

The Varying Fates of Four of Berlin's Iconic Buildings

Malcolm Millais – February 2018

This short paper describes, with respect to demolition, restoration and rebuilding, four of Berlin's iconic buildings:

- 1 – Berliner Schloss (Humboldt Forum)
- 2 – Berlin Dom (Cathedral)
- 3 – Neues Museum
- 4 – Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church)

Note: All the text, except for my comments, are extracts copy-pasted from texts in the links.

1 - Berliner Schloss

The **Berlin Palace** ([German](#): *Berliner Schloss* or *Stadtschloss*) is a building in the centre of [Berlin](#), located on the [Museum Island](#) at [Schlossplatz](#), opposite the [Lustgarten](#) park. It was a royal and imperial palace and served as the winter residence of the [Electors of Brandenburg](#), the [Kings of Prussia](#) and the [German Emperors](#).

In 1699 the [Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg](#) (who took the title [King in Prussia](#) in 1701, becoming Frederick I), appointed the architect [Andreas Schlüter](#) to execute a "second plan" in the Italian manner. Schlüter's first design probably dates from 1702; he planned to rebuild the palace in the Protestant [Baroque](#) style. In 1706, Schlüter was replaced by [Johann Friedrich Eosander von Göthe](#), who designed the western extension of the palace, doubling its size. In all essentials, Schlüter's balanced, rhythmic composition of the façades was retained, but Göthe moved the main entrance to the new west wing.

[Frederick William I](#), who became king in 1713, dismissed most of the craftsmen working on the Stadtschloss. As a result, Göthe's plan was only partly carried out. Nevertheless, the exterior of the palace had come close to its final form by the mid-18th century. The final stage was the erection of the dome in 1845, during the reign of [Frederick William IV](#).



During [World War II](#), the Stadtschloss was twice [struck by Allied bombs](#): on 3 February and 24 February 1945. On the latter occasion, when the air defence and fire-fighting systems of Berlin had been destroyed, the building was struck by incendiaries, lost its roof and was largely burnt out.



The leadership of the German Democratic Republic wanted to root out Prussian history for ideological reasons. It was because of this that the Berlin Palace was blown up.

The **Palace of the Republic** ([German](#): *Palast der Republik*) in [Berlin](#) was constructed between 1973 and 1976 on the site of the former [Berliner Stadtschloss](#) (City Palace).



Intended as a palace for the people, it housed theatres, art galleries, and cafés; and while its architectural style was a clear repudiation of its predecessor's elitism, it became the stage for all the great celebrations and banquets of the Communist elite.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the palace had to be closed owing to the 5,000 tons of toxic asbestos used in its construction. The removal of this asbestos between 1997 and 2002 required the complete destruction of all interiors and special fittings, and prompted fierce debates concerning the future of the building. Following these debates, in 2008 the City of Berlin and the German government decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic and replace it with a reconstruction of the original palace, which would consist of the three baroque façades facing north, west, and south, as well as a contemporary design, to replace the Renaissance front to the east, for which insufficient visual and documentary evidence survives.



The illustration below shows the 'contemporary' design that replaces the Renaissance front to the east.



MM Comments:

The Berlin Schloss ended up in Communist East Germany, so the possibly repairable ruins were demolished for ideological reasons. The demolition of the replacement Palace of the Republic was contentious, but is obviously to be welcomed on aesthetic grounds. Rebuilding the original building with three facsimile elevations does not make obvious sense, especially as the fourth elevation is a masterpiece of modernist banality.

The best solution would have been to build a new building for the required accommodation, but designed to be aesthetically compatible with other buildings nearby. This all really highlights the current paucity of architectural practice.

Links:

Berlin Palace :

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Palace

War damage 1945 and demolition 1950 :

<https://berliner-schloss.de/en/palace-history/war-destruction-and-demolition/>

Palace of the Republic, Berlin

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_the_Republic,_Berlin

What's the point of rebuilding Germany's palaces?

<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/whats-the-point-of-rebuilding-germanys-palaces/>

Humboldt Forum

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humboldt_Forum

2 – Berlin Dom (cathedral)

On 6 September 1750, a baroque Calvinist *Supreme Parish Church* was inaugurated, built by Johann Boumann *the Elder* in 1747–1750.



[Karl Friedrich Schinkel](#) remodelled the interior, and in 1820–1822 the exterior of Boumann's church in the [neoclassicist style](#)



After dismantling the movable interior (altar, paintings, sarcophagi), Boumann's building was demolished in 1893 and Julius and Otto Raschdorff, father and son, built the present *Supreme Parish and Cathedral Church* in exuberant forms of high [Neo-Renaissance](#) style.



