



A REPORT ON
THE NATIONAL TRUST'S RESPONSE
TO THE FIRE AT
CLANDON PARK HOUSE

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Contents

I	Executive Summary	2
II	Introduction	4
III	Clandon Park House	5
IV	The Fire and Public Confidence	8
V	The National Trust's initial Decision and Later Developments	10
VI	The Case for Reconstruction	22
VII	A Response to Opposing Views	34
VIII	Conclusion	44
	Appendix A: Recommendations	i
	Appendix B: The White Report	iii

I Executive Summary

- A. Clandon Park House in Surrey is an early-eighteenth-century country house in the Palladian style. The property is in the care of the National Trust. In 2015, following an electrical fault, Clandon was ravaged by a major fire. In addition to close to 2,500 items which were lost, the house was left as what can only be described as a hollow shell.
- B. Although the National Trust initially said that money recovered from the insurer would be used to restore the ground floor state rooms, it has since announced a scheme which would leave the interior as a burnt-out shell into which walkways would be installed to enable visitors to inspect the bare brick walls close-up, with a glass roof erected over the structure.
- C. This Report takes issue with the National Trust's present approach. Among other things, it argues: (i) the purpose of the Trust to preserve historic buildings points towards reconstruction; (ii) that the Trust received a substantial insurance payout, and reconstruction is its most appropriate use; (iii) that the Trust's aims in leaving Clandon as a ruin can be achieved in far less onerous ways, which do not involve sacrificing a highly culturally significant building; (iv) reconstruction is feasible, and the Trust has significant relevant experience available; (v) Clandon's interiors were the reason for its preservation, the building having been designed by Leoni such that an austere and relatively unremarkable exterior would set the context for an extravagant and impressive interior.
- D. The Report considers a number of reasons which may be raised against reconstruction, including the potential of prohibitive cost, and the purported 'artificial' nature of reconstruction. It finds that none of the arguments against reconstruction is robust. The Report takes particular issue with the lack of transparency on the part of the National Trust in their failure to publish comprehensive reasons for the sudden change of

approach which actively engage with the arguments in favour of reconstruction. For the assistance of the reader, photographs of global reconstruction projects have been included in addition to photographs of Clandon itself.

II Introduction

1. This Report was written in response to the 2015 fire at Clandon Park House, a National Trust property in Surrey, and the subsequent approach of the National Trust to restoration over the last eight years.
2. We draw on a variety of material within the limits of what has been made publicly available, alongside previously conducted research in order to provide for the first time a broad account of the events of the last eight years and the resultant proposals.
3. In broad terms, we critique the latest position adopted by the National Trust on a variety of principled grounds which we explore in detail, and we make fourteen recommendations for future action. For ordinary members, in their ordinary visits to most National Trust properties, the experience they have will be overwhelmingly positive. We do not doubt that this is the case, but hopes instead that in the future, as in the past, Clandon may be counted among those properties which remain delightful places to visit.
4. Attached to this Report are two appendices. The first of these, Appendix A, sets out the final recommendations which are made as a result of the conclusions made in Part VII. The second, Appendix B, is the full text of the White Report, to which significant reference will be made. Readers should take care to read the White Report in addition to this Report, if they wish to develop the fullest possible understanding of the context of the Trust's decisions in respect of Clandon. Both appendices are attached in the hope that readers will find them useful in fully appreciating the reasoning and conclusions of this Report.

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III Clandon Park House

5. Clandon Park House (‘Clandon’) is an early-eighteenth-century country house in the



The Palladio Room

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

Palladian style.¹ The precise date at which construction of the house began is not determinable, nor the precise date of completion. It is reasonable, however, to estimate that construction began sometime between 1729 and 1731, coming to completion at some date in the 1730s.² The building of the present house, commissioned by the second Baron Onslow in the place of the prior seat, was entrusted to an Italian architect, Giacomo Leoni, to whose design it owes *‘its architectural distinction’*.³

6. Though the exterior of Clandon is remarkable for its unusual combination of various architectural styles (English, French, and Italian),⁴ it can only be truly appreciated when understood in its context as a prelude to the remarkable interiors. Clandon’s grandest room by far was the Marble Hall, *‘unquestionably among the grandest of all eighteenth-century interiors’*,⁵ and arguably *‘the most elaborate of its date in England’*.⁶ The Marble Hall was lauded in writing by visitors, both modern and historic.⁷ Clandon,

remain the authors’ alone.

¹ Historic England, ‘Clandon Park’, National Heritage List for England 1294591 (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1294591>).

² Mark Edwards, ‘Clandon Park fire: Remains of 18th century mansion solve the mystery as to when it was built’ *Surrey Live* (6 July 2016) (<https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/clandon-park-fire-remains-18th-11571403>); for further discussion, particularly the suggestion that construction may precede 1729, see Sophie Chessum and Christopher Rowell, *Clandon Park* (rev edn, National Trust 2014) 60.

³ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 60.

⁴ Owen Manning and William Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (London, 1804–1814) vol III 54.

⁵ John Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (2nd rev edn National Trust 1983) 7.

⁶ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 63.

⁷ James Lees-Milne, *Midway on the Waves: Diaries 1948–1949* (Michael Russell Publishing 2005); note also the comments of George Vertue, quoted in full in Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 6.

however, was not limited to only one room of note; it boasted an impressive collection spread across the various rooms, particularly those of the state apartment,

including the State Bedroom, Green Drawing Room, the Saloon, and the Palladio Room. Each of these rooms was notable in some regard, whether for their fine ceilings, chimneypieces, or rich wallpapers.



The Saloon

Photo ©The National Trust PhotoLibrary (Alamy)

7. The Onslow family, like so many of the aristocracy in the mid-

twentieth-century, found that despite their best efforts they could not afford to maintain the house. The sixth Earl approached the National Trust ('the Trust'), but negotiations stalled when it was established that the Onslows could not raise adequate funds properly to endow the gift.⁸ The '*saviour*' of the endeavour was the Countess of Iveagh, the Earl's aunt.⁹ She purchased Clandon for a nominal sum and gifted it to the Trust, with the requisite, and very generous, endowment she provided allowing for the preservation of the house. The Trust became the custodians of Clandon on 18 April 1956. The Trust managed Clandon as a very successful visitor attraction and much-loved heart of the local community, with Clandon serving as the site of numerous weddings, alongside other community-based events.

8. The Trust took the house in the knowledge that it was in need of serious repair and restoration; the house could not be allowed simply to deteriorate. In around 1968, John Fowler was commissioned to restore and enhance the house. Under Fowler's direction, work was carried out throughout all rooms of the house; wallpaper was removed or replaced in attempts to bring the house closer to its authentic past, rooms were reorganised,

⁸ Adrian Tinniswood, *Noble Ambitions: The Fall and Rise of the Post-War Country House* (Random House London 2021).
⁹ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 88.

and superficial structural divisions removed.¹⁰ Fowler's influence cannot be understated, and was so extensive as to lead the Trust to note in its final Clandon guidebook that:

Fowler's work is in itself a landmark in the history of late 20th century country-house decoration, and his contribution to Clandon needs to be seen as that of an historically minded decorator on the brink of a new era of country-house curation.¹¹

9. The restoration work carried out by Fowler stood from its completion in the early 1970s until the events of 2015.

¹⁰ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 9, 11, 15; Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 29–30.

¹¹ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 95.

IV The Fire and Public Confidence

The 2015 Fire

10. In April of 2015, a member of staff working at the Surrey Infantry Museum, then housed in the basement rooms of Clandon, found that his computer was not receiving power. He inspected the electrical distributor, and found that there was a small fire. He informed a member of the National Trust’s team at Clandon, who preventatively shut down the power to the remainder of the house. Clandon’s fire detection systems had not detected the fire by this point. At 16:08, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service were called; they arrived nine minutes later.¹² By the time the firefighting team arrived, the fire had spread to the roof of Clandon; it continued to spread upwards throughout almost the entirety of the house, leaving it almost ‘*completely bare*’ and ‘*stripped back to its skeleton-like core*’.¹³ The only room which suffered non-catastrophic damage was the Speakers’ Parlour. It is no surprise, therefore, that the fire would subsequently be described as ‘*the most devastating in the Trust’s history*’.¹⁴

The Trust’s Responsibility

11. The Trust’s purpose is stated in statute¹⁵ and throughout its promotional material,¹⁶ as the ‘*permanent preservation*’ of the buildings in its care. Evidently, Clandon’s destruction by fire is a failure of this purpose, though it would be wrong to call this a failure on the part of the Trust without further investigation. The issue, however, is that the Trust is yet to demonstrate that it took sufficient steps to anticipate and prevent any fire at Clandon. As noted in the Fire Investigation Report published by the Surrey Fire

¹² Bryn Strudwick, ‘Report of Fire’ (Incident no. 007905/2015, Surrey Fire & Rescue Service 2015) 2.1.

¹³ ‘Clandon Park: National Trust reveals ‘laid-bare’ design for fire-hit house’ BBC South East (6 July 2022) (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-62051843>).

¹⁴ ‘National Trust Reveals New Plans for Fire Ravaged Clandon Park, Offering a Unique ‘X-Ray’ View of How a Country House is Made’ (National Trust July 2022) previously available at (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/services/media/national-trust-reveals-new-plans-for-fire-ravaged-clandon-park-offering-a-unique-x-ray-view-of-how-a-country-house-is-made>) a copy available at (<https://vantagepointmag.co.uk/blog/national-trust-reveals-new-plans-for-fire-ravaged-clandon-park-offering-a-unique-x-ray-view-of-how-a-country-house-is-made/?print=pdf>).

¹⁵ For example: National Trust Act 1907 s 4(1).

¹⁶ Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 55.

and Rescue Service, the Trust had been informed of the lack of fire compartmentation between the distribution board and the ceiling recesses as early as 2010.¹⁷ Due to this lack of compartmentation, the fire was able to spread swiftly. It reached every floor of Clandon, spreading via the lift shaft and other voids. The Fire Report concludes that a lack of ‘adequate fire compartmentation’¹⁸ was responsible for the particular devastation caused by this fire. Any work at Clandon should take account of this conclusion, and ensure that appropriate compartmentation forms part of any plans.

12. In 2020, the Trust and its insurer were reported to have brought a claim against the contractors who had been responsible for installing the lift shaft in the mid-2000s.¹⁹ No publicly available information is available as to the status of the litigation, or any settlement which may have been reached with the contractors. Amongst other allegations, the claim was made that the lift, and its materials, did not conform to the relevant safety regulations. Had this been the case, the Trust argued, the ‘damage would have been minimal and/or very significantly reduced’.²⁰ The Trust claimed that the contractors were liable for the cost of the full restoration of Clandon. The Trust’s conclusion that the lift shaft was instrumental to the impact of the fire demonstrates that more significant or thorough risk assessment and fire safety checks could have revealed some dangers. We are confident that the Trust will continue to work to prevent fire across all properties, and suggests that the Trust is as open as possible about work that is being done.

¹⁷ Strudwick, ‘Report of Fire’ (n 12) 7.1(d).

