

GERMANY

Post-war Interior of St Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin at Risk of Being Irretrievably Lost

Two years after the erection of the Berlin Wall the rebuilding of the St Hedwig's Cathedral in East Berlin was completed with a modern interior. Hardly any other building in Germany reacted to the guilt and terror of the Nazi era by creating such inspiring architecture. Now, the only modern interior of a cathedral in Germany destroyed in the Second World War and major work by the architect Hans Schwippert is in need of repair. This exceptional interior space and thus also the readability of its multi-layered meanings are threatened to be lost forever if a remodelling is im-



Interior of the St Hedwig's Cathedral, 2015/16
(photo W. Bittner, Landesdenkmalamt Berlin)

plemented which the archdiocese of Berlin initiated in 2013–14 with an open realisation competition for the interior and the cathedral's surroundings.

Built between 1747 and 1773, St Hedwig is of significance similar to other ambitious church projects of the time in European capitals: St Paul's in London, Les Invalides and the Panthéon in Paris, or the Karlskirche in Vienna, all of them crowned by monumental domes. Prussia's King Frederic II had chosen this prominent construction site at the Forum Fridericianum and the type of an antique rotunda based on the model of the Pantheon in Rome, thus making the first Catholic parish church in Berlin after the Reformation a symbol of enlightened religious policy.

From 1884-87 the interior was altered by Max Hasak. After the establishment of the diocese of Berlin in 1930 the church was elevated to the rank of a cathedral and once again altered in 1930-32 by Clemens Holzmeister. In 1943 the cathedral was completely destroyed, except the outer walls. The re-erection of the main dome as a concrete construction was carried out from 1951 by architects and engineers Felix Hinssen, Herbert David, Herbert Ebs and Theodor Blümel, based on the model of St Stephan in Karlsruhe. Hans Schwippert, one of the protagonists of rebuilding in Germany, was in charge of the redesign of the interior between 1956 and 1963. With the building of the first German parliament in Bonn in 1948-49 (demolished in 1987) he had already created the first architectural symbol of the young Federal Republic.

The interior of the cathedral is characterised by a breathtaking building concept: radical utilisation of the centrally planned building and concentration on the vertical main axis by creating a double church with crypt. Through an opening in the centre of the building this crypt has an impact on the main church interior. Schwippert integrated the lower church into the upper church and created a ring of chapel-like spaces used for baptism, the commemoration of the diocese's martyrs killed during the Nazi terror, the burial of the bishops, for confession and as treasury. By taking up the shape of the round roof light the circle-shaped opening in the floor of the upper church not only corresponds to the steeper dome rebuilt after the war, thus creating spaciousness. It also allows access to the space of the crypt and powerful references to the spiritual fundament of the church.

The crypt open for the commemoration of the martyrs shows the visionary character of the created space. Since 1965 it has also become a funerary monument due to the tomb of Provost Bernhard Lichtenberg. In the cathedral he had prayed publicly for those persecuted by the Nazis. In October 1941 he was arrested and died on November 5, 1943 during his transport to Dachau concentration camp. In 1996 the cleric was beatified by Pope John Paul II, who had prayed at his tomb.

In the rotunda, everything is oriented towards the centrepiece of the interior: the liturgical centre near the opening to the lower church with the connecting altar stele, carrying above the main altar with cross and below a sacramental altar with tabernacle. Among the artists involved from East and West Germany were:



The interior seen from above (photo W. Bittner, Landesdenkmalamt Berlin)

apart from Hans Schwippert (Düsseldorf) the glass artist Anton Wendling (Aachen), the textile designer and Bauhaus weaver Margaretha Reichardt (Erfurt), the metal artist Fritz Kühn (East Berlin), the goldsmiths Fritz Schwerdt and Hubertus Förster (Aachen) as well as the painter, graphic artist and draughtsman Josef Hegenbarth (Dresden).

Deliberately quoting the Confessio of St Peter's in Rome was done to show the affiliation to the World Church. It is the only modern *confessio* in church history and moreover quite unique in the modern history of art. The spatial arrangement and the furnishings represent revolutionary dynamics and spiritual depth. In the combination of ancient spatial designs (crypt, double church, *confessio*, and dome on top of the circular building) and exceptional artistic implementation in material and form lies the great vividness and dignity of this interior space until today.

