Uppark House
The Decision to Restore

While the house was still burning, a lengthy debate on its future began. Should Uppark be restored or demolished, provided with a new interior, or the shell stabilised as a ruin? In a press release issued immediately after the fire Martin Drury declared: ‘We shall reconstruct Uppark if we can, although it is too soon to know if this is possible.’ Nearly all the contents of the public rooms had been salvaged, thanks to the heroic efforts of the rescuers, and on 13 September 1989 David Sekers announced: ‘We feel that enough survives to justify total restoration.’ Christopher Rowell also pointed out that whereas at first the house was thought to be gutted, ‘on closer inspection’ it was found that, though the fire had destroyed the attic and first floor, it had consumed only part of the ground floor and very little of the basement. His view confirmed that ‘the omens are good and that the house can rise from the ashes’.

These statements sparked off a debate in the newspapers. A correspondent wrote to the Times on 18th September 1989; ‘The result of such misguided activity will be very largely a fake; a very skilful fake, I have no doubt, but a fake (or if you prefer it a “reproduction antique”) none the less. What will be the point of this? Those visiting Uppark in the future would know it was a copy of the original; would the public therefore go and see it anymore?’ (The answer to this question is that when the house reopened in the summer of 1995 over 60.0000 visitors came to see it in the first five months - double the annual total before the fire.)

Several argued that the site should be ‘returned to nature’, and airily claimed that the ‘rescued furniture and paintings etc. can easily be found worthy homes elsewhere’. The demolition argument was most memorably put by Mr David Martin, the Conservative MP for Portsmouth South, in a letter to the Times on 6 September 1989:

Sir,
The expressed intent to restore the fire ruined Uppark House in Sussex surprises me. In these days of outrage at development of green-field sites, let alone a prominent one on a Sussex Downs hilltop, here is an ideal opportunity to demolish it altogether and return the site to nature.
Imagine attempting to get planning permission for building such a house (or rather museum business premises) in such a position today! The very same great and good people supporting the National Trust and similar bodies wanting to restore it would be leading petitions, dismayed letters to MP’s etc to preserve such an area of high landscape value and unique habitat for something or other from being vandalised by developers.

In their assaults on vast acres of our countryside, were the yuppies of the 17th Century so very different? Why should we allow time to confer legitimacy on their depredation?

Yours truly

David Martin
House of Commons

This evoked a certain amount of derision in the local press, being generally denounced as "arrogant nonsense", and provoking the SDP leader of the opposition from Hampshire County Council, Mike Hancock, to call him "the biggest philistine since Golliath". He added: "obviously Mr Martin has neither feeling for, nor knowledge of, history."

Deyan Sudjic, in an article in the now defunct Sunday Correspondent on 17th September 1989, expressed the new modernist spirit:"…it won't actually *be* Uppark no matter how skilful the work of the 20th Century craftsman who seek to recreate it. What tourists come to see will, in fact, be a replica, one which could be said to diminish those fragments which actually are authentic…" he continued 'It (Uppark) will become a monument to the 20th century's inability to accept the consequences of catastrophe.' (Surely, some of the noblest aspiration of twentieth-century civilisation have been its attempts to come to terms with catastrophe: Lutyen's Cenotaph and war cemeteries of the First World War, for instance, or the reconstruction of Warsaw and St Petersburg after the Second World War.) A couple of faint-hearted journalists in the *Guardian* and *Independent* also argued that it would in effect be morally wrong to attempt a facsimile restoration. 'A new Uppark can never be the same as *the* Uppark…' And Anna Pavord, for instance, recommended a plain modern interior within the seventeenth-century shell.

Most commentators, however, urged that Uppark should be restored. On 7 September 1989, in the *Daily Telegraph*, Mark Bence-Jones pointed out robustly that the Trust's 'credibility as a guardian of the Nation's Heritage' depended upon its response to the Uppark fire. To use the insurance money for any purpose other than for rebuilding would, he stated, be a form of alienation and a betrayal of the donors' intentions in handing over the house in 1954 for permanent preservation. Dan Cruikshank in *Country Life*, on 18 January 1990, recommended rebuilding as the wisest course. Not only would a restored interior be the most 'suitable setting for the contents', but also the reconstruction could form a model demonstration of the correct use of traditional materials and decorative techniques.