¹⁸ Strudwick, ‘Report of Fire’ (n 12) 8.7.

¹⁹ ‘Clandon Park fire: National Trust insurers seek damages’ *BBC South East* (13 July 2020) (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-53396657>).

²⁰ Dave Rogers, ‘Legal row erupts over cause of fire that gutted Clandon Park’ (Building Design 15 July 2020) (<https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/legal-row-erupts-over-cause-of-fire-that-gutted-clandon-park/5107017.article>).

The Importance of Transparency

13. The Trust has not published the 2010 report of the electrical contractor which was alluded to in the Fire Investigation Report. The result is that there is no way of knowing whether there were other identified problems which were or were not remedied. Similarly, it is not clear when fire safety plans at Clandon had last been reviewed, or risk assessments carried out. The natural result is that Trust members, and the general public, may find themselves concerned, not only about the events at Clandon, but about steps taken to protect other historic properties in the Trust's collection. It is imperative that confidence in the Trust's capacity to protect these properties is maintained, and where this protective duty is not being discharged adequately, that the Trust can be held to account.

Recommendations A: Transparency in connection with the 2015 Clandon fire

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- A(1) Makes public the 2010 Report of the electrical contractor;
- A(2) Makes public the outcome or status of any litigation relating to the events at Clandon, especially whether any claims are made about blame or responsibility for the fire.

Recommendations B: Current Trust-wide fire safety procedures

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- B(1) Makes public any changes to its fire safety procedures in relation to other Trust properties, and publicly emphasising lessons learnt from Clandon;
- B(2) Makes public up-to-date fire safety plans for each Trust property, as well as the dates of the most recent risk assessment and staff fire safety training.

V The National Trust's initial Decision and Later Developments

14. This section addresses the following questions:
- a. What was the Trust's immediate response to the fire?
 - b. What plans did the Trust develop for Clandon in the months and years fol-

lowing the fire?

- c. How and when did those plans change?
- d. What reasons did the Trust give for the plans and the changes to the plans?
- e. How transparent and complete were the Trust's given reasons?

15. Following the fire, the Trust's plans can be viewed as going through several phases. The first was exploratory, in the immediate aftermath of the fire. The second lasted from 2016–22, comprising the Trust's publicly announced plan to restore Clandon. The third is the decision announced in 2022 not to restore Clandon.

The Initial Response

16. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, the Trust did not publicly commit to any single course of action. It engaged the services of surveyors and archaeologists to assess the remaining building structures and begin installing structures which would enable preliminary recovery work.²¹ The Trust's website states as of July 2023 that *'A project team of National Trust experts [was] put in place to plan the way forward. Initial surveys [were] made using 3D lasers and drones.'*²²
17. On 8 September 2015 the Trust made a part-retrospective application to Guildford Borough Council to obtain consent for internal and external works to Clandon in connection with salvage and stabilisation works, including to erect scaffolding.²³ In the documents submitted to the council, the Trust's planning advisor wrote that:

This application does not address the provision of future services or the future use or reinstatement proposals for the prop-

²¹ Neil Linford, Paul Linford, and Andrew Payne 'Clandon Park House, West Clandon, Surrey, Report on Geophysical Survey, May 2015' (Historic England May 2015) (<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1870-1/dissemination/pdf/english4-250479.2.pdf>).

²² 'The project at Clandon Park' (National Trust) 'May 2015' (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/surrey/clandon-park/the-project-at-clandon-park>).

²³ Guildford Borough Council Planning Application Ref. No. 15/P/02061.

erty. These will be the subject of further applications in due course. However, by stabilising the structure of the building and by putting in place the methodology to recover decorative historic fabric the National Trust is staying true to its core purpose of conserving, preserving, and making accessible landscapes and buildings of ‘historic interest and natural beauty’ for the enjoyment and interest of as many people as possible. This will ensure as wide a range of options for reinstatement as possible.²⁴

18. The September 2015 planning application contained an archaeological report conducted in August 2015 by Robert Maxwell.²⁵ Maxwell’s report noted at paragraph 3.2 that Clandon ‘has many significances, in terms of rarity, historic, craft skill and intrinsic value’.

The Decision to Restore



The Green Drawing Room

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

19. The Trust appears to have made a broad decision on the direction of their restoration work by the beginning of 2016. This approach would be followed until 2022, when the Trust made what Roger White describes as a ‘dramatic volte face’.²⁶
20. In January 2016, a variety of media reports announced that the Trust was planning to restore the main house at Clandon. The Trust’s website states at the time of writing (July 2023) that in January

²⁴ Application 15/P/02061 (n 23) ‘Covering Letter’ (13 November 2015).

²⁵ Application 15/P/02061 (n 23) R Maxwell, ‘Project Design for Archaeological Recovery and Recording: Phase 1’ Heritage Statement Appendix 2 (13 November 2015).

²⁶ Roger White, ‘Restore Trust: How to Restore Clandon House’ (2023) Appendix B at page v.

2016 *‘[i]nitial proposals for Clandon’s future [were] announced, which honour its rich history alongside creating a vibrant and modern space to breathe new life into the house’*.²⁷ The White Report notes that:

After the Clandon fire it was concluded by those then in the relevant positions at the National Trust both that the house remained of outstanding national significance and that some degree of restoration could take place.²⁸

21. An article published by *The Independent* in January 2016 reported *‘The National Trust*

has announced the “biggest conservation project in a generation” when it pledged to partially restore the Grade I-listed Clandon Park stately home’.²⁹ The newspaper reported that the Trust had reached the decision to have the *‘most historically significant rooms restored’* after having considered *‘all options from full restoration to leaving it as a “romantic ruin”’*. The then-Director of the Trust, Dame Helen Ghosh, was reported in the same article as saying that a full damage assessment conducted in November 2015 *‘reinforced us in the view that were we able to restore parts of the building, we should’*.

Dame Helen was also reported as saying that:



Frauenkirche (rebuilt 1994–2005)
Photo ©Leviathan1983 (CC BY-A 3.0)

²⁷ ‘The project at Clandon Park’ (n 22) ‘January 2016’.

²⁸ The White Report (n 26) at (n g).

²⁹ Nick Clark, ‘Clandon Park: National Trust to restore stately home in “biggest conservation project in a generation”’ *The Independent* (18 January 2016) (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/clandon-park-national-trust-to-restore-stately-home-in-biggest-conservation-project-in-a-generation-a6820116.html>).

Given their historic and cultural significance, and the fact so many original features have survived, we believe we should restore the magnificent state rooms on the ground floor; the most architecturally important and beautiful rooms.

This approach thus appeared to be based on the twin themes discussed below³⁰ and identified by the White Report, i.e. the historical importance of the architecture, and the beauty of the building's interiors.



The State Bedroom

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

22. An article published by the Trust in January 2016 indicated that it had not only decided on restoration of the exterior and ground floor state rooms of the house to their pre-fire state, but that it would explore the possibility of taking back parts of the house to the eighteenth-century designs.³¹

23. Crucially, the Trust's decision was based on clear and compelling reasons; these reasons were announced publicly and were the result of apparently significant internal consideration. The January 2016 article contained the following explanation of the

Trust's approach since the fire:

For nine months, we reviewed a number of options for Clandon, ranging from leaving it as a ruin to a full restoration. We looked carefully at the architectural significance of what had survived the fire, the items salvaged from the building and what was technically possible within it.

³⁰ Discussed below at [44] and [51].

³¹ 'A new life for Clandon' (National Trust 18 January 2016); webpage unavailable July 2023.

24. The Trust was also transparent about the criteria on which this decision had been made.

The 2016 article noted that the Trust:

[A]ppplied a set of criteria, based on the charity’s core purpose, to guide our thinking. This included: ensuring Clandon Park remained open and accessible to the public; reflected Clandon’s historic and cultural significance; and generated enough income to maintain its long-term conservation.

25. One year after the fire, the Trust released an article on the work undertaken since the fire.³² In that article, the proposed reconstruction project was described as *‘represent[ing] one of the most significant and ambitious projects the National Trust has ever*

undertaken’. The article described the Trust’s *‘ultimate goal’* as a *‘remade Clandon’*. Representatives of the Trust made statements which noted plasterwork recovered from rooms, including the Marble Hall, was *‘certainly . . . enough there to be able to reconstruct those ceilings and really bring back those kind of glorious interiors’*³³



Plasterwork in the Saloon

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

26. It should be noted that Clandon was insured by Zurich Municipal. In a letter to *The Times* in December 2016, Dame Helen Ghosh wrote that the money to be received by the Trust in respect of their insurance was only able to be applied for the restoration

of Clandon Park, as *‘if [the Trust] were to leave the building as a ruin [it] would only recover*

³² Sophie Chessum, ‘Clandon Park one year on: from caravan to conservation and beyond’ (National Trust 2016); webpage unavailable July 2023.

³³ ‘The Marble Hall ceiling at Clandon Park after the fire’ (National Trust 14 April 2016) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0o0MOEtUxKA>).

from the insurer the relatively modest sums involved in the salvage operation and the stabilisation of the remaining building'.³⁴ In the same letter, Dame Helen further expressed the Trust's commitment to reconstruction, noting that *'We wouldn't want to walk away from Clandon. The Trust exists to look after places in our care forever, and that is why we are committed to rebuilding it in some shape or form.'*



Berliner Schloss (rebuilt 2013–2020)

Photo ©Asio otus (CC BY-SA 3.0)

27. The above decision making process resulting in a public commitment to restoration was reported in national media outlets at various times between 2016 and 2022. The BBC reported in 2017 that the tender for architectural proposals included a request that submitted proposals *'restore damaged interiors and state rooms, including the Marble Hall and Speakers' Parlour'*.³⁵ The BBC also reported that Paul Cook, project manager, said that the proposals would *'take [the Trust] a step closer to choosing a team who will help us restore and rebuild this grand place.'*

28. The Trust's proposals were rooted in an appreciation for the architectural significance of all parts of Clandon, and show consistency and clarity in the thinking of the Trust's leadership. On 18 January 2016, *Surrey Live* quoted Dame Helen Gosh explaining the Trust's decision in the following terms:

The loss of so many of the contents of the house means that we

³⁴ Helen Ghosh, Letter to The Times (16 December 2015), (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/national-treasure-m8lmg7l8jhf>).

³⁵ 'Clandon Park: Shortlisted plans unveiled for fire-hit house' *BBC News* (21 August 2017) (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-41001009>).

cannot return it to how it looked the day before the fire. However, we now know more about the original layout and recognise that the enduring significance of the house is its architecture and so we would like to return it to the 18th century design – making it a purer, more faithful version of Clandon as it was when it was first built. This element of the project will also enable us to draw on the wealth of expertise within the Trust and beyond to utilise and develop traditional skills which are in grave danger of being lost. . . . Recent research has also given us a wonderful picture of the original 18th century gardens, and so resources permitting, we also hope to bring those back to life in the spirit of a project that will both look back to the best of the past and create an exciting future.³⁶

29. The decision to restore Clandon was based on a variety of factors. What is apparent is that underpinning the decisions were at least the following considerations:
- a. The architectural significance of the house;
 - b. The culturally relevant beauty of the house;
 - c. The experience of visitors inside the house;
 - d. The Trust’s purpose and role in respect of culturally important buildings;
 - e. The feasibility of restoration;
 - f. The survival of certain important individual features.