It was a particular venture to implement the impulses of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) in the anti-clerical German Democratic Republic. The cathedral's consistently modern interior in the divided city of Berlin bears witness to this venture. Archbishop Alfred Bengsch consecrated the main altar on November 1, 1963, i. e. one month before the decisions of the Council valid for the entire Catholic Church were published. If this interior now needs to be defended, it is not merely a matter of heritage conservation. Instead, this also concerns ecclesiological dimensions, because a self-concept of the Church is negotiated. This cathedral and its interior in former East Berlin as seat of a cross-border diocese at the time of the German partition symbolises the unity of Catholic Christians in East and West. Therefore, this monument is a combination of high architectural quality and theological and political relevance.

Consequently, the interior in its appearance of the early 1960s should be preserved and carefully restored or modernised, where

necessary. Through careful maintenance and repairs the cathedral has been preserved almost unaltered. Between 2005 and 2008 the outer shell of this monument of national relevance, an important post-war interpretation of plaster surfaces imitating natural stone, was cleaned and repaired. The interior deserves to be treated with the same care. Closing the central floor opening (as proposed in the prize-winning design of the architectural competition) would equal not only an extreme reorganisation of the church in a rather retrospective sense, but also the demolition of an outstanding monument carrying vanguard ideas and having a forward-looking impact even today.

Sabine Schulte

The Surroundings are an Integral Part of the Monument – The Garden of the Magnus-Haus in Berlin is to be Destroyed

In the 18th century, rich families in Berlin used to live in the very centre, in townhouses boarding the streets and with gardens to the rear. Few of them survived the enormous development of the city that began in the middle of the 19th century and the destructions of World War II. One of those very rare examples is the Magnus-Haus at the *Kupfergraben*. The builder was the Prussian King Frederic II, who in 1753 had the prestigious house built according



The rear front of the Magnus-Haus and the open space of the garden belonging to it



The Remise (depot-building) gives an idea of the scale of the garden

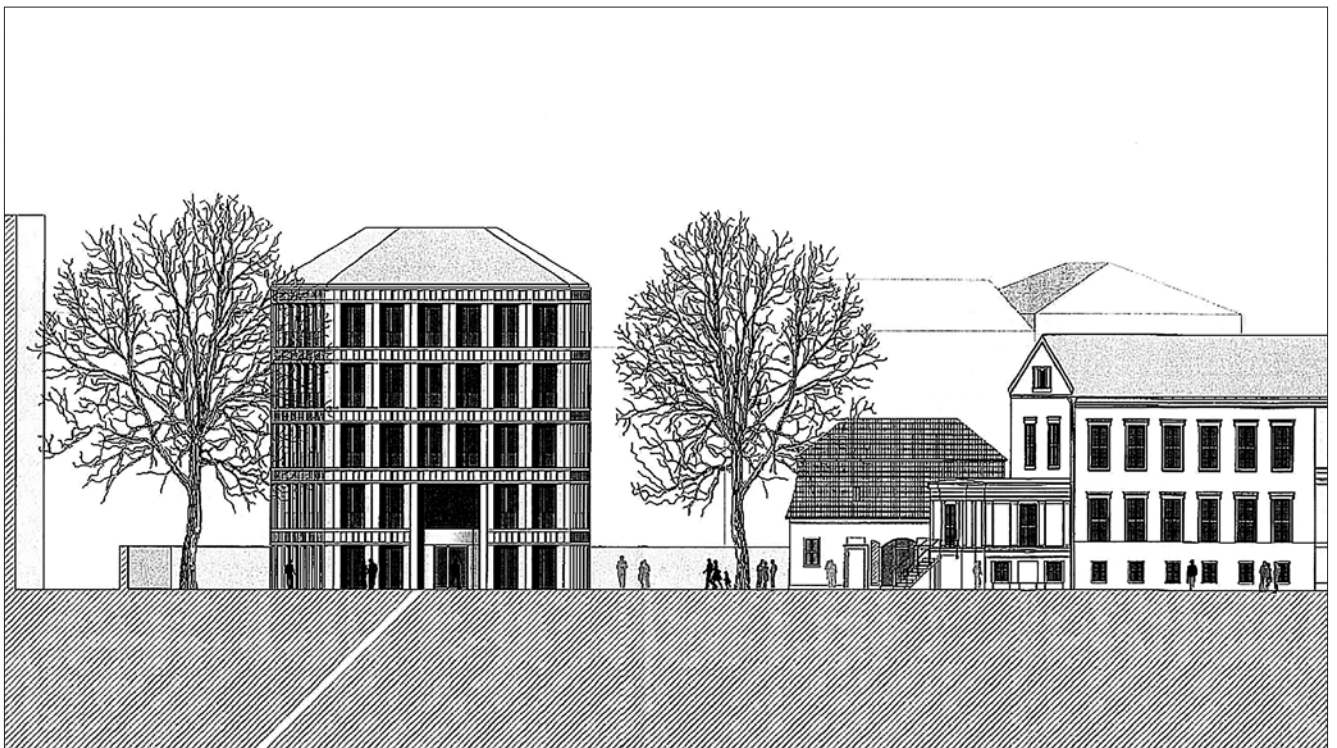
to the designs of the famous architect Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff. The townhouse is a typical baroque building, featured with a Corinthian colossal order; its west façade overlooks a typical pleasure garden.