'With this work completed, the house could be more popular than ever – since together with "before and after" photographs, it would be a dramatic testament to the committed recreation of a national monument.' Others made the point that the rebuilding would provide an unequalled opportunity to foster skills in historic preservation 'where experts can demonstrate their

knowledge and craftsmen could be trained.'

Professor Andor Gomme (Professor of Architectural History at the University of Keele) reinforced the argument for restoration in a letter to the *Independent* on 3 October 1989:

Sir:Uppark is the third great house which the National Trust has lost through fire since the last war. Both Coleshill (burnt in 1953) and Dunsland (1967) were subsequently entirely destroyed-decisions which have been deeply deplored ever since. (In fact, Coleshill burnt before the estate came to the Trust.) Uppark is a house of comparable importance and value, and its full restoration is essential.

Anna Pavord's proposal…that the interior should be rebuilt as a "series of simple, clean, well-designed rooms" for the display of the contents saved from the fire ignores the fact that the furniture and paintings at Uppark were designed or collected by the Fetherston Haugh family over numerous generations especially for the rooms in which they lived. Shorn of these surroundings the furnishings would be just another museum collection…

Had the Germans taken the purist line after the war, we should be without the wonders of Bruchsal and the Residenz at Wurzbur, and the great churches of Nurnburg would look like the clean, well-designed – but totally anaemic – interiors of those in Kassel and Stuttgart. Where, as appears to the the case at Uppark, it is physically possible to make an accurate restoration of a great building, it should be made and not jeered at as a creation of a theme park of misnamed pastiche.

This debate has to be seen in the context of a philosphy of restoration which has developed in Britain since the later nineteeth-century, and is still much influenced by the writings and opinions of those larger-than-life Victorian defenders of old buildings John Ruskin (1818 – 1900) and William Morris (1834 – 1898). Ruskin was horrified by the cavalier "restoration" and drastic reconstruction of medieval churches in England and on the continent by Gothic architects such as Sir George Gilbert-Scott (1811 – 1878) or Violet Le Duc (1814 – 1879), who frequently removed later features of interest and replaced them with their own, often hyperthetical, reconstructions of what might have been. Ruskin also had invade against "desecration" and argued that old buildings should be valued in themselves, but "not" improved. His pupil William Morris developed this theory, arguing that all buildings should be merely patched in the gentlest possible way, and that all such repairs should be distinctive so that the viewer would not be deceived into thinking that the new work was old. In theory, if carried to its logical extreme, this philosophy could lead to peculiar visual results with, for example, a corroded window mullion being replaced in a different material rather than matching its neighbour in stone. In practice, it inspired some of the most beautiful and evocative restorations ever carried out in England: old churches in Herefordshire or Sussex, for example, where Georgian box

pews and lime plaster ceilings were left alongside Gothic work, or houses like Morris's own Kelmscott, in Oxfordshire, or Haddon Hall, in Derbyshire, not to mention much that the National Trust has achieved, including the repair of many of its earliest acquisitions like the Clergy house at Alfriston, in East Sussex, or vernacular villages such as Lacock, in Wiltshire, and West Wycombe, in Buckinghamshire.

In order to promote the appropriate repair of old buildings, William Morris founded the still flourishing Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1877. Morris's choice of the word protection rather than preservation is significant. His aim was to protect buildings from unsuitable restoration and alterations, as much as from demolition, ruin and decay. What might be called the SPAB approach to historic buildings has evolved principally with medieval and vernacular buildings in mind, where the ancient structure itself has considerable archaeological interest. Much of the visual appeal of such buildings derives from the inimitable texture, techniques, colours of natural materials, hand-craftsmanship and time-worn finishes. It is more difficult to apply the same principles to Victorian buildings with their hard, cast or moulded industrial materials and machine methods, or even to Georgian buildings, where at least as much of the aesthetic impact derives from the architect's design – three-dimensional spaces, symmetry, proportion and well deployed classical ornament – as from the execution by craftsmen or the 'patina of history'.