The Berlin Dom (Cathedral) was the scene of Nazi parades. The photo below shows a Nazi parade through the Lustgarten in front of the Dom in 1933.



The most prominent damage to the Cathedral caused by an air raid in 1940 was the loss of the altar windows. In 1944, the impact of a liquid incendiary bomb struck the foot of the dome lantern. Because access to this location was so difficult, the fire could not be extinguished, and the entire dome construction was destroyed. Parts of the burning dome crashed into the church and through the floor, causing the fire to spread all the way into the crypt below.



In 1975, reconstruction started, simplifying the building's original design and **demolishing the northern wing, the 'Denkmalskirche' - Memorial Church**. Compared by some to the Medici Chapel, it had survived the war completely intact but was demolished for ideological reasons by the communist government due to it being a **hall of honour for the Hohenzollern dynasty**. This resulted in scaffolding for restoration appearing on the church while detonation charges were applied to its undamaged rear. The government also demanded the removal of as many crosses as possible. The demolition and redesign cost 800,000 marks, while the restoration (done on the cheap) cost just 50,000 marks. The Berlin Cathedral Building Society now seeks to rebuild the Denkmalskirche.

In 1980, the [baptistery](#) and wedding church was reopened for services. The restoration of the nave was begun in 1984. On 6 June 1993, the nave was reinaugurated in an event attended by [Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl](#) and televised nationwide in Germany. There has been discussion to restore the dome and surrounding cupolas to their original appearance, but this has not occurred due to lack of funds.



MM Comments:

Built in just a few years, the current building was finished in 1905 and is a main work of [Historicist architecture](#) of the "Kaiserzeit". [Kaiserzeit](#) meaning the Imperial period, the new cathedral was strongly identified with the Kaisers. As the cathedral ruins ended up in Communist atheist East Germany, clearly its presence caused some ideological problems, which is why reconstruction, wholly financed by West Germany, only started in 1975. Extraordinarily the undamaged northern wing was demolished due to its links with the Imperial family.

Cultural/historical reasons seem strong enough to justify the cathedral's repair and reconstruction, and the demolition of northern wing seems wanton, but given the ideological background, perhaps understandable. Anyway, it's wonderful to visit in detail.

Links:

Berlin Cathedral

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Cathedral

Sunshine and swastikas: Rare colour pictures of 1930s Berlin show carefree life in Hitler's capital before war that reduced it to rubble

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2240351/Sunshine-swastikas-Rare-colour-pictures-1930s-Berlin-carefree-life-Hitler-s-capital-war-reduced-rubble.html#ixzz581hG54Bc>

Third Reich in ruins

<http://www.thirdreichruins.com/berlin.htm>

Berliner Dom - Destruction

<http://www.berlinerdom.de/content/view/82/124/lang,en/>

Berliner Dom - Reconstruction

<http://www.berlinerdom.de/content/view/83/125/lang,en/>

3 – Neues Museum

Construction of the Neues Museum began on 19 June 1841, under the auspices of a committee established by [Frederick William IV](#), which included the curator of the Royal Museums, Ignaz von Olfers, as well as Friedrich August Stüler. On 6 April 1843 when the ceremony of laying the cornerstone took place, the foundations, including the [cellars](#), were already built. Construction of the walls was completed at the end of 1843, so that by 1844, the [cornice](#) and roof of the museum were completed. In 1845, iron constructions, the construction of flat [vaulted](#) ceilings and brick-lining of the connecting gallery to the Altes Museum were completed. The museum was finally opened in 1855 to the public, although work on parts of the interior decoration, in particular the wall frescos in the stairway, continued until 1866.



In the bombardments on 23 November 1943, the central stairway and its frescos were burned, along with other great treasures of human history. In February 1945, [Allied](#) bombs destroyed the northwest wing as well as the connection to the Altes Museum and damaged the southwest wing as well as the south-east façade ([risalit](#)).



The museum was closed at the beginning of the war in 1939, when its artefacts were taken into storage. Situated in the former East Germany, it was left in its war-torn state due to lack of funds.

In the post-war period, the ruin of the Neues Museum in the Soviet occupied part of the city was left decaying for a long period of time. Other museums of the Museum Island used the least damaged areas of the building for storage. Reconstruction work was started in 1986 by the [East German](#) government, but it was halted after the [fall of the Berlin Wall](#) and [German reunification](#). In the process historical parts of the building were lost. For instance, the last remnants of the Egyptian courtyard were eliminated.

