem to need organising along formal lines. In much the same way as a responsible commercial business is responsible for the upkeep of its premises to a safe and in the case of cafes etc etc inviting standard.

Broadly, I agree with what I understand the sentiments of the Introduction of Toward an Ecology of Heritage (E Brabec & E Chilton 2012 para2). Whilst Brabec and Chilton are referring to contemporary disasters. Arguably when a castle is deliberately ruined then left to decay for centuries a form of disaster or has occurred. Certainly an intentional loss of function if one considers the fate of Laugharne Castle. "Culture and heritage affects all aspects of society and how individuals define themselves in the world. Heritage as we define it here, is not merely "what happened in the past"; that is, the term "heritage" does not only mean "history", as in historical facts, events, and time periods."

Laugharne Castle has become a place of both heritage and culture. During my recent visit it is evident that there is sufficient of the original structure or perhaps more accurately the structure prior to being deliberately ruined (please see reference to Professor David Austin above) to be able to describe the castle's original function. Heritage because of its acknowledged place in the Welsh landscape and why its function helped the Normans protect the coast of Carmarthenshire from incursions. Llansteffan Castle just to the east guarded the River Towy as part of a linked series of defensive castles or military fortifications as was Kidwelly.

www.glanamangarnant.wales

The historical place in Carmarthenshire's history Laugharne Castle occupies is well documented and lends itself to giving substance to the experience of visiting students, school children and tourists by the thoughtful use of information.

Bramber Castle in West Sussex is an example of a classic motte and bailey style castle that evolved into a formidable stone structure complete with 14 metre high curtain walls according to www.english-heritage.org/brambercastle. I have visited Bramber Castle on many occasions throughout my life. Almost always for picnics or walks amongst the ruins or when younger play on the mott. My visits weren't particularly memorable but invariably pleasant. Bramber Castle is easily accessed by car or bus and has a good quality cycle path passing close by. Until about fifteen years ago I knew a little about the castle. Or at least I thought I did ! Local oral history informed that Bramber Castle was a Roman ruin *. English Heritage have installed several story board together with diagrams of how the castle would have appeared. Unlike some other English Heritage venues Bramber Castle is free to visit and benefits from the protections it has as a Scheduled Monument.

Bramber Castle was constructed shortly after the Norman Conquest circa 1070 to protect William 1st newly conquered territory. (Ben Johnson ; The History of Castles www.historic-uk.com 2015) Bramber Castle was, like Laugharne and Kidwelly part of a series of castles. Bramber formed one of six defensive and administrative centres stretching along the coast from Battle Castle. Thus Bramber Castle played an important role in the shaping of Britain following the seminal event when William the Conqueror successfully invaded in 1066. The consequences of the Norman Conquest are still readily apparent in the way much of Britain was divided into counties, our language and through key moments such as the Domesday Book.

In addition to the defensive properties of castles in Britain further significance may be evidenced by the functions provided within them such as prisons, courts, accommodation for militia and government officials. Taxes were collected by officials based at Norman castles (Castles and the Anglo-Norman World - Davies AJ et al 2016)

In my experience story boards installed by English Heritage boards at Bramber and elsewhere can significantly enhance how one might 'see' castles etc and perhaps support preservation. Byword-the remains of Bramber Castle are unsecured, yet these story boards have not been vandalised.

I would argue that heritage sites and buildings such as Laugharne Castle and others have become venues. A gradual and mutually beneficial collision of heritage, history and tourism seems to have evolved into an accepted format insofar as management is concerned. The Core of Heritage Tourism (Y Poria, R Butler & D Airey 2003) explore together reasons why heritage and tourism are interlinked. Their Introduction uses the phrase 'social phenomenon'. I felt the paper incisively drew connections with the varied reasons why people visit heritage sites/attractions as a tourist. That people should wish to travel and learn either en route or at the destination is not in itself a new 'social phenomenon'.