This purist approach to the restoration of old buildings has been further complicated since the mid-twentieth century by the intellectual legacy of architectural Modernism. The Modern Movement decisively rejected the use of traditional techniques and materials or the inclusion of architectural ornament in favour of uncompromisingly severe buildings with unencumbered lines and 'new' materials such as concrete, steel and plate glass. Modernism has affected the way in which many people, especially those trained in schools of architecture, look at historic buildings. In general, Modern Movement theory was antipathetical towards old buildings; it was thought that they had no place in the Brave New World. A 'modern industrial society' (whatever that might be) required buildings of a type totally different from anything hitherto enjoyed by the human race. Le Corbusier, for instance, whose ideas had an enormous impact after the Second World War, produced an 'ideal, plan for the complete demolition of central Paris and its reconstruction on a 'rational' grid with evenly spaced tower blocks. The influence of this type of thought is visible in the planning and reconstruction of most English towns and cities in the 1960s and is still a force in contemporary architectural doctrine, even if not a very potent one..

Although the Modern Movement is no longer dominant, its influence lingers, colouring attitudes towards historic buildings and traditional craftsmanship in Britain. It manifests itself as a subliminal Puritanism which regards any sort

of historicist decoration or the use of traditional materials as 'pastiche' or 'fake'. Its proponents have little sympathy with the concept of scholarly or accurate restoration of historic buildings. They tend to regard any form of copying as morally wrong. If something old is damaged or destroyed, they consider that it should not be repaired or copied, but swept away and replaced with something in the 'style of our time' or 'good new design', by which they mean Modern architecture. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) the professional mouthpiece of 25,000 practising architects, still gives regular expression to these views. The *RIBA Journal,* for instance, described the completed Uppark restoration as 'the equivalent of a Wimpey house but for its sadly forced, intellectual veneer'.

It is the fond belief of many that when in the past good old buildings were damaged by fire the owners always demolished them and commissioned the 'best architects of the day' to build new and even better homes than the ones they had lost. Sometimes they did, but often they did not. There is, in fact, a long and serious tradition of copying and restoring old buildings in Europe. (In Japan many historic buildings, being of timber, are rebuilt in replica at regular intervals, especially some of the 'old' Shinto temples; the Ise Shrine, near Kyoto, for instance, is reconstructed every twenty years). When Doncaster parish church burnt down in 1853, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott rebuilt it partly as a reproduction of what had been there before the fire. Following the gutting of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg in the 1830s the interior was reinstated as it had been on the evidence of detailed watercolours. This was also the case with the Fenice theatre in Venice (alas, burnt again in 1996). Likewise, after the Private Dining Room at Windsor Castle was destroyed by fire in 1853, Anthony Salvin (17799-1881) reconstructed it exactly according to Jeffry Wyatville's 1828 designs.

Many fire damaged houses in Britain have been restored over the past two centuries. When Thomas Archer's Bramham Park in Yorkshire was gutted in 1828, the Lane-Fox family did not demolish the shell and commission a good modern to design a new house; they simply reroofed it. After Duncombe Park (also in Yorkshire) burnt in 1879, Lord Feversham called in William Young (architect of the war Office in London) to reinstate it in the spirit of the original. When fire demolished the central block at Stourhead in Wiltshire, in 1902, the Hoare family employed Aston and Dorian Webb to undertake repairs, and most of the rooms are now reasonable copies of their predecessors. The same happened at Monzie Castle, in Perthshire, in 1908 and in 1911 at Sledmore, in Yorkshire, where Joseph Rose's destroyed plasterwork was recreated by George Jackson and sons, the firm which was awarded the Uppark plastering contract. At Hagley, in Worcestershire, a remarkable skilful restoration of the main rooms was carried out after a fire in 1925, including copying damaged rocosso ceilings and thereby foreshadowing the Uppark project.