Overwhelmingly, however, they indicate a publicly professed commitment to restoration and reconstruction, on the basis of both careful internal consideration and engagement

³⁶ Mark Edwards and Paul Harper, ‘Clandon Park fire: National Trust reveals plans to breathe new life into mansion’ *Surrey Live* (18 January 2016) ([getsurrey.co.uk/news/clandon-park-fire-national-trust-10750114](https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/clandon-park-fire-national-trust-10750114)).

with a variety of experts, in a way that honoured the building itself and the Trust's public responsibilities.

The Decision Not to Restore

30. In 2022, the Trust announced that, contrary to the announcements made over the preceding seven years, it had decided on a new course of action. The Trust's website as of July 2023 describes this as a '*new direction for Clandon Park*'.³⁷ This new direction, according to an article published on the Trust's website in June 2022,³⁸ would '*see most of the interior of Clandon Park thoughtfully conserved in its fire-damaged state*'. The Trust proposed to construct suspended walkways and platforms, restore the external walls, and offer visitors '*a unique 'X-ray view' of how country houses were made*'. Of the major internal spaces, only the Speakers' Parlour would be restored, as it was comparatively undamaged. In the same article, the Trust suggested that:

The new Clandon will be a unique place to explore how great house were made, not only physically but also socially and culturally. It will be space for a backdrop for a dynamic programme of events, exhibitions and activities, some created with communities connected to the house.

31. When the 2022 plans were announced, it was reported that the Trust would not disclose their cost. *The Guardian* reported, however, that the Trust '*said [the cost] would be met by an insurance settlement **plus** funding from the trust's reserves*' (emphasis added).³⁹ This suggests that its plans may well exceed the value of the insurance settlement,

³⁷ 'The project at Clandon Park' (n 22) 'July 2022'.

³⁸ 'Clandon Park reveal X-ray view of a great house' (National Trust 28 June 2022, updated 28 August 2022) (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/surrey/clandon-park/new-plans-for-clandon-park-reveal-x-ray-view-of-a-great-house>).

³⁹ Harriet Sherwood, 'Fire-gutted Clandon Park House to be conserved as ruin, says National Trust' *The Guardian* (6 July 2022) (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/06/fire-gutted-clandon-park-house-to-be-conserved-as-ruin-says-national-trust>); see also 'The project at Clandon Park' (n 22) 'Frequently asked questions: How is the project being funded?'.

finally received in 2020/21 and set at £66 million.⁴⁰ The same article indicated the Trust's intention to complete the new plans *'by the winter of 2027/28'*.

32. In reaching this new decision, the Trust's website as of July 2023 indicates that the change of approach was due to the Trust forming the view that their *'original proposal was not feasible'*.⁴¹ No other information was provided publicly for the change in approach, and no further details publicised as to why after six years, the Trust's view



St Michael's (rebuilt 1997–2001)
Photo ©Rbrechko (CC BY-SA 4.0)

on feasibility had changed. The BBC reported the senior curator, Sophie Chessum, as suggesting that any restoration would be *'a complete modern replication'*, which the Trust had concluded *'wouldn't be the right approach'*⁴², contrary to her statements from 2016. The value of such a replication is discussed below,⁴³ but in any case such public comments do not appear to correlate to any question of feasibility, which the Trust's website currently suggests motivated its decision.

33. In a publicity video released in 2022,⁴⁴ Chessum said that although initially a restoration work was planned, over time *'we gradually realised how special this is, and how much it [the building] has to offer us'*, in the context of leaving Clandon's rooms entirely unreconstructed but for the Speakers' Parlour. This is a third justification, and whilst it may be a sincerely held belief on the part of the current project managers, again does not correlate to the Trust's statements that the decision was motivated by questions of

⁴⁰ 'Annual Report 2021–2022' (National Trust 2022) 43 (<https://redrocketdigital.co.uk/eBook/14466-National-Trust-Annual-Report-2022/index.html>).

⁴¹ 'The project at Clandon Park' (n 22) 'July 2022'.

⁴² BBC South East (n 13).

⁴³ See [45] onwards.

⁴⁴ 'New plans for Clandon Park embrace a great house laid bare' (National Trust 5 July 2022) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blvHFJM1AjE>).

feasibility. Further, it fails entirely to mention the significance of Clandon’s interiors before the fire, either for the local community, or their more broad cultural significance. How these three distinct publicly acknowledged factors relate to each other, if at all, is uncertain. The Trust has not explained what truly underpins the decision not to restore, and has not made available any ‘feasibility study’ which presents the reconstruction of Clandon as unachievable.

34. The White Report sheds further light on the stakeholders who have potentially influenced the Trust. The report goes into detail on the views of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and their opposition to restoration of the kind initially proposed by the Trust. The SPAB was founded by William Morris as a reaction against heavy-handed Victorian restoration of medieval churches, a field in which it has had a very beneficial effect over ensuing years. However, the Morris philosophy promotes ideas, such as additions to historic buildings, needing to be ‘in the style of our time’ and repairs needing to be made visually obvious, which are not accepted universally as appropriate for application to classical buildings. The report notes that:

In [the SPAB’s] Spring 2023 magazine, an article on the current Clandon scheme states very clearly: ‘The SPAB became involved in discussions very soon after the fire, and has consistently supported an approach which emphasises conservation and new design as opposed to a historic and faithful recreation in the style of Uppark.’ In other words, despite Clandon—begun in 1729/30—dating entirely from the Georgian period, SPAB lost no time in lobbying the Trust to ensure that its arguments against reinstating or recreating any of the interiors were strongly impressed on the Trust and more particularly those engaged in working out a way forward.

[...]

[The reversal of the Trust’s decision] was without doubt a triumph for the hard-line version of the philosophy that the SPAB had, by its own admission, been actively promoting behind the scenes.

35. Though the approach at Clandon is undoubtedly a victory for the SPAB’s philosophical approach, it is impossible to know the extent to which the Trust’s decision was changed by the SPAB’s direct representations. Whilst the SPAB is entitled—and might be expected—to attempt to influence Trust policy, the Trust should be open about such lobbying, as the SPAB has been. Good faith and principled arguments made by the SPAB and adopted by the Trust should be shared, and the reasons for the Trust’s confidence in them freely acknowledged as motivating their change of approach.

Recommendations C: Transparency of trust decision-making processes

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- C(1) Makes public the interactions it has had with all stakeholders, experts, and interest groups;
- C(2) Acknowledges where Trust plans have been altered as a result of the representations made by stakeholders, experts, or interest groups.

VI The Case for Reconstruction

36. This Report argues for the reconstruction of Clandon according to some form of the original plans as formulated by the Trust in 2016. Part V will defend the value of reconstruction in comparison to the latest plans announced by the Trust. Part VI below will respond to the defences of its current plans put forward by the Trust. We agree with the White Report in that the language of restoration is in fact inapt; the quantity of material lost means that reconstruction is a more appropriate descriptor of what should happen; in this context, reconstruction is not a weakness, but an honest and defensible approach.⁴⁵ Whilst restoration might be a catch-all term, the reality of what is required is in fact reconstruction.
37. The current plans of the Trust are discussed above. For the purposes of this Report, what is important is that they include (i) leaving the interior of the ruined house largely unreconstructed such that from the ground to the roof the house is exposed, (ii) leaving each individual room unrestored and exposed, and (iii) constructing a number of walkways, such that potential future visitors can see the house's interior on several levels.

The Value of Reconstruction

38. There is enormous benefit to the reconstruction of the house, rather than adopting the present approach of the Trust. First and foremost, the cultural value of Clandon was largely dependent on its interiors. Whether the reconstruction of these interiors is artificial, and whether this deprives the task of value, is discussed below. However, the White Report observes that Clandon's:

interiors were ... the main justification for the Trust acquiring Clandon in the first place. ... [The property's] disadvantages

⁴⁵ 'The White Report' (n 26) at page *x*.

were thought to be outweighed by the superlative quality of the plasterwork in the main ground floor rooms.

The most notable features of the house, such as the Marble Hall in particular, are in need of reconstruction in order to respect Clandon's architectural pre-eminence. The plasterwork was its defining characteristic, without which the rooms would have been significantly less important as a feature; there is comparatively little value in the structure alone; the austere Palladian exterior was simply not what was considered remarkable about Clandon.⁴⁶



A Figure in the Marble Hall
Photo ©Steve Fisher (Alamy)

39. The White Report discusses in detail the motivations of the SPAB, referenced above, and concludes that to abandon the interiors is not a neutral decision, but rather one which reflects the SPAB's particular view of 'conservation'. Such a view is premised on the prevention of overzealous restoration which destroys the integrity of the underlying

building. Not only is such a threat not at issue here, given the overwhelming destruction caused by the fire, but a reconstruction plan based on the original eighteenth-century designs would place the nature of the underlying building at the heart of the conservation project. This is not to say, however, that the SPAB's preferred approach is never appropriate; it may well be in cases of privately owned buildings, or buildings of little comparative significance. It is, however, to say that it is not appropriate at Clandon in particular.

40. The Trust has made much of the potential educational experience that their new plans would foster. These claims are critiqued below. However, there is arguably a much

⁴⁶ 'The White Report' (n 26) at pages *iv-v*, citing Christine Casey, *Making Magnificence: Architects, Stuccatori, and the Eighteenth-Century Interior* (Yale University Press 2017) 196–8.

greater benefit to be had in reconstructing the interior. Such a reconstruction would require many specialists; such experts were invaluable in the Uppark restoration, and their training at Uppark later proved valuable in the restoration of Windsor Castle, following the 1992 fire. Promotional material released by the Trust has stressed repeatedly the value of being able to see the ‘bones’ of the building in a way that would not be possible were it not for the fire. The Trust should carefully consider whether this value is more apparent to experts than the interested public, and in any case should consider whether the beauty of Clandon’s original interiors might not provide far greater value; modern technology could enable the interesting aspects of the house’s construction to be captured in a way that could engage future visitors, without forcing the house to be frozen in its moment of ruin. Additionally, the experience of heritage properties suggests that the Trust is being optimistic as to the value of the burnt remains in a way that may prove detrimental to Clandon’s future. Particular attention should be given to the White Report’s argument that:

There is surely zero prospect that visitors will come back time and again to be depressed by an interior comprising nothing but ruined rooms (excepting the Speakers’ Parlour, which was always one of the less interesting interiors of the house)...[t]he Trust should learn from the experience of the other organisations that struggle to maintain them and attract visitors.

The Trust’s belief that visitors will come to Clandon because of its burnt out interiors would only be compelling were the interiors not the originally most significant part of Clandon. There is a real danger that the Trust’s belief in the fascination of the architecture is misplaced, and the prospect of new walkways does not salvage this belief. Such modifications may come to be seen as dated in future decades, and the value of the architecture may be, as suggested above, more limited in a house like Clandon than would be needed to sustain visitors.