The house received its name when the physicist Gustav Heinrich Magnus became its owner. A few years later, in 1845, the German Physical Society was founded there. When they set up their own company Siemens AG in 1847, Werner von Siemens and Georg Halske were closely associated to the society. Finally, the Magnus-Haus passed into the ownership of the federal state of Berlin.

The house, but not the garden, is inscribed in the list of protected monuments. However, the importance of the garden has not

been ignored: the entire lot is part of a *Denkmalbereich* (listed conservation area) and also of an *Erhaltungsgebiet* (area protected by building regulations); it also belongs to the buffer zone of the World Heritage Museum Island Berlin. In fact, the garden forms an integral part of the ensemble. It is like a small park, surrounded by a wall; several tall trees have a spatial impact on the house and the neighbourhood. Formerly well-groomed, it has been neglected in the last years. The garden is part of a typological unity – the house is not understandable without the wide open space in its original expanse. The case shows the importance of preserving any feature worth protecting in the surroundings of a heritage object.

It was noticed and negatively received when the federal state of Berlin sold the house with its garden to the Siemens AG with-



First detailed plans for the project to erect a large office building in the garden

out any assurance that the historical value of the whole property would be respected. It is a scandal that the company currently plans to erect a building of five or six storeys in the garden in order to have a prestigious office in the heart of the capital city. First intentions were made public in 2012; now the plans have become realistic.

It is most disturbing to see a private company disregard a city's public interest in its intact cultural heritage. The previously agreed preservation plans are callously being neglected. The company's plans act against the perception of the importance of historical gardens and parks, as has been developed in the last decades and become generally accepted in the meantime. By erecting a tall built volume in the rear part of the garden the indispensable relationship with the house would be destroyed.

It is also hard to believe how the city's government and administration dealt with the company's demand for a general construction permission. The competent board and all professional services clearly took position against the project, which violates the existing rules. However, the Mayor gave instructions to "help the investor" and a compliant administrative director delivered the permit immediately. That behaviour of submission was strongly criticised in the media, by political initiatives and by the broader public.

Unimpressed, Siemens organised an architectural competition. Courageously, in an open letter, all the important architectural associations recommended that their members should carefully consider whether they should participate in a procedure that would destroy a highly important piece of landscape-architecture.

While these lines are being written, the procedure is still open. The garden space belonging inseparably to the Magnus-Haus is in extreme danger. The case shows the power of major companies, even in developed democracies, and the weakness of political representatives. The cultural heritage that belongs to the public is sacrificed. Once destroyed, it can never be recovered again.

Bernhard Furrer

The *Ledigenheim*, Rehhoffstraße, Hamburg

The *Ledigenheim* in the Rehhoffstraße in Hamburg's Neustadt is the last surviving example of its type. It was built in 1912 to provide 112 rooms (each of eight square meters) combined with a communal restaurant and library as well as different social services for men who had no other form of accommodation in the city. The Verein Ros e.V. was founded in 2011 to take forward a number of cultural and educational projects in Hamburg and has focused on saving the *Ledigenheim* from redevelopment by a Danish company so that it can be refurbished and continue to provide much-needed housing for people in need.

The *Ledigenheim*

The concept of the *Ledigenheim* (or home for single men and women) was developed from the 1870s onwards as a response to growing concerns over the inability of urban housing markets to



Historic view of the foyer, 1913
(photo Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv, Slg. Koppmann)



Historic view of the *Ledigenheim*, 1913
(photo Hamburgisches Architekturarchiv, Slg. Koppmann)

cope with an unprecedented increase in population growth fuelled increasingly by in-migration. Hamburg, like many other port-cities and manufacturing centres in the German Empire, attracted a growing number of workers, many of whom came from rural areas, its hinterland or from further afield. They were often young, unskilled, and with little experience of daily life in a rapidly developing urban metropolis. The *Ledigenheim* was therefore seen as an important solution to an acute housing problem and was part of a wider strategy of housing reform, particularly in the period between 1890 and the outbreak of the First World War. Homes for single men and women were built by individual employers, as a means of strengthening their control of labour; by the Church, in order to improve the lives of skilled workers; and by municipal authorities, such as Hamburg, to cater for the accommodation needs of single men who were seeking to establish themselves in the local labour market.