Particularly successful restorations since the Second World War have

included the Wyatt Dining Room at Heveningham Hall. In Suffolk, after a fire in 1949, and the rebuilding of the dome at Castle Howard, in Yorkshire, following its destruction in 1940. Many restorations and reinstatements of old houses after fires have been carried out so unobtrusively that many people do not realise what has happened. The evidence suggests that most owners have taken a pragmatic decision about whether to restore or to replace their houses.

The theory that architects and artists never copied in the past is not supported by the evidence. Numerous examples can be quoted. Some of the seemingly medieval quadrangles at Oxford date from the seventeenth or even eighteenth centuries. Half the symmetrical Elizabethan façade of Stonyhurst, in Lancashire, dates from 1590 and half from the 1830s. At Westminster Abbey the laete fourteenth century nave is an exact copy of the mid-thirteenth-century choir, and Hawksmoor's eighteenth century towers continue the style of the Perpendicular west front. Sir William Chamber's Georgian front of Somerset house facing the Strand is a copy of John Webb's demolished river front. Much of the 'Elizabethan' exterior of Longford Castle, in Wiltshire, is in fact a Victorian reconstruction by Anthony Salvin. And this is just to mention a handful of representative examples from different centuries.

Something of this historical background needs to be borne in mind when considering the arguments aired in the press, and elsewhere, by different parties regarding the 'correct' way to treat Uppark after the fire. Many offered advice in early September 1989, before the true extent of the damage was known. The SPAB, for example, urged that if the interior had been gutted 'no attempt should be made to create a lifeless replica of the eighteenth-century rooms. 'Instyead, it suggested, the shell should be consolidated, a roof added and the internal spaces reconstructed as a museum of the National Trust contents. This work should be done to the 'highest standards of today and could result in beautiful and memorable rooms'. This view was moderated once the true extent of the damage was clearer. The SPAB expanded its philosophy of conservation as it applied to Uppark in an article by its secretary Philip Venning, in its 1989 autumn newsletter. It is worth discussing, as it is the best expression of a particular and influential attitude towards restoration, and an honest attempt to grapple with the philosophical question raised by the arguments in favour of repair versus restoration.

The basic question at Uppark was the extent to which the destroyed parts of the decorative interior should be replaced in replica, if at all. The SPAB was promnent among those urging the National Trust not to commit itself to total restoration of the house. Philip Venning's article acknowledged that the Trust had, even before the fire was extinguished, mobilised 'the most impressive post-disaster operation ever seen in this country'. It also recognised that 95 per cent of the contents of the ground floor rooms had been saved and praised the efficiency with which archaeologists, conservators and other specialists had begun the

stabilisation of the shell, and the salvage and 'first-aid' conservation of the remnants. Whereas the upper part of the house, the home of the Meade-Fetherstonhaugh family, and its contents had been totally obliterated, it described the picture at basement and ground floor level as 'more mixed'. The Salon, less its decorative ceiling, has come off best of all and survives in most of its beauty. By contrast the stairs have vanished, and the Dining Room is a tragic remnant. (This proved to be over-pessimistic.) Other rooms vary in the extent of damage.

Adherents of the SPAB standpoint sincerely believed that a copy of any work of art is, to quote from the same article, 'at best a lifeless imitation' and that a modern reproduction is not an adequate substitute for a great work of art which has been lost in a fire.' No restorer, however clever, can put back the missing ingredients at Uppark- 250 years of historic creativity and use.' This assertation slightly begs the question, A house is not an autograph work of art like a great painting; it is the joint result of many hands-plasterers, joiners, masons, carvers, decorators and gilders - interpreting and executing the concept of the architects, as well as a composite of alterations and adjustments made since completion. It is difficult to argue that a twentieth century copy of an eighteenth century ceiling is different in kind from say, a Victorian renewal of an eighteenth century red flock paper. In a slowly evolving and changing entity like a country house, later decoration and restoration work is surely as much part of the history of the building as anything that went before.