The Trust's Purpose

41. Regardless of the practical and aesthetic value of reconstruction, an arguably more compelling justification for reconstruction—and arguably a justification which means that the Trust has acted wrongly since 2022—is that the Trust's proposed course of action is contrary to its underlying purposes. Several important principles should be held in mind:
- a. The Trust was given the house in 1950 on the condition that they care for it, and without the power of sale or mortgage;⁴⁷
 - b. Damage to properties of cultural and aesthetic importance ought to be repaired, and were minor damage to have been sustained the Trust is overwhelmingly likely to have repaired it, as they have in various ways since 1950;⁴⁸
 - c. The Trust does not hold its properties for its own benefit but as a national custodian;
 - d. Given the overarching purpose of the Trust is the preservation of buildings under its care, where the Trust fails in this duty the appropriate response is to remedy that failing rather than to affirm it.
42. The third principle here might also be expressed in more classically fiduciary terms; the Trust has an obligation to care for the properties it has for the benefit of its members, and the public. That the Trust is not at liberty to decide unilaterally that failing to care for a property is in the public's best interest is apparent from the fact that they would undoubtedly be in breach of their duties if they either intentionally destroyed, or permitted to fall into a state of disrepair, a property in order to use it for purportedly educational purposes.

⁴⁷ Helen Ghosh, 'Letter to *The Times*' (n 33).

⁴⁸ Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 31; Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 30.

43. The point of the above principles is to suggest that in essence, the Trust's proposed plan is not one that is in the spirit of its role. It exists to care for properties that were given to it on trust for the nation. Fire damage to one of those properties, accompanied by fund-



Teatro La Fenice (rebuilt 2001–2004)

Photo ©Benh Lieu Song (CC BY-SA 2.0)

ing which may only be applied to the restoration of that property in some form,⁴⁹ generates a presumptive duty on the part of the responsible organisation to restore the property. That duty should extend to reconstruction in a case like this, where the value of the property is its original design and its carefully designed and well-documented interiors. The fact that the Trust may in some way have been responsible for the destruction of the property in its care is not a necessary condition for the generation of this presumption; if in the last analysis it is shown to have been responsible, however, the presumption is all the stronger. In the face of this presumption, the action which the Trust intends to take would require a strong and compelling case, such that the Trust could demonstrate in precise terms why reconstruction is not correct. The Trust should be expected, at the very least, to justify itself in far stronger terms to relevant stakeholders, including its membership. No such clear rebuttal can be said to have been made given the lack of transparency shown by the Trust; and given the problems with the current plans, particularly the extent to which they would prohibit any future reconstruction, no such successful rebuttal is likely.

44. Whether or not a modern private owner would build large walkways and preserve the ruins is impossible to know with certainty. If they would, the Trust might reasonably respond that it is not a private owner, and as a public body, it has a broader responsibility

⁴⁹ The precise form of that restoration which the Trust had to assure its insurers that they would execute such that the insurance money was recoverable is impossible to know without seeing the terms of the Trust's insurance.

which includes educating the public. In the event this argument were made—and the authors are not suggesting it has been—it would not be compelling given that the Trust’s educational remit must take place in the context of the buildings in its care, rather than in the abstract. The Trust can only exercise its educational role whilst executing its primary role, the care of the properties it holds on trust; the fact that it still owns Clandon is not sufficient. It may not be the case that reconstruction in full of ruined buildings is always the best approach. Nevertheless, there are a number of criteria which may influence whether this is the proper and practical approach in a particular situation.

- a. First, the most notable parts of the building should be considered. As noted previously, it was the now ruined interiors which were significant about Clandon. The exterior, though containing a number of styles, is broadly unremarkable for the period. If the reason for Clandon’s preservation had been the quality of the exterior, either in construction or appearance, the question may be different. This is not the case. Laurila has noted that where the *‘value of the building was in its art’* reconstruction may be possible; this is in contrast to cases in which a building’s value comes from age or use alone.⁵⁰ The value of Clandon was certainly rooted in its art, and reconstruction of the building in a way true to its value is therefore possible.
- b. Second, the cultural significance of the building is undoubtedly important. The ground floor rooms at Clandon comprised a state apartment. They hosted Princes, and members of the Georgian elite. The cultural significance of Clandon, however, goes beyond this. It is not only a testament to the fine concept of Leoni, and the craftsmen who worked on the building, but is to be lauded as a genuine exemplar of an English stately home from the period. Clandon was remarkable; it told us not only about the quality of the architecture at

⁵⁰ Laurila (ed) ‘Can we Learn from the Heritage Lost in a Fire? Experiences and Practises on the Fire Protection of Historic Buildings in Finland, Norway, and Sweden’ (2004) 26 Helsinki: National Board of Antiquities, Department of Monuments and Sites 60.

the time, but also about Britain's social elite. Clandon told us how the elite saw themselves, how they interacted with the communities over which they exercised power, and the role they saw Britain playing globally—Clandon was far more than just a beautiful house.⁵¹

- c. Third, The utility of reconstruction may well bear on whether it can be considered wholly appropriate. Though this will be considered in greater depth later in the Report, there are some points which should be made here in brief. Globally, reconstruction over the last thirty years has been significant. Major buildings including the Frauenkirche in Dresden; the Berliner Schloss in Berlin; the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem; St Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv; Shakespeare's Globe in London; the recently completed Deoksu Palace in Seoul; and presently Notre Dame in Paris, demonstrate that there is real global appetite for reconstruction. This requires knowledge and skills. These knowledge and skills cannot and will not be sustained without adequate funding, training, and work on the part of preservation charities. Clandon is a real opportunity to ensure skills and knowledge necessary for future work are not lost.
- d. Fourth, the purpose of the Trust, as outlined above, must be considered in assessing whether reconstruction is imperative. The Trust has an important role to play as custodian of property and countryside integral to the cultural and historic deposit of Britain. Clandon was not a private stately home, and the Trust is not a private owner entitled to simply move away, abandoning its true role at Clandon.
- e. Fifth, the feasibility of reconstruction is necessarily a core factor in determin-

⁵¹ On built heritage in its present-day social context, see John Bold 'Introduction: Reconstruction: The Built Heritage Following War and Natural Disaster' in John Bold et al (eds) *Authentic Reconstruction: Authenticity, Architecture and the Built Heritage* (Bloomsbury 2020) 6. On the approach to cultural significance taken by the Burra Charter, see Bold (2020) 12-13.

ing whether it is the proper approach to pursue. This is dealt with further below. As an aside, however, it is difficult to see how Clandon could be entirely unfeasible if elaborate historic buildings in former-Soviet countries (such as St Michael's in Kyiv), or those in countries ravaged by war, can rise again after having been entirely lost.

f. Sixth, it is worth considering whether reconstruction leads to something being lost. In the nineteenth-century, William Morris of the SPAB was primarily concerned with Victorian examples of restoration which involved the destruction of original fabric, particularly in medieval churches such as Tewkesbury Abbey. Here, given the present state of Clandon, the work would be purely reconstructive, and would bring back that which has been lost, rather than destroying important existing work as a result of over-zealous purism.

45. It should also be noted, as the White Report does, that there are a number of international documents which give guidance on whether reconstruction or restoration can



The reconstructed altar of the Frauenkirche (wood, stucco)

Photo ©CEphoto and Uwe Aranas (CC BY-SA 3.0)

be considered 'appropriate' in particular circumstances. The Venice Charter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), drawn up in 1964, takes a particularly negative view of reconstruction. The decades since the Charter's promulgation, however, have seen numerous triumphant reconstruction

projects, which enjoy broad acceptance and support. From the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, to the Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul and the Golden Temple in Kyoto, it seems evident

that the Venice Charter now tends to be seen as superseded.

46. The Operational Guidelines for UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, the international body that oversees world heritage, similarly discourage reconstruction, but this belies the practical reality of global preservation. UNESCO itself has recently designated the reconstructed town centre of Warsaw as a World Heritage Site, a status long enjoyed by the reconstructed House of Commons. Today, UNESCO is itself leading the reconstruction of the Sufi Mausolea in Timbuktu, following their destruction by Al-Qaeda. UNESCO has now acknowledged formally what has long been known in practice, revising the Charter to admit that reconstruction is sometimes appropriate, particularly where buildings are so well recorded that reconstruction would not be a matter of conjecture. Similarly, ICCROM acknowledged the appropriate place of reconstruction in its Riga Charter (2000); it took the view that if reconstruction could take place without conjecture, then it would not fall foul of the main criticism of reconstruction, namely that it is often difficult to determine the way in which a building should be reconstructed. In the case of the rooms which formed the state apartment in Clandon (such as the Marble Hall), the amount of conjecture involved is vanishingly small on account of extensive documentation.
47. These developments speak to a broader issue with the guidelines; there are many overlapping charters and institutions attempting to grapple with the same issues. As John Bold and others have noted, the present rules are deeply unsatisfactory, and ultimately not realistic.⁵² Instead, it would be better to develop approaches which are flexible and responsive, engaging with reconstruction, rather than adhere to a:

certain heritage orthodoxy rooted in the long-established preserve-as-found view of those who wish to argue for an inalienable au-

⁵² John Bold, Robert Pickard, and Peter J. Larkham 'Conclusions, Guidelines and Looking Forward' in Bold et al. (eds) (n 50) 309–310.

thenticity.⁵³

The near-universal movement of opinion is away from strict adherence to rigid charters, and a move towards appreciating the proper role of reconstruction. In light of these developments, the Trust's *de facto* adherence to the Venice Charter, and apparent scepticism towards reconstruction can only be seen as both out of step with global trends and, quite simply, outdated.

48. The question remains: to which state should the house be returned? The twin values of a culturally important building like Clandon are noted above at [21] and discussed below,⁵⁴ namely the evolution of the building and the inherent design. To return the



The Saloon Ceiling

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

buildings to their condition immediately pre-fire would resurrect an incremental development, part of the value of which is that it ordinarily arises over different periods. Similarly, where restoration work has had this aim, such as the restoration of Uppark, this has been informed

by considerations not present at Clandon. At Uppark, a significant amount of the collection remained, in particular furniture from various periods. Restoration of the property to the state it was the day before the fire allowed for the proper display of these important surviving works, in the context of various changes made to the property throughout its history, and was therefore more appropriate.⁵⁵ This is not the case at Clandon—the Trust was unable to save

⁵³ Bold, Pickard, and Larkham 'Conclusions, Guidelines and Looking Forward' in Bold et al. (eds) (n 50) 309–310.

⁵⁴ Discussed at [51].