Following decades of post-war ruin, its restoration was planned and carried out by prominent London architect David Chipperfield and his advisor Julian Harap, who have recreated it as a mixture of old and modern.

MM Note: the following are slightly disjointed copy paste comments, which aim to give a flavour of reactions to the restoration of the museum.

After the consolidation of the foundations and walls, the Neues building was reconstructed. This work was done within the framework of the Masterplan for Berlin's Museum Island, with a cost of approximately €295 million for the Neues Museum. The northwest wing and the south-east façade, which were completely destroyed in the war, have been reconstructed according to Chipperfield's plan, in a manner close to their original layout in the museum building.

In March 2009, the museum briefly reopened to the public with its empty building; artifacts had not been installed at that time. On October 16, 2009, the museum officially reopened. At the reopening ceremony, the [Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel](#) described Chipperfield's work as "impressive and extraordinary" and the museum as "one of the most important museum buildings in European cultural history".

However, many people in Berlin would have preferred it if the museum had gone back to the way it originally looked when it opened on the city's Museum Island in the mid-19th century. **These conflicting views have led to a fierce cultural battle that shows no sign of easing, even though the museum renovation has already been completed. A group called the Society of Ancient Berlin requested [UNESCO](#) in 2008 to put the Museum Island on the list of [World Heritage Sites](#) that are at danger of losing their status, seeing Chipperfield's architectural concept involving complete reconstructions as a form of cultural destruction.**

The neoclassical architecture, recognized as a UNESCO world heritage site, **has been lent a modernist touch by British architect David Chipperfield.** His painstaking €233-million (\$347 million) **revamp has sparked controversy by leaving some of the historic decay untouched.** White modern stairways sweep past old bricks pocked by bullets in World War II, original columns still have fire damage and neo-classical mosaics and pseudo-Egyptian murals still seem to flake away on ceilings and walls.

A so-called "closed competition" followed, with only a handful of architectural firms contacted for their expert opinion. Among these experts was David Chipperfield from London, who was officially appointed to take over the project in 1997.

Chipperfield had already gained a reputation in Germany for his design of the Museum of Modern Literature in Marbach and the Riverside Hotel in Hamburg. The former president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Klaus Dieter Lehmann, sees Chipperfield's Neues Museum design as a perfect blend of old and new. "I find it spectacular," said Lehmann. "What was done here incorporates old aspects, but shows them in a contemporary form." Too much change for some.

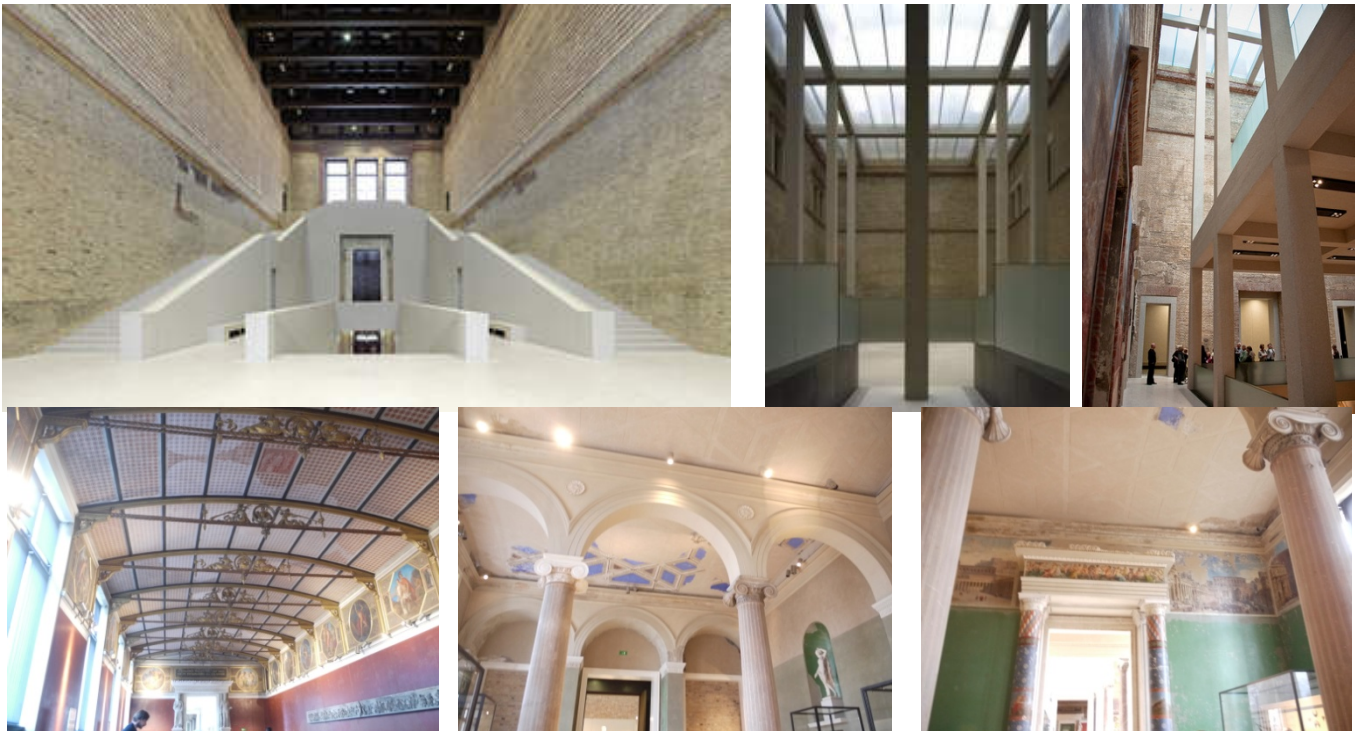
All this was a slap in the face for traditionalists, who organized a petition in 2007 entitled "Save the Museum Island." But their efforts failed, as they could only gather 6,000 of the 20,000 necessary signatures. The conflict then became more severe when members of the Society of Ancient Berlin accused Chipperfield of wanting to destroy the Museum Island for the second time. They saw his architectural concept as a form of cultural destruction, likening it to the 1945 bombing of the Island. Chipperfield thinks that architecture should tell a story.