The purists argued that the philosophical problem was greatest in the rooms where only some of the original workmanship survived, How far should damaged rooms be totally restored? How far should the salvaged fragments of plaster, joinery, carving and metalwork be reinstated, or simply used as patterns to copy? Many doubted whether it was technically feasible to incorporate the salvaged fragments in the restoration. Others took the more straightforward view that Uppark presented not a philosophical but a practical problem. If it was technically possible to restore the house, then it should be done.

Since the 1970s there had been a number of competent restorations of fire-damaged interiors: Inveraray Castle, in Ayrshire, by Ian Lindsay & Partners; the Music Room at Brighton Pavilion, by Brighton Corporation; three rooms on the *piano nobile* at Nostell Priory by the National Trust; the library at Cullen, in Banffshire, by Kit Martin; and the Kings State Apartments at Hampton Court by the Historic Royal Palaces Agency. Out of these disasters has evolved a whole new armoury of skills and methods. It could be argued that accurate, scholarly restoration of historic buildings in Britain is a quintessentially late twentieth century architectural phenomenon, drawing as it does on thorough archival research, modern recording techniques and the application of developed archaeological practice. Detailed photographic and photogrammetric records and computer-aided drawings (CAD) have made possible a degree of speed and

accuracy in restoration work never before attainable. The use of such 'high tech' resources, as well as new scholarly disciplines, is just as valid and distinctive an expression of the twentieth century as steel and concrete construction, float glass or any other technological advance.

Technology is only a means to an end, however, and not an end in itself. Craftsmanship still remains paramount, although modern techniques of recording and surveying buildings are useful ingredients in successful architectural restoration. Regrettably, such techniques were not available when the gutted Wren churches in the City of London or the Bath Assembly Rooms were reconstructed after the blitz. A comparison between these early post-war restorations and those at Cullen or Hampton Court more recently shows the advances in architectural restoration in the last fifty years. The National Trust's experience of restoring Nostell after the fire in 1980 and the lessons learned there were to prove useful at Uppark. In no respect could the Nostell disaster be called a 'dress rehearsal', but it had shown what could be done to resurrect gutted and partially damaged Georgian rooms and that the high quality of traditional craftsmanship required by such work was still available. The difference at Uppark, however, were many; not least, there was a difference of scale, with eight state rooms requiring extensive restoration, as well as the repairs to the fabric and the reconstruction of the residential upper floors.

In a memorandum of 19 September 1989, intended as guidance to the Executive Committee, the Trust's Director General, Angus Stirling, outlined three options facing the Trust – demolition of the shell, preservation of the ruin and restoration – all of which found their passionate advocates in the correspondence, both public and private, following the fire. While demolition would follow the precedent of Coleshill, the memorandum pointed out that there were other historic sites, such as Clumber Park, in Nottinghamshire, where the main house had been destroyed, leaving only outbuildings as a reminder of greater days. Whereas there might be a 'superficial attraction' in returning the Sussex Down to its natural state, the stonework and architectural detail of the exterior constituted a monument, which would arguably be a vandalistic act to destroy. Moreover, in the light of the providential rescue of the contents, demolition would be 'unwise' and irresponsible'. While taking account of the strong feeling expressed that the soul of Uppark had been destroyed, the memorandum argued that to preserve the house as a ruin would forfeit the beauty and historic traditions that still resided within its walls. Finally, it stated that the survival of most of the contents and the insurance position favoured restoration and hoped that the Committee would feel able to decide upon this course.

On 4 October 1989 the National Trust's Executive Committee, having fully considered the options, decided to restore Uppark to its appearance of 'the day before the fire'. This decision, supported by the majority of committee members with only two voting against it, was

based on practicalities rather than abstract philosophical concepts. In the first place, the building was far from being a write-off; the shell, substantial parts of the ground floor rooms (about 70 per cent of the original fabric, including 90 per cent of metalwork and 65 per cent of the textiles) and all the basement remained. Thanks to the corset of scaffolding which surrounded the building (for the benefit of the roof workers) the outer walls were still stable. Uppark is a grade 1 listed building and English Heritage would simply not have consented to its total demolition. Retention as a ruin was not practical. The best way to preserve a shell, especially one built of brick and lime mortar in England (where it rains) is to protect it with a roof so that only the exterior walls get wet. To have created a new interior within the preserved shell would have involved the destruction of the substantial parts of the surviving part of the ground floor interior and would have provided an anachronistic setting for the collection. Again, the grant of Listed Building Consent would not have been forthcoming from English Heritage.