In many cases there was a strong emphasis on strengthening community life. Not only did the *Ledigenheim* have a library and eating facilities, it had a separate reading room, a room for playing billiard, a little shop with a friendly shopkeeper, as well as a porter who was responsible for keeping an eye on the residents and their needs. To this extent it was a living institution located close to the city's harbour area which continued to provide good quality accommodation for single men within a wider community-based context. It enabled single men, whether they were sailors or dockworkers, to live a life without undue hardship and it provided a sheltered home in a family-like framework. Overtime, however, the clientele of the *Ledigenheim* in Hamburg changed: during the Weimar Republic a number of police cadets and firemen were accommodated, while during the Nazi dictatorship it is said to have been used by the Gestapo.

Although the concept of the *Ledigenheim* was a product of the late 19th century, it still has a real relevance as a response to the acute needs of our time. Major cities, such as Hamburg, are still confronted by severe housing problems, particularly in terms of providing sufficient accommodation for young people, in-migrants, and those who have difficulties in establishing themselves in urban society. In Hamburg, as in other urban centres, there is a chronic lack of affordable accommodation and the growing number of apartment seekers has contributed to a rapid rise in rental levels. At the same time, the growth of wealth inequality in Western society has been accompanied by increasing homelessness and destitution. In such a context, the preservation and extension of affordable urban housing remain a priority in the 21st century. Indeed, the home for single men in the Rehhoffstraße, with its concept of community-living, continues to fill an important gap in Hamburg's housing provision with tangible socio-cultural benefits.

A home under threat

Despite the fact that the concept of the *Ledigenheim* is still directly relevant to the housing needs of our time, there have been repeated attempts in the last few years to close it, primarily be-



Detail of the facade (photo Ros)

The foyer today (photo Ros)

cause of speculative profit motives. The home has been neglected for many years and is therefore now severely at risk, both in terms of its building fabric and the survival of the social ideal that underpinned its original establishment. Necessary repairs have not been made and the community-based services have been abolished almost entirely. The *Ledigenheim* and its residents have been badly affected by these developments. In 2009, the home was sold to a Danish investor, who had no real interest in retaining its historic function as a home for single men. Naturally, this caused a great deal of fear and anxiety amongst its mostly elderly residents who were very confused and worried about what was going to happen to them. As neighbours, we were very concerned about their plight and offered to provide whatever support might help them to safeguard their interests and preserve a community housing concept that was still helpful and beneficial at the start of the 21st century as it had proved to be in the German Empire.

A new perspective

Eventually, we decided with the support of the home's residents, to contact the new owner. This proved to be a turning point, because during our discussions the idea of trying to convert the *Ledigenheim* back to a non-profit form of ownership emerged as a possible solution to the current crisis. Initial talks with various experts and political leaders in our district demonstrated that there was a great deal of support and active encouragement for this idea. Numerous meetings followed, particularly with the district officials in Hamburg and the Danish owner, which focused on two key questions: the viability of a non-profit form of ownership; and who would take over long-term responsibility for the historic residence. By now we were not only convinced that the concept of the *Ledigenheim* made sense as a charitable enterprise, but that it might be possible to restore and expand this unique socio-historical monument in the long term! As a first step, in a three-way-meeting with the owner and the city authorities we agreed to work together to try to save the home and to revive the original concept through a change in ownership and its transfer to a non-profit organisation. An immediate and timely improvement for the residents was the reintroduction of social services in the home for the first time in over ten years.

The long-term management of the *Ledigenheim*

Although the desirability of preserving and restoring the home had been agreed, there was still some uncertainty over how its long-term management should be secured. Because we had been campaigning for several years for its preservation and retention as a home for single men, it was suggested by many people that we should assume responsibility for ensuring its continued role. Inevitably, this was a very personal issue for us, and we had already been undertaking most of the work to secure the future of the home and the welfare of its inhabitants. We felt that it would not be right to expect other people or organisations to take on this responsibility, so we have committed ourselves to managing the future of the *Ledigenheim* as a non-profit, charitable institution. We have therefore decided to buy the home and have gone on to establish a non-profit public foundation, 'Ros', as a means of securing the *Ledigenheim*'s longterm preservation.