⁵⁵ Christopher Rowell and John Martin Robinson, *Uppark Restored* (National Trust 1996) 44–45.

a significant amount of the collection, and in any event these collections were not integral to Clandon historically; Clandon had a *‘rather sparse indigenous collection’*, supplemented by the 1968 Gubbay bequest.⁵⁶ Instead, the most reasonable to reconstruction is therefore to return Clandon to as close to its eighteenth-century design as possible. As noted above, this approach was supported by then Director Dame Helen Ghosh who was quoted as saying (to reiterate):

The loss of so many of the contents of the house means that we cannot return it to how it looked the day before the fire. However, we now know more about the original layout and recognise that the enduring significance of the house is its architecture and so we would like to return it to the 18th century design—making it a purer, more faithful version of Clandon as it was when it was first built.⁵⁷

This preserves the valuable interiors of Clandon already discussed, as well as presenting a limited opportunity to the Trust for innovation, such that this reconstruction would itself form part of the architectural development of the house. Such innovation is not without precedent; one example from the recent past are the Fowler developments discussed above.⁵⁸ Notably, rather than continue with the proposals to install a new roof, the fire provides the Trust the opportunity to reconstruct the original, pre-1960s, lead and slate roof, as well as considering the merit of reconstruction the eighteenth-century gardens.

Recommendations D: Reconstruction I

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- D(1) Reinstate all of the floors and ceilings, as well as reconstruct the interiors of the ground floor state rooms and the pre-1960s roof;

⁵⁶ Chessum and Rowell, *Clandon Park* (n 2) 89.

⁵⁷ Edwards and Harper, ‘Clandon Park fire: National Trust reveals plans to breathe new life into mansion’ (n 35)

⁵⁸ Discussed at [8].

- D(2) Adopt the view that any reconstructive work undertaken should restore the house to its eighteenth-century condition, rather than to the state it was immediately preceding the fire;
- D(3) Recognise the benefit and merit of reconstruction, and publish its reasons for abandoning the initial reconstruction plans. This should include a full and transparent costing of reconstruction, setting out clearly the assumptions on which the estimate is based.

VII A Response to Opposing Views

49. Having outlined the positive case for reconstruction, this section explores the arguments which could be raised in opposition to reconstruction. At the outset, it is worth acknowledging that it is difficult to know on which of these the Trust might rely directly. Though the Trust, as well as related persons and bodies, have expressed a number of arguments to be motivating factors for the decision against reconstruction, no formal or cohesive body of reasons for the latest proposals has been provided by the Trust. In order, therefore, that the potential reasons for the Trust's change of approach are addressed fully, this section will attempt to respond in as complete a way as possible to each of the principal potential objections, without suggesting which, if any, of these in fact were decisive in the view of the Trust.

The Potential of Prohibitive Cost

50. As noted above at paragraphs [26] and [43], senior Trust figures have stated publicly that the money the Trust has received from Clandon's insurers can only be put to use for Clandon itself; it is not the case that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

51. Despite this, the argument could be made that full reconstruction of Clandon is simply prohibitively expensive. In the litigation mentioned previously the damages sought were in excess of £115 million, whereas the Trust received just over half of this amount in money from Clandon's insurers.⁵⁹ Though, as mentioned above, no documents in relation to the litigation have been made publicly available, it is reasonable to suppose that the £115 million value is due to the inclusion of the cost of the full reconstruction of Clandon—including the less-notable upper floors—and accounts for the loss of at least some of the 2,400 objects which were destroyed along with the house.⁶⁰ It is important

⁵⁹ *BBC South East* (n 19); 'Annual Report 2021–2022' (n 39).

⁶⁰ *The Guardian*, 'Fire-gutted Clandon Park House to be conserved as ruin, says National Trust'(n 38).

to note, however, that given the rate of building costs has increased sharply over the past eight years, the Trust's failure to act quickly has inflated any final cost.

52. To argue that full reconstruction is overly expensive, and therefore reconstruction should not occur would be to create a false dichotomy for the following reasons:
- a. First, it is not the case that all reconstruction efforts in relation to Clandon are of equal value. It is clear, for example, that the Marble Hall and the other ground floor rooms comprising the state apartment were of much greater significance than many of those on the upper floors. It would be entirely possible to spend time and money reconstructing these rooms as a priority.
 - b. Second, it presumes that all reconstruction must occur immediately. If priority in time and funding were to be given to the rooms constituting the ground floor state apartment, the upper rooms could be put to another purpose whilst additional funds were raised. The state rooms could be restored individually, as funds became available. All that this would require would be for any measures taken in respect of any as yet non-reconstructed elements of Clandon to be non-prohibitive of future, further, reconstructive work. This is compounded by the possibility that the reconstruction project could have wide public appeal if its significance was made clear to the general public; people are more likely to engage with a major, ongoing, reconstruction than they are with a ruin.
 - c. Finally, it can hardly be said that the Trust is motivated by entirely monetary concerns. The Trust has been open about the new, non-reconstructive, plan involving spending both from money received as a result of the insurance, and from Trust reserves.⁶¹

⁶¹ *The Guardian*, 'Fire-gutted Clandon Park House to be conserved as ruin' (n 38); 'The project at Clandon Park' (n 22) 'Frequently asked questions: How is the project being funded?'

53. Given the Trust already plans to spend in excess of the funds provided by the insurance payout after the fire at Clandon, it can hardly be financial concerns alone which motivate the move away from reconstruction. The fixed costs of running a major construction site such as Clandon are so significant as to dwarf the cost of reconstructing the interior of any one room, even when any necessary training is considered; if cost were to prove prohibitive, it would not be as a result of the reconstruction of the interiors. To the extent that this is a factor which has motivated the Trust, it should consider other measures which could be taken to alleviate this concern, such as prioritising particular elements of the reconstruction, and adopting other temporary uses, which are not preventative of later reconstruction in the way that present plans are.

The Artificial Nature of Reconstruction

54. Since the change of approach articulated in 2022, some representatives of the Trust have suggested that a reconstruction project would be artificial, as it would go beyond restoration and involve using new materials.⁶² This is not sufficient to justify abandoning of reconstruction.
55. It has been noted above that the restoration of the house to the immediately pre-fire state would amount to the creation of a ‘false patina’, as it would take a natural evolution and impose it on the ruined house.⁶³ That does not mean, however, that a reconstruction to the original eighteenth-century design would also be ‘artificial’. It would admittedly be new, and achieved in the twenty-first century, but providing it is conducted with faithful and authentic techniques and according to the detailed records which exist of the house’s interiors, it cannot fairly be called artificial.

⁶² ‘The project at Clandon Park’ (n 22).

⁶³ For further discussion, see ‘The White Report’ (n 26) at page *xiii*.

56. Artificiality in this context might mean that work undertaken is new or modern, or that it is drastically different from or unsympathetic to the existing property. The former is

not necessarily a defect, and the latter is not relevant here.

The Trust has used new, even pioneering, techniques at other Trust properties in order to restore them. The water-tight roof at Castle Drogo in Devon⁶⁴ is one such example of the Trust recognising the defects of the previously existing structure and creating a new



Kinkaku-ji (rebuilt 1950–55) - Artificial?

Photo ©Jaycangel (CC By-SA 3.0)

one for the overall benefit of the property. This has been common in restoration globally; the dome of the Frauenkirche in Dresden was reinforced such that it could withstand sudden changes in forces.⁶⁵ The reconstruction at Clandon would be on a larger scale, but modern construction would arguably be tempered by the increased faithfulness to the original designs; this is a different kind of ‘authenticity’.⁶⁶ This undermines straightforwardly assertions of false patina; there would be no patina in the case of Clandon, where (as discussed above at [44]) the most appropriate approach is reconstruction in line with the original eighteenth-century plans, without later accretions.

57. The Trust has the opportunity to create a real and substantive work of beauty according to the original designs; this is neither fake nor devalued merely because it has been built by modern skilled artisans and craftspeople. Reconstruction of the house would

⁶⁴ ‘Saving Castle Drogo’ (National Trust 11 February 2022) (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/castle-drogo/saving-castle-drogo>).

⁶⁵ K Uplekar, ‘The Reconstruction of the Frauenkirche’ (2006) 11 *Sacred Architecture Journal* (https://www.sacredarchitecture.org/articles/the_reconstruction_of_the_frauenkirche).

⁶⁶ See further: Bold, Pickard, and Larkham ‘Conclusions, Guidelines and Looking Forward’ in Bold et al. (n 50) 317–318.

provide an opportunity for visitors today to experience a ‘new’ Georgian house without the patina of age, as it appeared to the original inhabitants; this would be an altogether different experience compared to visiting a house developed and redeveloped over a broader period. The fact that the Trust plans to restore the Speakers’ Parlour shows that it does see the inherent value of restoration where useful material remains, but that it is unwilling to expand its ambitions to the entire house where it does not. This is a distinction without a real difference. Post-fire restoration of this kind will require time, expense, and the introduction of significant amounts of new material; it is not a fundamentally different task from reconstruction of the other state rooms.

A Preference for Instrumental Educational Use

58. Underlying the Trust’s new approach to Clandon seems to be the idea that the present state of the house has the potential to be used to educate visitors about the nature of eighteenth-century buildings and craftsmanship. We have already discussed the flaws in this argument in its totality from paragraph [35] onwards, above. Without restating the analysis in full, the case has been made that this approach does not accord with the moral imperative of restoration, when the Trust’s proper purpose is taken into account.
59. Further, it is not the case that reconstruction of the house would prevent the Trust from educating visitors about the methods by which Clandon was built. Following Fowler’s 1968 restoration works, for example, the choice was made that the Blue Wallpaper Room should be left unrestored, for the insight that this would provide visitors.⁶⁷ This is a much more sensible approach. Rather than prevent the reconstruction of what were some of the most impressive interiors for reasons of education, the educational function could be preserved by leaving unreconstructed some of the less important rooms on the upper floors. Similarly, where the Trust is of the view that particular elements of the framework of Clandon are of educational value to craftspeople, the Trust should explore

⁶⁷ Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 32.

how modern technology might permit the capture of these valuable elements, in a way that does not prohibit reconstruction.

60. Even adopting a purely instrumental view, the Trust's position that leaving Clandon as a ruin presents the most interesting learning opportunity simply cannot stand. Though



The Globe (rebuilt 1989–97 with traditional methods)
Photo ©Diego Delso (CC BY-SA 4.0)

it may be true that there is plenty to learn from the frame of Clandon, particularly for experts, the question must be asked of how much more might be learnt from a concerted effort to engage in the broad reconstruction of such a building. The opportunity this provides to learn truly about how such a building was constructed in the eighteenth-

century is extensive, and would be provided over the course of several years. The Trust's work at another property, Tyntesfield, provides a useful comparison. In order to purchase the property in 2002, a significant public appeal generated £3 million in small donations, in addition to other large donations and grants which were made available.⁶⁸ As the property was restored, visitors were permitted to enter the house, and were able to benefit from seeing the progress made. Conservation projects are not necessarily to be conducted behind closed doors and away from the public, as inconvenient breaks in operation. As the Trust would doubtless agree, these projects can be opportunities in themselves for education and public engagement, although any substantive discussion of the form this should take is beyond the

⁶⁸ James Miller, *Fertile Fortune* (National Trust 2003) 175.

scope of this Report.

