

PROCESS OF CHANGE AND MODERNISATION IN OLD PARSONAGES OF FINLAND Anu SOIKKELI*, Brésil / Brasil

The aim of this study is to determine the phases of development and the present state of the parsonages of the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Finland built before 1940. The study also surveyed the ownership and current use of preserved parsonages. The study examines the process of change in parsonages and their repairs after the Second World War and analyses changes in setting and landscape at the end of the 1900s. A significant part of the study consists of a look at the present use of the parsonages included in the study, as well as a review of questions related to their repair and conservation. To assess the current state of parsonages, a field study of 423 parsonages was made. This field study consisted of surveying the present condition of the buildings and settings, determining their use and ownership, evaluating their chances of being preserved, and establishing their history of repairs.

The examination of the current state and condition of parsonages indicated that an excessively thorough renovation constitutes the greatest threat to the buildings. For centuries, right up to the 1950s, it was common practice to refurbish parsonages with discretion in a way that was in agreement with their inherent character. Only building components that required corrective maintenance were repaired. In the late 1950s and in the 1960s repairs became more and more comprehensive and industrial materials, alien to the old buildings, were introduced. Original floor plans and dimensions of premises disappeared in a mad rush for modernisation. Old materials and heating systems, including glazed stoves, also had to go. Fortunately, repairs and decorations were often carried out with the aim of saving time and effort, and therefore old surfaces were often left beneath the new ones. In contrast, parsonages that were repaired during the 1980s often suffered from excessive zeal. Old materials were often disposed of as if they were just rubbish, often leaving just the log frame as the only witness to the building's history. In such cases the building cannot be restored to its original condition using the original materials. Fortunately, the current decade has seen an increase in our appreciation of old buildings. However, people still find it difficult to accept temporal stratification in old buildings, and would rather restore entire buildings to conform to the style of a certain period without understanding how this kind of action distorts the building's history.

1. Regarding this study

The parishes of Finland currently own and maintain a large proportion of our culturally important architectural heritage: parsonages, vicarages and cantor dwellings, churches and belfries, cemeteries, cemetery chapels and parish halls. Churches have traditionally been maintained and renovated with piety, which is also true for cemeteries and sepulchral monuments.

Until recent times, less use has been made of parsonages as priests' dwellings or as places for congregational occasions, for example. Thus, many of Finland's parsonages and vicarages are no longer used for their original purpose and many of them have been sold.

The aim of this paper is to examine the stages of development that old parsonages have undergone in the 19th and 20th centuries in particular, and to explore their present condition. It ends with a summary of their present role in Finland and of their prospects in light of information regarding renovation and condition.

The essential question here regards the stages undergone by parsonages since 1935, which was the last point at which information was gathered on them. How many are still used as parsonages or even exist? No written comprehensive information was available concerning their present use, condition or owner. All of them were renovated in the 20th century, much of this renovation work radically changing their character, however, so that some of them could hardly be recognised afterwards. In addition, local heritage information proved to extend not very long into the past, since locals, including the parish, did not necessarily know that a parsonage that had not been used for its original purpose after the 1950's existed at all, even though the building still stood where it had been erected. It was absolutely essential for the analysis of the present condition of parsonages and their stages throughout the 20th century that extensive field work be launched in order to collect information on all the surviving parsonages.

2. Basic survey

The parsonage and vicarage inventory was extended to almost all parts of the country in the summers of 1995 and 1996 in order to collect background material for the study. Work continued in the summers of 1997-1999. However, the inventory and the material examined here only include parsonages built before 1940, since those built after the war were no longer representative of century-old parsonage traditions but rather resemble ordinary private houses. Thus, the inventory focused mainly on the present state of the parsonages listed on the 1935 register (Godenhjelm 1935), including an assessment of their condition and setting, purpose of use and ownership, preservation outlooks and an analysis of the various stages, such as their renovation history, they had undergone.

Their current state could be determined on-site, whereas examining ownership changes and finding renovation history information required a number of contacts with parishes though some of this information was obtained from publications regarding the history of parishes and districts. The condition of each building was assessed visually from the outside and, if possible, also from the inside. All the parsonages and their surroundings were photographed. The inventory did not include the provinces of Kuopio and Vaasa, however, since a survey of the parsonages located in these provinces already existed. 15 parsonages in Lapland were also excluded, as these were situated far away from each other. The parsonages located in the archipelago and on the Åland Islands made up a special category of their own and were thus omitted from the present inventory. This was necessary because many of the latter were located on school premises, as formerly priests would also act as teachers. The inventory was not extended to areas handed over to the former Soviet Union after the Second World War either.

The present condition analysis comprised 423 parsonages, of which an inventory was made on site, and the interior of 282 parsonages. The parsonages located in the provinces of Vaasa and Kuopio were excluded, however, though their published basic surveys had also contained information on their condition. Nevertheless, this information would not necessarily have been commensurable to the assessment performed as part of the present investigation. A method for assessing condition and the degree of damage was developed in order to evaluate repair needs, and was applied to all of the parsonages examined. The condition of the parsonages proved to be so good, however, that the method was in the end not used at all.