Second, the building was comprehensively insured for total reinstatement by a syndicate led by Sun Alliance. The insurance money could only be used for the rebuilding and repair of Uppark and not for any other purpose. Third, 95 per cent of the contents of the state rooms - pictures, furniture, ceramics, carpets, books, and so forth – had been rescued during the fire and could be put back in their original positions. The National Trust, a champion of the historically authentic, non-museum display of works of art, considered it important that the contents, which had been designed or purchased specifically for the house by two generations of discerning Georgian collectors, should be seen again in their natural surroundings. Partial restoration of the interior would have greatly reduced its quality as a setting for the eighteenth century collection. Each part of Uppark contributed to a greater whole. Wilfully to have omitted the destroyed parts of the original architecture on doctrinaire philosophical grounds would have turned the house into a didactic archaeological display. What would have been gained, for instance, by giving the Saloon a plain ceiling or leaving the north wall of the dining room as bare brickwork, when the rest of the rooms and their furniture, pictures and other fixtures and fittings had largely survived or were capable of repair? Finally. Uppark was well documented, with a detailed photographic record of the main rooms, as well as thousands of fragments retrieved after the fire, furnishing evidence for their full reinstatement. As we have seen, the rescue, sieving and recording of nearly 4000 dustbins had provided a basic catalogue of all the salvaged material, from primary floor joists to small nails. In October 1989 the National Trust had also commissioned a complete photogrammetric survey of the surviving structure. As a result of this, there were very few details of the building which were not known; the evidence was available for an absolutely accurate reconstruction of Uppark, incorporating everything that had survived the fire.

Above all, the National Trust considered it vital that Uppark

should have a continued life. The fire had been a major disaster but it need not be terminal. The Trust took heart from the Latin motto on a Victorian Fetherstonhaugh hatchment: *Non Omnis Moriar* (I shall not wholly die). Much more of the house had survived than had originally been thought. The main rooms were capable of skillful repair and this would not, in the Trust's view, be pastiche. If philosophical quibbles were put aside and common sense allowed to prevail, all the problems presented by reinstatement could be resolved.

The brief prepared by the National Trust for the architect embodied these two key principles; that the house was to be rebuilt to match its appearance of the day before the fire and hat the reconstruction should incorporate conserved remnants wherever possible, but subject to strict commercial scrutiny. The latter was a requirement of the Trust's insurers, who insisted on the most economical approach. Their loss adjusters were adamant that original components should only be reinstated where it could be shown that it it was no more expensive to do so than to make a replacement of equivalent quality. In the event it proved consistently cheaper to reuse old work wherever practicable rather than to copy, even allowing for the cost of initial repair.

There still remained, however, much to settle. If the house was to be reinstated to its condition on the day before the fire, did this mean putting back out-of-date cast-iron radiators? The Trust's response was that the general principal applied to the architecture and decoration but that all services would be modernised and the most advanced heating systems, humidity control, fire detection and security technology would be discreetly introduced, just as they had been in other National Trust houses as part of the major overhaul of the fabric; for instance, at Waddeston Manor, in Buckinghamshire, or Ham House, in Surrey, where the whole of the domestic services had just been renewed.