Feasibility

61. As mentioned above,⁶⁹ the Trust has asserted that the original plans to reconstruct Clandon were not feasible.⁷⁰ This view may be informed by two possible considerations. The first is cost, which has been considered above;⁷¹ the second is practical impossibility. As has been stressed continually, it is not possible to assert which of these has motivated the Trust, due to the lack of comprehensive published reasons.
62. The first question to ask is whether the skills exist to reconstruct Clandon in an appropriate way. The White Report makes the practical case for reconstruction clear, and it is surely difficult for the Trust to claim the skills required do not exist, given the effort the Trust made at Uppark to establish a team of freehand plaster modellers where none previously existed by drafting in sculptors working in other media, and providing extensive training in the new skills required for the restoration.⁷²
63. As the restoration of Uppark⁷³ demonstrates, projects such as these provide invaluable opportunities to train and retrain skills which otherwise are little used, and in danger of being lost. It is notable, for example, that present in explanations of why Clandon's interiors were considered both impressive and of particular value, was the skill of those who constructed them.⁷⁴ If it is the case that particular pieces of art are valuable not only for their beauty, but also because of the extent to which they demonstrate the artist's skill, it is therefore valuable to preserve and foster such skill today.

⁶⁹ Discussed at [44].

⁷⁰ 'The project at Clandon Park' (n 22) 'July 2022'.

⁷¹ Discussed at [46].

⁷² Jenny Barraclough, 'Uppark—A Country House Re-Born' (11 March 2021) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwLTar73Xew>).

⁷³ For further detail, see 'The White Report' (n 26) from page *vii*.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 7.

64. Indeed, this was a fact recognised by the Trust before the change of approach. Dame Helen Ghosh made the point that returning Clandon to its original, eighteenth-century design, would:

enable us to draw on the wealth of expertise within the Trust and beyond to utilise and develop traditional skills which are in grave danger of being lost.⁷⁵

Dame Helen was correct. There is no doubt that the skills which do exist today require preservation in the same way as the products of these skills do.

65. To permit these skills to be lost would be a severe failure not only in relation to the preservation of valuable cultural knowledge, but would also cause future practical difficulty. Just as the skills which were fostered in the restoration of Uppark were later employed at Windsor Castle, so too would the preservation of skills trained in the reconstruction of Clandon serve to make much simpler and more possible restoration works at other Trust properties, and beyond, over the coming years. This is a pressing concern. Historic England has been reported as offering help in the restoration works at Notre Dame ‘based on lessons learned from fires in UK historic buildings’⁷⁶ It is worth noting that, in the same article, Historic England is reported to warn that many traditional skills are at risk of being lost permanently.

66. Further, the display of these skills to recreate notable and prestigious ceilings could work to contribute to an increased demand for the work of skilled artisans in the private sector. The use of traditional methods would, therefore, not only serve to preserve the authenticity of Clandon, but also ensure that valuable traditional skills are not lost, but remain available both for the preservation of historic buildings, and in the modern

⁷⁵ Hannah Furness, ‘Clandon Park fire: National Trust to restore stately home in “biggest project in a generation”’ *The Telegraph* (18 January 2016) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/12105182/Clandon-Park-fire-National-Trust-to-restore-stately-home.html>).

⁷⁶ D Alberge, ‘Notre Dame fire: UK ready to share conservation expertise’ *The Guardian* (20 April 2019).

economy.⁷⁷

Reconstruction Generally

67. Projects mentioned in this Report, from Uppark to Kyiv’s Golden-Domed Monastery, have proved to be great successes much beloved by the public and their visitors. Clandon was a historically and culturally significant building which was lost devastatingly to fire. To refuse to rebuild Clandon on the basis of anything other than abject unfeasibility would amount to the house being left in a ruined state as the result of a highly specialist academic argument common only to a small group of niche enthusiasts. Trust properties, however, are meant to be enjoyed by everyone; they form some of the great accessible, unifying, treasures of Britain.

68. Globally, the trend is clearly to move away from strict-SPABism (i.e. non-reconstruction),

and towards the rebuilding of beautiful buildings to be enjoyed by all.⁷⁸ Very few would argue that significant monuments should not be rebuilt following war, or sudden major natural tragedy. That fires are more common should not alter this predisposition. Clandon was important, and if the Trust is truly to reject reconstruction absolutely, it should at the very least justify this approach in a far more detailed and authentic way. Opaqueness of reasoning is not appropriate in the case of a decision of such conclusiveness. It must be remembered that if the Trust’s present plans are followed, the reconstruction of



**The Hurva Synagogue
(rebuilt 2000–2010)**
Photo ©Chesdovi (CC BY-SA 3.0)

⁷⁷ It should be noted that the Trust seems to accept the inherent value in utilising traditional skills of this kind in relation to Clandon in particular. The plans to restore the ceilings of the Speakers’ Parlour are stated to employ ‘*traditional craft techniques*’; ‘The project at Clandon Park’ (n 22) ‘Frequently asked questions: Why aren’t you reinstating Clandon Park as it was before the fire?’.

⁷⁸ See, for a non-Western example, Martin N. Morris, ‘From the Ground Up: The Reconstruction of Japanese Historic Buildings from Excavated Archaeological Data’ (1999) 11 *Japan Review* 3.

Clandon will almost certainly never be possible again.

Recommendations E: Reconstruction II

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- E(1) Prioritise the reconstruction of the Marble Hall, and then the remaining rooms which form the state apartment: the Saloon, the Palladio Room, the Library, the State Bedroom, and the Green Drawing Room;
- E(2) Confine to the upper floors of the building any non-reconstructive development which takes place, with the view that any such development should not prohibit future reconstruction.

Recommendations F: Education and Training

This Report recommends that the Trust:

- F(1) Where possible, reconstruct the interiors through the use of traditional methods, ensuring valuable skills are preserved;
- F(2) Explore the use of technology to capture what is instructive about the exposed interior walls in a way that can be used for later education whilst permitting reconstruction to go ahead;
- F(3) Leave only rooms of low significance in their ruined state for educational purposes. This need not be more than one room, as was the view of the Trust when the Blue Wallpaper Room was left unrestored following Fowler's work.

VIII Conclusion

69. It is abundantly apparent that Clandon Park House was of immense architectural and cultural significance. The dry analysis of a report can underplay the remarkable human achievement of such a place; it was a testament to the astonishing work of architects, historians, builders, artists, conservationists, and many others over the last three hundred years including, more recently, the many dedicated staff and volunteers of the National Trust, whose work made this magnificent house available for all to enjoy.
70. Nonetheless, we have sought to question the steps taken over the past eight years, and in light of the best available evidence—which, we stress, may not be conclusive given the uncertainty as to what is and is not publicly available—believe a reconstruction of the ground floor state rooms of Clandon to be the best response to the fire, for the reasons explored above, in light of all evidence which is publicly available, and in line with the recommendations summarised below.
71. It should be noted that many of our recommendations below relate to the National Trust ensuring better availability of evidence in future in relation to the decisions it has made, and continues to make, in respect of Clandon; past measures taken to protect Clandon before 2015; and present measures taken to protect other Trust properties. Until such information is made consistently publicly available, it will remain more difficult than it should be to form a conclusive judgment about the Trust’s treatment of Clandon, and to hold the Trust to account in the future.
72. Clandon’s beauty being its greatest asset, our recommendations seek to encourage the National Trust to resurrect that beauty as fully and richly as possible, for future generations to enjoy. In many ways, Clandon was much more than just a house; it was cherished and admired by the local community and the whole nation. It is our hope that Clandon Park House may, in the words of the National Trust, be protected *‘for*

*everyone's enjoyment, today and in the future*⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cornforth, *Clandon Park* (n 5) 55.

Appendices

A Recommendations

This Report recommends that the National Trust:

- A(1)** Makes public the 2010 Report of the electrical contractor;
- A(2)** Makes public the outcome or status of any litigation relating to the events at Clandon, especially whether any claims are made about blame or responsibility for the fire;
- B(1)** Makes public any changes to its fire safety procedures in relation to other Trust properties, and publicly emphasising lessons learnt from Clandon;
- B(2)** Makes public up-to-date fire safety plans for each Trust property, as well as the dates of the most recent risk assessment and staff fire safety training;
- C(1)** Makes public the interactions it has had with all stakeholders, experts, and interest groups;
- C(2)** Acknowledges where Trust plans have been altered as a result of the representations made by stakeholders, experts, or interest groups;
- D(1)** Reinstate all of the floors and ceilings, as well as reconstruct the interiors of the ground floor state rooms and the pre-1960s roof;
- D(2)** Adopt the view that any reconstructive work undertaken should restore the house to its eighteenth-century condition, rather than to the state it was immediately preceding the fire;
- D(3)** Recognise the benefit and merit of reconstruction, and publish its reasons for abandoning the initial reconstruction plans. This should include a full and transparent costing of reconstruction, setting out clearly the assumptions on which the estimate is based;
- E(1)** Prioritise the reconstruction of the Marble Hall, and then the remaining rooms which form the state apartment: the Saloon, the Palladio Room, the Library, the State Bedroom, and the Green Drawing Room;

- E(2)** Confine to the upper floors of the building any non-reconstructive development which takes place, with the view that any such development should not prohibit future reconstruction;
- F(1)** Where possible, reconstruct the interiors through the use of traditional methods, ensuring valuable skills are preserved;
- F(2)** Explore the use of technology to capture what is instructive about the exposed interior walls in a way that can be used for later education whilst permitting reconstruction to go ahead;
- F(3)** Leave only rooms of low significance in their ruined state for educational purposes. This need not be more than one room, as was the view of the Trust when the Blue Wallpaper Room was left unrestored following Fowler's work.

B How to Restore Clandon House

*by Roger White**

The Architectural Significance of Clandon Park

Clandon Park is—or was—the most complete surviving work by the architect Giacomo Leoni (c1686–1746). Leoni described himself as Venetian but largely made his career outside Italy, seemingly trying his luck in Germany before gravitating to seek employment in England. This would have been by 1714 at the latest, and in 1715 he published the first instalment of his English version of Palladio’s Four Books of Architecture, which was an important milestone in the revival of interest in Palladio in this country even though not altogether scholarly. As a practising architect he was handicapped by being a Catholic, and so debarred from public commissions. His work was therefore largely for private clients in the country house field, and unfortunately the majority of his known commissions have either been demolished or seriously altered. Clandon, the best preserved until the 2015 fire, was begun probably in 1729/30 (when timber for the first-floor joists was felled) and rainwater heads are dated 1733, though the completion of the interior took a good many years. It entirely replaced a mid-17th century house of the Onslow family, and was built for the 2nd Lord Onslow largely using his rich wife’s money. It was, therefore, in essentials an entirely Georgian building.

Leoni’s architecture shows the influence of Palladio and Inigo Jones, combined with more Baroque touches. The exterior of Clandon is an austere red brick and stone block, the austerity heightened by widely spaced windows and a higher pro-



The pre-fire exterior of Clandon.