Long live the *Ledigenheim*

A considerable amount of money will be required to purchase the home from its Danish owner and to restore the fabric of the building. Thanks to the support of many individuals, local trusts, and individual companies, we have already made considerable progress in raising funds to secure the future of the *Ledigenheim* as a home for single men in desperate need of accommodation within a community-based framework.

For this reason, we are looking for supporters who would be willing to fund the purchase and authentic restoration of the home—people who can help to give the *Ledigenheim*, as a social institution, the necessary means and opportunities to fulfil its historic function by providing single men with a low-cost, family-like-home.

Renew and develop the *Ledigenheim*!

We would like in future to both modernise the home as a unique cultural monument and to technically re-equip the building, so that its historic community role can be re-established. This would bring back to life the unique residential form represented by the *Ledigenheim* which has catered for the accommodation needs of dock workers, seafarers and craftsmen within the harbour-warehouse district of Hamburg since 1912. It would also reinforce the role of the Hamburg Museum by providing a unique example of a building form that reflects the wider process of housing reform in Hamburg prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The *Ledigenheim* is a living testimony to a critical period in Hamburg's history: it is today already of great interest to school groups and people of Hamburg in general, and is bound to become an important heritage attraction to the city's many visitors interested in architecture and the social relevance of building design. More importantly, if we can achieve our objective, a unique cultural monument in Hamburg will have been saved for future generations.

Prof. Robert W. Lee
Antje Block
Jade Peter Jacobs

The *Multihalle* in Mannheim

The so-called *Multihalle* in Mannheim was erected as a temporary building for the national garden show in 1975. It still exists; however, its condition is deteriorating fast. On the whole, in contrast to structures for trade fairs, buildings for one-time exhibitions such as garden shows or World Exhibitions are considered to be temporary. In most cases, this classification has to do less with the construction than with changed terms of use at a certain site. Therefore, "temporary" did not prevent the heritage authority in Baden-Württemberg from putting the *Multihalle* on the monument list at the end of the 1990s.

The *Multihalle* has stood for more than 40 years and was used most of the time for various purposes, until the city of Mannheim as owner suddenly stopped the maintenance without giving any explanation. The office Carlfried Mutschler + Partner from Mannheim in cooperation with the landscape architect Heinz Eckerbrecht from Frankfurt/Main had been the winners of a national



Inside view of the *Multihalle* (photo Architektenkammer Stuttgart)

architecture competition. They were commissioned to do the landscaping as well as to design the many small and large buildings for exhibitions, cafés, and infrastructure that are necessary for operating a large garden show. A number of alternatives were conceived for a central large roofing, all of them as lightweight constructions. Finally, the design of a grid shell made of wood was selected, developed by the architect Frei Otto from Stuttgart, who only a few years before had designed and realised a spectacular pavilion for the Expo67 in Montreal. Both constructions, the tensile structure in Montreal and the grid shell in Mannheim, were novelties on the world market. The constructions and the architectural forms were praised and admired by experts and the general public. Not without reason the *Multihalle* was popularly known as the “miracle of Mannheim”.



The *Multihalle* at night (photo Frei Otto, Warnbronn)

The *Multihalle* is made up of a grate of square meshes turning into rhombuses in order to follow the curvature. 9,500 square metres were covered with a free span of 60 metres. Until then, such dimensions for a wooden shell had never been achieved. This design principle developed by the Pritzker Prize winner Frei Otto (d. 2015) allows a totally free ground plan with different room heights and not least a complete prefabrication using straight bars. For the roofing of the grid shell a plastic foil was used. In addition, methods for calculation and geometric determination were necessary; these were developed by the engineers Linkwitz in Stuttgart and Ove Arup in London. As there were no comparative calculation programmes, an archaic method using suspended weights had to be applied for the static test. Consequently, the calculation was a so far unknown methodology that had a lasting international influence on the technology of wide-spanning structures. The design model is now kept at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt/Main.

The *Multihalle* in Mannheim is at risk. Wooden structures are sensitive to humidity; however, if looked after well they can be preserved for a very long time – as is proved by centuries-old half-timber buildings and roof trusses. It is not understandable why the city of Mannheim and the region with millions of inhabitants shouldn't be able to find an adequate use. The same applies to the necessary renovation, which is becoming more and more expensive and complicated every day, although the discussion about the *Multihalle's* preservation has been going on for years.

It seems justified to demand that Germany as one of the world's wealthiest industrial countries takes care of the works of its internationally renowned architects. There is no doubt that the *Multihalle* can be preserved and is also particularly worth preserving.

Berthold Burkhardt