

CONFERENCE, 2006 Valletta, Malta

Managing the Past for the Future. Sustaining Historic House Museums in the 21st Century

Synopses of papers, based on notes by Linda Young and Peter Keller

AUSTRALIA - "Managing digital collections for historic house museums"
Jesmond Calleja, Senior Registrar, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Digital collections (images of sites, collection material, digitised archives and other records, research and educational products) are an important resource of intellectual property for historic house museums. While they can be made accessible on the internet, it is important for house museum to guard the copyright of these resources, for legal, ethical and profitable reasons. The creators of digital or digitised material own copyright over it for a certain number of years, or they may transfer copyright to the museum or a third party; the copyright status of each item must be determined to act correctly.

AUSTRALIA - "House Museology: Houses as museums in the age of heritage"
Linda Young, Senior Lecturer, Deakin University, Melbourne

Around the world, individual houses have been musealized for a range of purposes since the 1830s; collections of houses since the 1890s; and complex historic sites (often including houses) since the 1960s. In this history, the tension between the preservation of elite culture houses and more humble specimens generates on-going changes in the range of house museum stock. All these genres have established a specialised house museology, framed by disciplinary perspectives such as decorative arts, social history, and archaeology, which have produced vigorous techniques, such as managing the integrity of intact collections, enabling aesthetic experience in the historic environment and reinstating traditional housekeeping.

CZECH REPUBLIC - "Nové Hrad: the Restitution Cavalry in Bohemia after the Velvet Revolution"
Daniela Karsova, Senior Curator, Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Prague

Nové Hrad is a 1750s rococo palace in Bohemia, nationalised in 1948; thereafter it deteriorated due to many inappropriate uses. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 it was returned to its original family of owners, who sold the contents and then the building. It was acquired by new owners in 1997, who began a loving and ambitious program of restoration, including opening a museum of furniture in one wing. This has been supported by the state Museum of Decorative Arts and by private collectors.

GREECE - "Creating quality visitor experiences"
Dorothea Athanasiou-Zuhr and Odysseas Sekellaridis, University of the Aegean

Taking the case study of Palazzo Giustiniani on the island of Chios, this paper surveys the methodology of developing an effective tourism program. The author advocates comprehensive analysis of visitors by modern market research techniques in order to develop tourism products that produce a good cultural heritage consumption mix.

MALTA - "The rescue of a medieval palace"
Maurice de Giorgio, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti

The Palazzo Falson, Mdina, is a 13th century palazzo, variously owned by the Falson family, the Grand Master of the Order of St John, and from 1927, by Captain Gollcher (1889-1962). He was a wealthy, cultivated collector, who bequeathed Palazzo Falson to the Order, which established a foundation to manage it; the foundation willingly transferred it to the Patrimonju, which undertook a big conservation project in the early 2000s. The project conserved not only the house but also a large collection of 3000+ items: artworks, furniture, decorative arts, oriental carpets. Modern museum and public services have also been installed. The conference delegates inspected the Palazzo on a subsequent study visit.

MALTA - "The Grand Master's Palace"
Theresa Vella, Curator, National Museum of Fine Arts

The Palace of the Grand Master of the Order of the Knights of St John is a historic house, a living museum, and a national emblem of Malta. Built in the 1560s, it was an opulent residence for the Grand Master, with fine reception rooms on the piano nobile. The Order's Armoury was kept on the ground floor. The Palace was converted in the early 19th century for use as the seat of British government in Malta, and the home of the Governor. In 1974, when Malta became a republic, the Palace became the seat of Parliament and the President's office. Heritage Malta is now responsible for managing the Grand Master's Palace. The current program is to further research the provenance of the collections, and to improve public interpretation of the Palace.

MALTA - "Capacity building and professional development in the heritage sector"
Nadia Theuma, Senior Lecturer, University of Malta

The view of the heritage professional has changed from the notion of a white collar archaeologist who resents tourists to people who are responsible for the management and interpretation of tangible and intangible heritage. Their mission now is to enable conservation, access, education, relevance, recreation and quality while meeting financial requirements and satisfying community interests. This requires professional development and capacity building. Professional development is personally-initiated, on-going formal or informal education, by which professionals keep in touch with developments in the field. Capacity building is harnessing skills for efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

MALTA - "Working with the fabric of Casa Bernard"
Paul Camilleri, architect

The author gave a case study of the adaptive reuse of a historic house in Rabat, Casa Bernard, listed, name from family who lived in it 18thC-1936; in centre of town, on Roman foundations, with medieval fabric at street level, Renaissance and Mannerist cloister, a baroque faïçade and piano nobile.