Chipperfield, however, has taken all this criticism in his stride. For him, architecture is a method of storytelling, and making new versions of something that once existed is against his principles. Instead, he says he wants to give history a chance to express itself by showing the traces of World War II within a new, modern context "This is a complete reconstruction, and we took the original building very much into account," said Chipperfield. "It was important for us to not destroy any of the remaining original fragments."

The Society of Ancient Berlin does not share this opinion and plans to continue its campaign. It has written to the German Committee of Petitions, and in December 2008 it asked UNESCO to put the Museum Island on the list of World Heritage sites that are at risk of losing their title.

The group is also against the construction of a new central reception building on the Museum Island, which was also designed by Chipperfield. According to Gerhard Hoya from the Society of Ancient Berlin, Chipperfield "doesn't have the sensitivity that he claims to have."

For the architect, it is important that the new version of the Neues Museum does not gloss over the blows it suffered in World War II, while still showing aspects of its former beauty. But it seems that this concept will never please the traditionalists



MM Comments:

As the various comments copy-pasted above note the renovation of the Neuse Museum is contentious, and a visit makes this glaringly obvious. The initial impression, reinforced by a prolonged stay, is one of complete incoherence; incoherence in planning, incoherence in aesthetic criteria and incoherence in conservation.

The obvious question is what is the renovation trying to achieve? Apparently, Chipperfield thinks that architecture should tell a story, but this is a somewhat farfetched and precious approach that can hardly make sense with most buildings, if any. Presumably in pursuit of this odd concept the damaged and neglected original rich decorative scheme, including wall murals and painted ceilings, are preserved 'as found'. This provides little aesthetic pleasure and is merely a grim reminder of the lack of care this building endured for decades.

Chipperfield's interventions seem to reinforce the view that he "doesn't have the sensitivity that he claims to have." The interventions are predominately in a creamy fair-faced concrete, a colour and material that does not resonate with the original building. It is interesting to compare original roof-supporting roof structures with the new.



It is also interesting to compare the original 'grand' staircase with Chipperfield's version to observe the architect's sensitivity' – original on the left, Chipperfield on the right.