Debate continued about the details of restoration in each room. The SPAB and architectural historians, such as Dan Cruikshank of the Georgian Society, urged that all the salvaged fragments should be incorporated and not just used as models to copy. Where substantial amounts of original fabric remained in particular rooms, careful repair and 'judicious replacement of lacunae' were essential in order to retain the integrity of the whole. Once it had become clear how much had escaped the conflagration, the only real difference of opinion remaining between SPAB and the National Trust was the scale of the 'lacunae' to be replaced. The National Trust felt that the main staircase, which had been almost destroyed in the fire, should be reinstated to its original design so as to preserve the unity and sequence of the ground floor rooms. The SPAB still considered that the destruction here provided an opportunity fo a 'really good and inventive architect' to show what could be done. 'In the case of the stair well, the SPAB holds the view that the resulting void must be filled by new design. To achieve this satisfactorily the

architect must exercise aesthetic judgement within an overall philosophical framework…we respect the craftsmanship of the past by adding the best of our day.' John Bonython, an architect and a georgian enthusiast had no truck with that, and in a letter to Country house in 1989 retorted that 'the only staircase design that can make sense at Uppark is the original one.'

This was the line taken by the Trust, given that it was the consistent appearance of the sequence of ground floor rooms that counted most. The replacement of the destroyed or damaged elements of the oak staircase and of the decorative plaster ceilings was not that different from the restoration of holes in a large canvas, and ensured that the total *mis-en-scene* could still be read as a 'visual' entity. Angus Stirling expressed the spirit behind the restoration when he announced the Trust's decision to rebuild: 'Far more of Uppark and its contents survive than have been lost
….It would be fainthearted not to face up to the challenge of what will be the greatest single building conservation project the Trust has ever undertaken.'

Marcus Binney, the President of SAVE Britain's Heritage, summed up the views of most of those professionally involved in the care of historic buildings and their collections in an article, provovatively entitled ' Purists cheated by the Pheonix,' in The Times of 8 October 1989: 'The Trust has decided rightly and has won the gratitude of all who cherish Britain's architectural heritage.' He wrote enthusiastically about what had survived:

Uppark's three main facades, commanding a matchless view across the South Downs, are largely intact except for the pediment. Brickwork and stonework are miraculously unscorched. Much of the 18th century window glass survived.

Three weeks after the fire you can walk into the great saloon on the south front and stand on the beautifully bleached oak floor. The two magnificent marble chimneypieces survive in pristine condition at either end. Carved and gilded doorcases are virtually intact – so are the plaster wall panels. Humphry Repton's white and gold en-suite bookcases are largely undamaged. Only the rich coved ceiling has completely gone.

Martin rury, the Trust's historic buildings secretary, points out how Nathaniel Dance's great portraits of George 111 and Queen Charlotte can go straight back to their original gilt plaster frames over the chimneypieces…Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh over the central door and the Batonis, Zuccarellis and Giordanos around the rest of the walls.

The saving of the contents of the main rooms speaks wonders for the National trust's staff and volunteers – and the cool professionalism of the firemen…#

He was positive about the future:

A really careful reconstruction such as the Trust will undertake at Uppark sets new standards for understanding every aspect of a

building's construction, fitting out, decoration and furnishing. Like it or not, historic buildings ae being repaired and done up all the time. What we need are the highest standards of craftsmanship. Uppark gives the Trust the opportunity – and the challenge – to show the very best that can be done.

Faced with disaster, we must not simply give up. The beauty of the past will survive only if we show equal determination that it shall not disappear before the ravages of all kinds – of the elements, of decay, of pressure from development.

None the less, the National Trust had set itself an enormous task. In the end its decision would be judged by the results. Would its faith in repair be rewarded? Would it really be possible to reassemble and incorporate all the salvaged fragments? Whereas a large pool of skilled craftsmen and conservators could be drawn upon, few had ever worked together on a project of such size. Over 250 craftsmen would be needed. Like all creative people, they did not necessarily consider that repair required as much or more skill than new work. Moreover, many of the techniques, for example free hand modelling in lime plaster, had been in abeyance in Britain for a century and a half and needed to be rediscovered. Even if the house could be authentically restored, were the purists right? Would Uppark end up as a lifeless facsimile, or worse, a misguided fake or reproduction antique? The answer to these questions lay five years ahead, and the Trust, despite its misgivings, was determined to make the attempt.