MALTA - "Creating a Historic Houses Association in Malta"
Samantha Fabry and Malcolm Borg, Heritagenterprise

There are about 100 potential house museums in Malta, mainly privately owned, and there is increasing interest in developing this resource for sharing heritage and extending tourism. The authors are working on the structure of a network of owners and supporters, along the lines of the UK Historic Houses Association, and informed by the range of international heritage standards contained in charters.

NETHERLANDS - "Ethics and principles in historic house management"
Eloy Koldewij, Coordinator, National Service for Archaeology, Cultural Landscapes and Built Heritage, and Stephan Hartog, Consultant, Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage

The authors were commissioned by their respective agencies to investigate and make recommendations about the preservation and management of the movable elements of heritage sites, especially house (and other building) interiors. This follows from the 1998 Council of Europe recommendation to promote integrated management of movable and immovable heritage - about which very little had been done. Koldewij and Hartog developed a report on what they call 'ensembles' of significant movable heritage, focusing specially on historic interiors. The paper discusses a methodology to understand types of ensembles: historical unity; composition, or arrangement; integrated design; and provenance. They review legal and incentivating means to protect such ensembles. It is to be hoped that the Netherlands government will adopt the report.

PORTUGAL - "House museums for the 21st century: Vila do Conde's Jos&egu; Régio house-museum"
Antonio Ponte, Curator, Camara Municipi de Vila do Conde

José Régio (1901-69) is a famous Portuguese author who was born and died in Vila do Conde. The museum

occupies the house of his retirement, which was acquired by the local Council after his death. It is next door to the house of his birth, which it is hoped can be acquired. Next to that is a new Documentation Centre, recently completed with EU funding. The author proposes that a house-museum should focus on the personality of its inhabitant; valorise its subject; inspire the public; and build a story which creates an homage.

ROMANIA - "Protecting and preserving a cultural legacy: the sustainable museum"

Mihaela Popescu, Analyst, Institute for Cultural Memory, Bucharest

60% of the movable cultural heritage of Romania comprises religious material. The author reports on the process of making an inventory of this material, which requires cooperation between owners, heritage agencies and funders. There are 138 house museums in Romania; 37 of them are in listed buildings.

SCOTLAND - "Historic house museums: future challenges"

Neil Grieve, Senior Lecturer, University of Dundee

A large number of historic houses become museums in order to preserve them. Some merit this extreme form of preservation; others that deserve museum status don't make it. Two case studies in Dundee illustrate the idea. A sea captain's 1830s house, with a large timber-framed warehouse behind, was not listed or otherwise identified as heritage, but following study by the author and his students, was shown to be of considerable significance. With a package of funding from different sources, the house and warehouse were successfully adapted for re-use.

The second case study comprised a complex of three buildings around a narrow court, plus two more adjacent buildings. They were found to date from 1560, early 1600s, 1780s, 1820 and 1860, and included use as a merchant's house, two tenement houses, a billiard hall and a Victorian emporium - a fine range of Dundee history represented in buildings. This site is to become a youth hostel, but probably deserves a higher degree of preservation.

SWEDEN - "Hallwyl Museum and free admission reform"

Ingallil Jansson, Senior Curator, Hallwylska Museet, Stockholm

Hallwyl Museum is the house of Wilhelmina von Hallwyl née Kempe (1844-1920), a wealthy collector. (She also left a castle museum in Lenzburg, Switzerland). The house was built in 1898; it was left to the nation and opened in 1938. It represents the lifestyle of the upper middle class in the early 20th century, for not only does the house display the Hallwyl collections of famous artworks and decorative arts, but it also contains all the domestic apparatus of life, from bed linen and underclothes to kitchen equipment and cleaning materials. Hallwyl Museum is owned by the state, and therefore was subject to the Swedish government's decision to introduce free admission to museums in 2005. Visitors increased by 246%; from 55,000 in 2001 to 163,000 in 2005; the high numbers appear set to continue throughout 2006. This wonderful growth has put pressure on the services and fabric of the museum. However, it may not continue, due to the election of a new government some months ago, which has indicated that it will abolish free admission to state museums.