Links:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neues_Museum

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/nefertiti-gets-a-new-palace-revamped-neues-museum-finally-opens-in-berlin-a-655577.html>

<http://www.dw.com/en/reconstruction-of-berlins-neues-museum-vexes-traditionalists/a-4796877>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/mar/16/neues-museum-berlin>

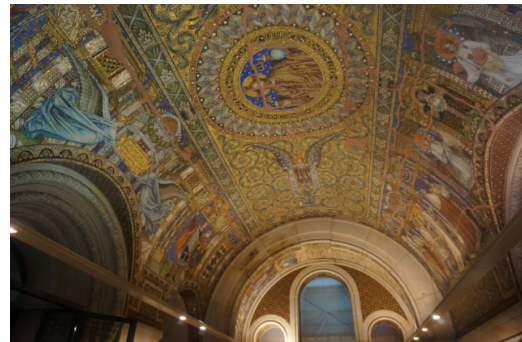
<https://www.designboom.com/architecture/david-chipperfield-architects-neues-museum-berlin-opens/>

<https://www.google.pt/search?tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=WpGRWvOhAeTwgAbUnoaoAO&q=Museum+of+Modern+Literature+in+Marbach&oq=Muse>

4 - Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedachtnis-Kirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church)

The construction of the church was part of a Protestant church-building programme initiated by [Kaiser Wilhelm II](#) and his consort [Augusta Victoria](#) to counter the German [labour movement](#) and [socialist](#) movement by a return to traditional religious values. Wilhelm II decided to name the church in honor of his grandfather [Kaiser Wilhelm I](#). The competition for the design was won by [Franz Schwechten](#), member of the [Bauakademie](#) who had distinguished himself with the design of the [Anhalter Bahnhof](#). Schwechten, a native [Rhineland](#)er, planned for a large church to be built in a [Neo-Romanesque](#) style.

The Kaiser Wilhelm II commissioned the construction of a church that bear the name of his grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm I. The first stone was laid on March 22, 1891, which was the birthday of Wilhelm I. The design competition was won by Franz Schwechten whose project raised a Neo-Romanesque church, including 2,740 square meters of wall tiles. Original needle rising 113 meters and the main hall could accommodate over 2,000 people seated. The church was consecrated on September 1, 1895, when he still had not finished the lobby.



In [World War II](#), on the night of 23 November 1943, the church was extensively damaged [in an air raid](#). **Yet it was by no means beyond repair.** A remnant of the spire and much of the entrance hall survived intact, as did the altar and the baptistry.

Like most historic treasures of [Germany](#), the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was bombed during the war, but at the end of the war it was less damaged than many other churches suffered the same fate. **It was badly damaged, but at that time it could be repaired.** Part of its external structure was intact.



However, in an act that can only be described as "**cultural vandalism**" occupation forces after the war destroyed most of the church was left standing, leaving only a fragment of the main portal decapitated and needle. Allied directives issued in 1945, as part of the "re-education" process, demanded the destruction all German monuments and museums deemed "patriotic, nationalistic or idealizing German culture". MM note: as the church was in the American sector one could assume the cultural vandalism was carried out by the Americans.

The spire of the church, which was built in 1895 by Kaiser Wilhelm II to honor his grandfather, Kaiser Wilhelm I, is now nicknamed "Hollow Tooth" by locals and was preserved for posterity. It has remained a famous and poignant

reminder of the horrors of war, as well as being a symbol of West Berlin's determination and extraordinary post-war recovery, during the time when it was surrounded by communist East Germany.

The new church was designed by Eiermann and consists of four buildings grouped around the remaining ruins of the old church. The initial design included the demolition of the spire of the old church but following pressure from the public, it was decided to incorporate it into the new design. The four buildings comprise, on the west of the ruins, the new church with a foyer to its west, and to the east of the ruins, a tower with a chapel to its northeast. The plan of the church is octagonal while the plan of the tower is hexagonal. These components are sited on a plateau measuring 100 metres long and 40 metres wide. The new buildings are constructed of concrete, steel and glass.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid on 9 May 1959, its roofing ceremony was carried out on 16 December 1960, the new bells were consecrated on 19 July 1961, the new church was consecrated on 17 December 1961 and the foyer and chapel were completed in December 1963.

The walls of the church are made of a concrete honeycomb containing 21,292 stained glass inlays. The glass, designed by [Gabriel Loire](#), was inspired by the colours of the glass in [Chartres Cathedral](#). The predominant colour is blue, with small areas of ruby red, emerald green and yellow. The church is 35 metres in diameter and 20.5 metres high with a capacity of over 1,000. Because of the distinctive appearance of the new buildings, it is sometimes nicknamed "*Lippenstift und Puderdose*" (the [lipstick](#) and the [powder box](#)) by Berliners.



And on the other hand there is what we can call the new memorial, which is in the new church. This really is giving another feeling. First you have to go through an airlock, which is dark and then you are in the church. What is really impressive is the blue colour that comes from the glass. And opposite to the entrance, a figure of Christ is suspended above the altar. As it is an active church, the ambience is really quiet. But the atmosphere let me feel really uncomfortable. I had the feeling to float and to lose my bearings in this blue dark box dominated by this suspended icon.

