

Uppark House

The Decision to Restore

The National Trust decided to restore Uppark to its appearance of 'the day before the fire'. This decision was based on practicalities.

1. The outer walls, most 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. The scaffolding that surrounded the building for the benefit of the roof workers ensured that the outer walls were still stable.
2. Uppark is a grade 1 listed building and English Heritage would simply not have consented to its total demolition.
3. 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. The grant of Listed Building Consent would not have been forthcoming from English Heritage.
4. The building was comprehensively insured for total reinstatement. The insurance money could only be used for the rebuilding and repair of Uppark and not for any other purpose.
5. 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. 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. 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 would have turned the house into a museum 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?
6. 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. 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. The National Trust had also commissioned a complete photogrammetric survey of the surviving structure. As a result of this, the evidence was available for an absolutely accurate reconstruction of Uppark, incorporating everything that had survived the fire.

The architect for the National Trust was instructed that the house was to be rebuilt to match its appearance of the day before the fire and that 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 insisted that original components should only be reinstated where it could be shown that 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.

The Trust's decided that this 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.