The so called 'Grand Tour' had a lasting impact upon British architecture and was perhaps the birth of British tourism. However, the modern 'social phenomenon' of large numbers of travellers ie tourists has created opportunities for 'out of the way' venues/attractions due to the relative increases in disposable income, greater private car ownership and longer holidays, internet and television documentaries etc.

Thus for managers and organisations tasked with the key responsibilities of maintenance and perhaps restoration increased visitor numbers can create management challenges. One might argue that additional footfall creates additional revenue but at what cost ?

Depending on the venue/attractions issues may include; increased wear and tear to vulnerable flagstones or erosion of paths and stonework. The visual nature of the venue can be altered by large crowds which in themselves may or not be negative.

However, greater numbers of visitors can mean larger car parks, unsympathetic buildings such as toilets, cafes etc. The seasonal nature of many British venues that involve unheated buildings, gardens etc may create fluctuations in numbers on a day to day basis. Therefore, creating additional management challenges.

I have no doubt that the in-situ protections afforded by ensuring venues/attractions are popular will be persuasive. The justifications for greater revenue can translate into improved maintenance, restoration programmes, education, employment and local pride.

Clearly, to operate a castle for the most part as it was historically intended to function is neither possible or desirable.

Management of historic buildings, particularly those which are popular and/or vulnerable is complex.

Using the above examples it would seem management of these British historical buildings/venues are by and large rising to the challenges of prioritising maintenance and restoration. The fact that these castles remain open to the public is I would argue a measure of successful intervention (to arrest decline).

I do not feel confident that I can satisfactorily evidence a comprehensive and uniform position insofar as consequences due to the diverse yet linked values individuals may hold in respect of original function.

It may be to present a venue/attraction open to the public in such a way that offends nobody or has minimal consequences is almost impossible. However, by sensitively acknowledging historical importance and original function as appears to be the case with my albeit limited examples seems to be a predominant management position that is balanced and if increasing visitors numbers count popular too.

In conclusion I remain (though more broadly) of the opinion that a hybrid approach to managing historic should be adopted where possible.

By prioritising either historical or present function as a policy would appear inconsistent at many venues. For example, the recreational function afforded by some relatively safe castle grounds for families with young, energetic children may enable mixed groups to sample the historical aspect in a relaxed setting too.

I do accept many historic buildings and venues ought not be promoted as recreational functions for energetic children etc. Yet, I have come to the belated viewpoint that wherever feasible arrangements should be made to cater for all.

Bramber Castle has become an example of how present and historical functions successfully co-exist.

Undoubtedly, the functions of many historic buildings have had visual and usage changes imposed that would not have been considered even fifty years ago. I refer to the addition of car parks, restaurants, visitor centres and the like.

Where there is need to preserve an aura of originality and isolation (from modernity) such as can now be seen at Stonehenge following the removal of mid 20C buildings I would advocate such revisions.

Britain has raised the profile of 'heritage' in part through statutory bodies such as CADW. CADW etc have also advanced the protection aspect too. The successful and continued engagement of academics and local communities should in my opinion be accelerated. Arguably, locals who value a site or building can, with guidance become the best conservators.

However, the total cost of regularly visiting many historic sites and buildings is too high for many in the United Kingdom. I firmly believe 'heritage' should be accessible to all who seek it. If this translates to a need for greater government funding so be it. That way the public can connect with their 'heritage' and become stakeholders and potential future voluntary custodians. To some extent eventually a self-funding future proof social and community investment.

In summary I consider neither historical or present function should automatically take precedence.

Castles and the Anglo-Norman World J A Davies, A Riley, J-M Levesque and C Lapiche
Oxbow Book 2016)

The Core of Heritage Tourism (Y Poria, R Butler & D Airey 2003)

www.arundelcastle.org

www.english-heritage.org.uk

www.learnedsociety.wales/fellow/david-austin

(Ben Johnson ; The History of Castles www.historic-uk.com 2015)