MM Comments:

The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedachtnis-Kirche was built at the end of the 19th century when Germany was extremely powerful; the church being built to express Imperial German hubris. It was perhaps due to this that the occupation forces decided demolish most of the ruins - the cultural vandalism referred to above. Details of when and who made the decision and for what reason seem unavailable, though probably buried deep in some archive.

Unlike the other buildings described what is left of the ruins of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedachtnis-Kirche have been partially restored and function as a visitors centre.

The three new buildings that form the installations of the new church are an extreme example of the demands of the 1964 Venice Charter that additions to historic settings 'must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp' - here the 'contemporary stamp' is extreme. The new buildings follow all the hollow diktats of architectural modernism, in this case looking nothing like ecclesiastical buildings, using building forms that bear no relation to the existing ruin, with the interior of the church being a parody of a normal church lit by window of stained glass. It is little wonder that local have nicknamed the church the 'powder box' and the separate bell tower 'lipstick.' Such pejorative nicknames always indicate dissatisfaction of the general public.

Links:

Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaiser_Wilhelm_Memorial_Church

Rescuing Berlin's Most Famous World War II Ruin
<http://www.dw.com/en/rescuing-berlins-most-famous-world-war-ii-ruin/a-3570372>

Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church
<https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/building/kaiser-wilhelm-memorial-church/>

Destruction Of German Monuments~ Monumental Destruction
<http://www.exulanten.com/monuments.html>

U.S. ARMY INSTALLATIONS - BERLIN
https://www.usarmygermany.com/Sont.htm?https&&&www.usarmygermany.com/USAREUR_City_Berlin.htm

Opposing Feelings – Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church
<https://berlinperspectivesonarchitecture.com/2016/12/19/opposing-feelings-kaiser-wilhelm-memorial-church/>

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Summary

I came across these four buildings on a recent short holiday in Berlin. I was initially interested in the Berliner Schloss due to the idea of re-building it with facsimile façades, but after doing searches about it on the internet I realised similar searches for other buildings would also be interesting, so I ended up searching about the four buildings listed at the beginning of the article.

The four buildings have much in common. They were all constructed, in one way or another, to celebrate Germany's prowess; three were built in the 19th century and the other, the Berliner Schloss was started in the 18th century but only completed in the 19th; they were all bomb-damaged in WWII; all the damaged buildings were not demolished and were all repairable. After WWII all the damaged buildings suffered some form of neglect, or worse.

During WWII, Germany had proved to be a powerful and determined enemy; however, they had committed crimes against humanity on a scale hitherto unseen. Probably for this reason it is understandable that the victorious allies were less than interested in reinstating ruined buildings that represented, in one way or another, German might. This disinterest was compounded in the Soviet Sector by the imposition of a Communist police state whose ideology was unwilling to celebrate Germany's imperial past. For these reasons, the ruins of all four buildings were mistreated in various ways as noted above – it seems no one knew what to do with ruins.

As Germany gradually overcame the psychological and material effects of WWII, still not complete of course, and especially with the demise of the East German police state and reunification, these four buildings were given new roles, but only one seems to be successful, that is the Berlin Dom. That is because it has been, more or less, rebuilt as it was before bomb damage.

The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedachtnis-Kirche seems to have been made fun of. What was left of the ruins after allied 'cultural vandalism' has been patched up, but without even the spire being completed. Then, instead of adding new accommodation by means of sympathetic additions, incongruous and ugly architectural items have been dotted around the crippled vestiges of the original building.

As noted, the Berliner Schloss is now being re-built, after total destruction of the ruins, as a partially historical facsimile. As the building is yet to be completed, it's hard to tell if this apparently hare-brained scheme will succeed.

Visiting the now 'restored' Neues Museum colloquialisms like 'mish-mash', 'pig's ear' and 'dog's breakfast' come to mind. This just illustrates the incompatibility between normal building and what is known as modern architecture. The fact that the restoration has generated bitter controversy is unsurprising; as noted above **'These conflicting views have led to a fierce cultural battle that shows no sign of easing, even though the museum renovation has already been completed.'**

All this shows that there is yet to be agreed a sensible and mature approach to the restoration, and/or re-use of buildings that have some historical importance. This isn't because such an approach is yet to be formulated; it is clearly set out in Steven Semes seminal work 'The Future of the Past', a book that should be required reading for everyone involved in work on historical buildings, small or large.