Photo ©Philip Halling (cc-by-sa/2.0)

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portion of wall to window than is usual in English Georgian country houses, where there tends to be a desire for well-lit rooms. The blockiness is emphasised by the crowning balustraded parapet, which reflected the fact that as originally designed the roof was definitely not meant to be seen above it. This is confirmed by James Seymour’s painting of the house made soon after completion, and also by aerial photographs taken before the National Trust replaced the roof post-acquisition.

It is probably true to say that the exterior of Clandon has never been greatly loved, and the glory of the house was certainly its interiors. These begin (or began) immediately on entering with the Marble Hall, a 40-foot cube that John Cornforth in the original National Trust guide book called ‘*unquestionably among the grandest of all eighteenth-century interiors*’.^a A more recent author, Charles O’Brien in the revised *Buildings of England* volume for Surrey,^b described it as ‘*one of the grandest early Palladian rooms in England*’, reminiscent of the contemporary work at Houghton Hall in Norfolk built for Onslow’s political ally Sir Robert Walpole. At Clandon a strictly architectural two-tiered wall scheme of columns,



The Marble Hall Ceiling.
Photo ©Pam Fray (cc-by-sa/2.0)

pedimented doorcases, aedicules and niches is combined with a pair of superb marble chimneypieces by J.M. Rysbrack (these survived the fire largely unscathed). Crowning everything was the spectacular ceiling, which has generally been attributed to the Swiss-Italian plasterer Guiseppe Artari

on the basis of similarities to his documented work at Houghton.^c To quote Charles O’Brien,

^a John Cornforth *Clandon Park* (2nd rev edn, National Trust 1983) 7.

^b (rev edn, Yale University Press 22 November 2022) 713.

^c Giuseppe Artari (1690s–1769) was one of a family of decorative plasterers originating near Lugano. Like Leoni he sought employment in northern Europe before moving to England, where he arrived around 1720 and, like his compatriot and

it was still effectively Baroque.

It had a central circle with a relief of Hercules and Omphale . . . and a complex symmetrical pattern around it with shells and cartouche shapes in the corners of the four cardinal Virtues. It also employed a typical Baroque trick of having fully modelled limbs . . . spilling over the cornice from high relief figures on the ceiling itself.^d

Christine Casey, the leading current authority on Baroque plasterwork, has called the Clendon ceiling ‘*Artari’s finest and most ambitious figurative composition in Britain . . . Without the rich planar complexity and decorative exuberance of the ceiling, the Marble Hall would have been austere, if not dull, in its effect.*’^e

On stylistic grounds Artari must also have been employed to create other ceilings in principal rooms on the ground floor. The Marble Hall led directly on axis to the Saloon,

the connection emphasised by the continuation of the marble floor from the one to the other. This had another splendid highly modelled ceiling, with representations of gods and goddesses arranged round the perimeter, and a chimneypiece with a very Italianate Baroque overmantel. The ceiling



The Saloon

Photo ©The National Trust PhotoLibrary (Alamy)

has collapsed but the chimneypiece survives, albeit in a somewhat calcined state. Other particularly fine Artari ceilings included those in the State Dining Room (which was above

senior partner Giovanni Bagutti, was a favourite craftsman of the architect James Gibbs.

^d Charles O’Brien, *Surrey: Buildings of England* (n b).

^e Christine Casey, *Making Magnificence: Architects, Stuccatori, and the Eighteenth-Century Interior* (Yale University Press 2017) 196–8.

the Saloon) and Palladio Room,



The Palladio Room

Photo ©The National Trust Photolibrary (Alamy)

the latter with what Casey calls ‘*sacrificial scenes with pairs of canoodling sphinxes and putti*’.^f The only original ceiling not to collapse in the fire was that in the Speakers’ Parlour, which was a family room at the north-west corner.

The Post-Fire Controversy

As Simon Kincaid has very accurately noted:

[w]hat to do with important historic buildings following destructive fires is a subject attracting a good deal of strong opinion and controversy. The final decision on the future of the building in question is often a product of compromise reached among the stakeholders in the building, who may consist of the owners, the statutory authorities (including conservation bodies) and the insurers; with expert and public opinion taken into account. It is rarely universally accepted.^g

In the case of post-fire Clandon, though the National Trust has attempted to smooth matters over and give the impression that almost every relevant body is supportive of its revised scheme, the differences of opinion persist and have been exacerbated by the dramatic *volte face* announced in 2022.

^f ibid 200.

^g Simon Kincaid, ‘After the Fire: Reconstruction following Destructive Fires in Historic Buildings’ (2020) 11(1) *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice* 21–39.

The National Trust's current approach to the 'restoration' of Clandon House contrasts dramatically with the one adopted towards Uppark following its gutting by fire in 1989, so much so that in the case of Clandon the term 'restoration' is completely inappropriate. In 1989 the Trust considered three basic options: to retain the shell as a controlled ruin; restore the exterior but give it a modern interior that was 'of our own time'; or restore the whole house as nearly as possible to its appearance before the fire. At the first meeting of the Trust's Executive Committee after the Uppark fire it was decided to reject the first two options and to reinstate the ground floor and basement. The decision to go for complete reinstatement took a little longer, and in the meantime the Trust was subject to considerable pressure not to take that course (though the decision was reinforced by the terms of the insurance on the house). An article in *The Independent*, written by a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings though not on SPAB's behalf, advanced what might be considered a hard-line version of the 'conserve as found' philosophy of the organisation's founder William Morris. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was founded by William Morris in 1877 as a response to Victorian over-restoration of medieval buildings, particularly churches. The Manifesto drawn up by Morris and Philip Webb, to which even now would-be members have to sign up, includes the assertion that, as in previous centuries, alterations or interventions to a building should be in 'the style of our time'. The Georgian Group is an offshoot of SPAB created in 1937, when it separated off to enable it to more easily defend the post-medieval buildings that were not SPAB's main preoccupation, and to free the Group from a rigid adherence to the Morris line on restoration. The Group is constitutionally and organisationally entirely separate from SPAB. It has generally been accepted that, among the various statutory national amenity societies, it is the Group that has the principal remit when it comes to commenting on buildings that are unequivocally of the Georgian period, and traditionally SPAB has focussed on pre-Georgian buildings. Despite this convention, the article argued that if the exterior were to be reinstated it should be made visibly obvious where the joins between old and new fell. As for the interior, it contended that any facsimile

reinstatement would inevitably be a lifeless fake. The article was written without benefit of a site visit, so the author could perhaps not have known that, despite the impression of total devastation given by early post-fire photographs, a great deal of the interior had in fact survived. Nevertheless it was followed by a pronouncement in the next SPAB newsletter, following the Morris philosophy, that any copy of the original interior would be ‘sterile’, and that modern artists should be employed to create something contemporary—something, to use that essentially meaningless phrase, ‘in the style of our time’.^h

We know that in fact the Trust followed the path of faithful reinstatement with triumphant results that were almost universally applauded (except of course in the William Morris camp). The project gave invaluable opportunities to the then current and rising generations of craftsmen that were to be crucial when it came to the post-fire restoration of Windsor Castle a few years later. As Kincaid points out,ⁱ thirty or more years after the fire the impression given by Uppark today is not that of the ‘sterile copy’ predicted by SPAB:

Current visitor numbers suggest that the reconstruction has been successful and that the house continues to be appealing to those who ensure its future viability. Although to the careful viewer the evidence of the actual fire and the subtle blending of original fabric with new following reconstruction are there to be seen, it is perhaps not obvious to the casual visitor. However, Uppark is straightforward about acknowledging the fire as part of the story of the building, both in the literature available and with a video and display boards explaining the fire.^j

But the issues that Uppark raised are once again in play with regard to Clandon House, and having lost the argument over Uppark the SPAB has made sure that the National Trust does not disregard its views this time round. Unlike any of the other statutory national amenity societies (including the Georgian Group), the SPAB is currently one of the appointed bodies

^h Georgian Group Report and Journal 1989 13–14.

ⁱ Simon Kincaid, ‘After the Fire’ (n g) 28.

^j Simon Kincaid, ‘After the Fire’ (n g).

represented on the National Trust Council, so it might be said to have a ring-side seat at discussions on matters such as Clandon, and clearly it has not wasted this opportunity. In its Spring 2023 magazine, an article on the current Clandon scheme states very clearly:

The SPAB became involved in discussions very soon after the fire, and has consistently supported an approach which emphasises conservation and new design as opposed to a historic and faithful recreation in the style of Uppark.^k

In other words, despite Clandon—begun in 1729/30—dating entirely from the Georgian period, SPAB lost no time in lobbying the Trust to ensure that its arguments against reinstating or recreating any of the interiors were strongly impressed on the Trust and more particularly those engaged in working out a way forward. Meanwhile the Georgian Group, which as the statutory national amenity society specifically concerned with the fate of Georgian buildings has the principal remit for Clandon amongst the various national amenity societies, has so far pursued a non-committal line that it would maintain is thoughtful but which others have certainly interpreted as fence-sitting.^l Consequently any explicit push-back from the Group against the Trust’s drastically revised proposals has been almost completely lacking. When the story of this episode in National Trust history, and conservation history more generally, comes to be told it will be hard to avoid the conclusion that while SPAB was energetically proactive in promoting its agenda, the Georgian Group was under-active and, some would say, naïve.

At the time of the arguments over Uppark, it was pointed out that on the Continent after World War II prodigious feats of meticulous reinstatement were achieved in historic buildings that had been completely devastated—in Berlin, Warsaw, Würzburg, Leningrad to name just a few—without any sign of the ideological impediments that seemed, and seem, to paralyse some architects and commentators in Britain. It has also been pointed out

^k Tessa Wild, ‘Clandon Park: A Country House Laid Bare’ [Spring 2023] SPAB Magazine 32–4.

^l Peregrine Bryant, ‘The Future of Clandon’ [2022] 2 The Georgian Issue 42–6, where the Trust’s demonstrably untrue assertions about non-availability of documentary evidence are accepted at face value.

that the National Trust itself, in addition to Uppark, has restored historic buildings in its ownership such as the Assembly Rooms in Bath (bombed in the Second World War) and the Breakfast Room at Nostell Priory, Yorkshire (fire-damaged in 1980). Other outstanding feats of post-fire reinstatement in this country include Hampton Court Palace (1986 fire) and Windsor Castle(1992 fire).^m

These earlier achievements of restoration took place before the promulgation of the so-called Riga Charter in 2000. This was the latest of a series of international declarations on restoration/conservation philosophy that began with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites in 1964, which adopted a firm line that there should be no element of ‘conjecture’ in restoration. The Riga Charter makes clear that:

[while replication] is in general a misrepresentation of the evidence of the past ... in exceptional circumstances, reconstruction of cultural heritage, lost through disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may be acceptable ... [notably] where a ‘place’ is incomplete through damage or alteration [or] where it recovers the cultural significance of a ‘place’.

It makes the stipulation that it needs to be possible for reconstruction to be:

carried out without conjecture or compromising existing *in situ* remains, and that any reconstruction is ... the least necessary for the conservation and presentation of the site.ⁿ

As Kincaid explains, under the Burra Charter (another ICOMOS product, of 1992):

Restoration means returning a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing elements without the introduction of new material

^m At Windsor some rooms were meticulously restored to their pre-fire state while others, notably St George’s Hall, were put back in modified form.

ⁿ The Riga Charter on Authenticity and Historical Reconstruction in Relationship to Cultural Heritage, *ICCROM* (Riga 2000) preamble.

and

Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material.

Restoration is frequently used colloquially, often incorrectly, as a catch-all term, but used with its correct meaning it may be applicable where there is only light damage and no new materials are required. **Reconstruction** is the most appropriate term to describe post-fire interventions where elements have been badly damaged or destroyed.^o **Authenticity** is an important concept and is normally vested in original historic fabric, with interventions into a building seeking to minimise or avoid negative impact on that fabric. In terms of post-fire reconstruction however, authenticity refers to accurate reproduction of missing elements using the same materials and techniques and retaining the original design and layout for any parts that have been lost, and relies heavily on an adequate level of documentation.^p With a significant level of damage to a building after fire there is the opportunity to improve the building for contemporary needs if there are the financial means to allow for this. The Burra Charter is very clear that adaptation is only acceptable where it would have a minimal impact on the cultural significance.^q The introduction of new services is common—for example modern electrical systems and modern fire detection and alarm systems. Such adaptation is an unavoidable addition to authentic reconstruction and it would make no sense to ignore this opportunity.^r

The most recent international doctrinal text on authenticity in reconstruction (the Riga Charter) advises that although there is an established presumption against reconstruction, *it may be acceptable following loss if an asset has outstanding significance (and only where appropriate documentation exists*; the overall urban or landscape context is not falsified; and

^o Simon Kincaid, 'After the Fire' (n g) 23.

^p Simon Kincaid, 'After the Fire' (n g) 24.

^q *ibid.*

^r *ibid.*

existing historic fabric is not damaged).^s Having sufficiently detailed information about the building before a fire is of crucial importance. The commonly held view is that reconstruction should only go as far as the point at which conjecture, or speculation, begins, or in other words any reconstruction needs to be supported by adequate documentation.^t

After the Clandon fire it was concluded by those then in the relevant positions at the National Trust both that the house remained of outstanding national significance and that some degree of restoration could take place.^u This position is very well documented in public statements made by Trust officials at the time. There was consequently an international competition to choose an architect to deliver the project, and the winning design by the firm of Allies & Morrison was a combination of authentic reconstruction of the principal ground floor rooms, together with contemporary interventions in other areas which were not of the same historic significance—including a modern staircase in a now open four-storey space. There was also to be a modern exhibition space with the bare brickwork walls exposed by the fires as a backdrop (this serving also to acknowledge the event of the fire) and a roof-top viewing and seating area. Although the scheme included contentious elements (notably the inclusion of a new staircase in a position where none had previously been, and also the un-historic roof form necessitated by the viewing and seating area), it is worth reiterating that this approach was predominantly—though not universally—well received across the board, and many both inside the Trust and outside looked forward confidently to its implementation. For obvious reasons the complete *volte face* announced in 2022 came as not just a surprise but also a great shock. It was without doubt a triumph for the hard-line version of the philosophy that the SPAB had, by its own admission, been actively promoting behind the scenes.

When it comes to defending the dramatic change of heart, the National Trust and its allies

^s Simon Kincaid, 'After the Fire' (n g) 25.

^t Simon Kincaid, 'After the Fire' (n g) 26.

^u Simon Kincaid, 'After the Fire' (n g) 30; instancing an interview he carried out with Jim Foy (the Trust's Assistant Director, Operations) in April 2019.

reject comparisons with Uppark on the grounds that the two fires burned differently. At Uppark it started in the roof and burned downwards, and an efficient rescue operation saved most of the contents of the principal floor, strengthening the case for them to be displayed in facsimile interiors. At Clandon on the other hand, it burned upwards, resulting in the destruction of many of the contents (for instance the Gubbay Collection displayed in the top floor was entirely lost) and the collapse of the splendid baroque ceilings that were the distinguishing feature of Clandon's ground floor interiors. Much of the plasterwork of the latter has in fact been salvaged, but in fragments of varying size that, combined with water damage, means that they could not be reused or incorporated in recreated ceilings (as happened with the Uppark ceilings). But that is not to say that the fragments could not be used to enable, in places, completely accurate reconstruction to take place and there is the photographic evidence to guide the rest since, as at Uppark and as in the Continental buildings already mentioned, the Clandon interiors are very fully recorded photographically,^v and from a technical point of view reinstatement is perfectly feasible – despite the Trust's campaign of misinformation to the effect that the requisite knowledge and expertise no longer exist. This last claim is particularly unconvincing in view of the fact that the Speakers' Parlour ceiling survives in a damaged state and the Trust proposes to restore it. Moreover, intricate plaster ceilings have been recreated at Uppark and created completely anew at Kilbooy in Ireland. So the argument about reinstatement versus non-reinstatement boils down to one of conservation ideology, which is where the sustained intervention by the SPAB comes into play.

An historic building potentially has two salient characteristics. The first is that of patina. A building that has been allowed to grow old gracefully has a certain magical, almost indefinable quality which, where it survives, is something to be cherished and protected – and in this respect the SPAB approach to historic buildings cannot be faulted. When that is

^v This has been confirmed by John Orna-Ornstein, National Trust 'Director of Curation and Experience'.

lost, as for instance in a fire, one can only wait patiently for it to grow old again. However the other quality which such a building has is its intrinsic merit as a piece of design. This applies to both exteriors and interiors. Once the roof at Uppark was replaced it was still possible to admire the same satisfying forms and proportions that it had before the fire, which would also be true of Clandon provided the original Georgian roof form, intended to be invisible from below, is reinstated. That is why the 1989 SPAB suggestion that the restorers of Uppark should make it obvious where old fabric ends and new begins was to place dogma above aesthetics. William Morris developed his philosophy on restoration as a reaction to Victorian over-restoration of medieval buildings, and while it may work perfectly well with such buildings, with their frequently accretive character (one has only to think of a typical medieval parish church), it is apt, if applied rigorously, to produce a picturesque, much-patched look that puts more emphasis on surface than on design and is therefore inappropriate to the formality and symmetry of classical buildings such as Uppark or Clandon.

However, even under the terms of the Riga Charter and its predecessor pronouncements, as outlined above, there seems to be no logical reason why reconstruction of some at least of the Clandon interiors should be ruled out. These interiors were after all the main justification for the Trust acquiring Clandon in the first place. Its austere, blocky exterior (though it has its admirers) is, by common consent, its least attractive feature, and the property has many disadvantages in that the Trust does not own the estate buildings and very little parkland. These disadvantages were thought to be outweighed by the superlative quality of the plasterwork in the main ground floor rooms. Thus, the building overall is self-evidently of outstanding significance (as reflected by its Grade 1 listing), sufficient documentation exists (both within the Trust's own archives and beyond) to ensure that no real degree of 'conjecture' would be involved, and in the case of specific rooms—notably the Marble Hall, Saloon, Palladio Room and Library—the work would be perfectly feasible if challenging from a technical point of view.

This applies particularly to the Marble Hall. It was one of the great interiors of Georgian England, and its design is extremely well known and documented. Apart from anything else, with the exception of the ceiling it was a purely architectural design, the wall schemes being composed



The Marble Hall after the 2015 fire.

Photo ©Roger Smith

of standard elements such as columns, niches, architraves and so on, repetitively deployed; much of this survives in situ, and there is good photographic evidence—it would be highly culpable if there were not—from when the Trust carried out photographic surveys of its properties in the 1980s and 1990s. Although it has wrongly been suggested that there are inadequate records for the spectacular Artari ceiling, a perfectly good photograph of it from the Trust’s own collection is reproduced in Christine Casey’s definitive book on baroque plasterwork, *Making Magnificence*.^w The two splendid Rysbrack chimneypieces, obviously, survive virtually unscathed.

To present the Marble Hall, in perpetuity, as a battered carapace with architecturally incomplete walls and no ceiling would, once again, be to place dogma above aesthetics. Those promoting the changed approach appear to place great faith in the potential of the interior to excite visitors with an allegedly Piranesian vision of destruction and decay, to be viewed as the romantic remains of a long-defunct civilisation.^xThis is surely fanciful to put it mildly. The reality of Clandon at present is that it offers room after room after room of singed and smoke-blackened brick walls, bleak and depressing in the extreme.

^w Casey, *Making Magnificence* (n e) 199 fig 182—a photograph from the National Trust’s collection.

^x Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78), an Italian archaeologist, architect and artist who published many engravings showing picturesque ancient ruins, predominantly Roman. These were however the product of decay over many centuries, and not as the result of recent fires.



The post-fire State Bedroom

Photo ©Roger Smith

It is maintained that this will be a marvellous opportunity to show visitors how an 18th century country house was constructed; if that is the peak of the Trust's ambition for Clandon, then it can be achieved in a single specimen room, and further explained by imaginative displays in others. There is surely zero prospect that visitors will come back time and again to be depressed by an interior comprising nothing but ruined rooms (excepting the Speakers' Parlour, which was always one of the less interesting interiors of the house). England is not lacking in ruins, and the Trust should learn from the experience of the other organ-

isations that struggle to maintain them and attract visitors—that of English Heritage at Witley Court in Worcestershire, for instance, where it was found that the only realistic way to attract visitors was to spend a great deal of money recreating the Victorian garden, not an option the Trust has at Clandon with its very limited acreage. On the other hand, the public has often been enthused by seeing work in progress. Members of the Landmark Trust eagerly follow the progress of new acquisitions as they are given a new lease of life. Copt Hall in Essex attracts visitors who return year after year to see what new work has been done. Visitors to the Winter Gardens in Morecambe or to Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire feel that they are part of the story of the building while anticipating the day when their donations and the efforts of volunteers come to fruition. Visitors to Tyntesfield during the National Trust's restoration work of the early 2000s were inspired by the sense of progress there. None of these buildings would hold the same appeal if there were no prospect of a return to former glory.

As Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage 2002–15, has said:

consolidated ruins are not much fun to visit; I should know, I looked after hun-

dreds of them for thirteen years. Houses are not classrooms, they are places where people live and have lived. All the most successful fire restorations, whatever the approach—from Uppark to Astley Castle—have given back to the ruins life and meaning. Clandon was burnt by tragic accident, there is no meaning in the ruined walls—the job in hand is to make it mean something to people of the future.^y

The National Trust, which at present is pretending that its depressing, joyless and nihilistic scheme is the only possible way forward, needs to concede what the Riga Charter—the document that it and its supporters in the SPAB treat as holy writ—explicitly says can be acceptable *‘in exceptional circumstances’*: that replication of at least some of the lost or damaged Clandon interiors is justified as *‘recovering the cultural significance’* of this particular ‘place’.

Roger White

^y Simon Thurley, ‘The questions surrounding the restoration of great buildings’ (Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths 20 April 2023).