3. Regarding the present use of parsonages and their prospects for preservation

Parsonages represented the highpoint in standards of living in former times. In this sense they reflect the general aims set for living and housing in the course of centuries, particularly as the building process was always controlled and supervised by public authorities. They acted as a model for rustic buildings, at the same time conveying technical innovations. Thus, their history also provides information on the development of building in Finland, and of timber architecture in particular.

Of the 563 parsonages and vicarages remaining at present, more than half, i.e. 359, are owned by parishes. 157 of these are still at least partly used for their original purpose, while 138 are privately-owned dwellings. Some parsonages are owned by local councils, companies, communities and the government. The use of parsonages for their original purpose decreases each year, as parishes no longer need them. Having to maintain parsonages poses a problem to many of them. Therefore, renovation projects are today very rare as opposed to church repairs, for example. The desire to refurbish parsonages has been reduced by the difficulties expected in the renovation work, the unpractical nature of large parsonages and, most of all, by financial reasons. All of these elements pose a threat to their preservation.

Protecting parsonages should basically no longer be a problem. Although most of them are protected by building regulations, there have been many cases, even today, in which their protection has proved problematic. Conservation schemes usually only involve the façade or the main building, and therefore do not appreciate valuable built entities and their settings at all. Preservation has also been hampered by the contradictory nature of protection laws, since interpretations of the Building Act and the Church Code left parsonages outside protection schemes. In spite of being a historically-important landscape element in local terms, parsonages are not often sufficiently appreciated if they are not ranked high enough on the scale of significant parsonages.

It is evident from the point of view of preservation that parsonages usually have to be modified to suit new purposes of use, renovated, maintained and repaired. An entirely new problem in terms of their protection often derives from changes made in the 20th century, which raises the question of what should be protected in the first place – the parsonage culture, setting, building or only a historical monument?

4. Parsonage repairs at different times

Renovation approaches identified in parsonage repairs were commonly used in the refurbishment of all other types of buildings as well. Delicate methods not conflicting with the parsonages' basic character were typically employed for centuries until the 1950's, when refurbishment still only involved the parts that required maintenance. In the late 1950's and in the 1960's, works took a more comprehensive form and began to accommodate industrial materials uncharacteristic of old buildings. The feverish desire to renew practically everything led to the loss of the original scale and space distribution in many parsonages, not to mention old materials and heating systems, including tile stoves. In many cases, time-saving, inexpensive methods were fortunately used in renovation works, so that walls were simply covered with boards, which allowed for the survival of old facings. In the 1970's, bright-coloured chipboard was typically used for walls. Parsonage renovations of the 1980's, however, were unfortunately far too extensive and exhaustive so that almost all old materials were often dumped, except for log frames, the only historical relic to remain. Thus, it has been impossible to restore anything later. Fortunately, in the present decade people are increasingly learning to appreciate the past, though they still find it difficult to accept old structural layers in the buildings of yesterday and would rather like to see them restored to a state characteristic of a certain period. Yet, doing so would usually distort the history of the building.

Parsonage renovation projects are seldom prompted by a concrete structural need. Thus, extensive repairs for purely technical reasons are seldom initiated, and minor maintenance work is carried out instead. The need for repairing parsonages arises from changes in their use and building technology solutions employed in them.

Finding a suitable, flexible type of use for a building is one guarantee for preserving it in such a way that the building would not be forced to accommodate a modern room arrangement that aims at an effective use of the floor area. Even more important, however, is the relation between the repairer and the building.

Maintenance-oriented renovation that saves as much of the original as possible is always the best solution with regard to preserving old buildings, though in the case of parsonages it is unfortunately seldom applied. Renovation work should stem from the building itself, its features and history. It is absolutely essential that one should try to acquire a sense of the ideas of the former builders and renovators and to adopt their concepts of beauty and practicability. An ideal solution in repairing parsonages would be if the work could be done in phases, for the danger of large-scale extensive renovation is that the building will have to yield greatly to the requirements of our time. Refurbishment that does not rely too much on the spirit level only, but that takes place in terms of the building is usually also the least expensive solution. The unfortunate thing here is, however, that traditional working methods, techniques and building materials by means of which old buildings could be best refurbished have not been available on the market or at least not advertised in papers in the last few decades, though there are currently signs of an increasing interest in reviving and fostering traditions.

5. Parsonages under the grip of the present

The emphasis of projects for renovating parish-owned parsonages has typically been on refurbishing them completely from the outside, often destroying old details in the process, however. The interior may then have been changed completely, breaking the arrangement of rooms and the relations between interior parts for, after all, they are not visible to an outsider in any case. In a less-extensive repair alternative, the order of the rooms is maintained but the parsonage is greatly modernised to meet the quality standards of contemporary buildings. Thus the outer appearance of the building is evidently considered the most important element in maintaining its identity. The building is consequently regarded as old and beautiful, even if its form is the only thing reminding the onlooker of the past and if its details, such as windows or weather boarding, had been renewed entirely. This kind of an approach obscures stylistic features, for replacing a wide-planed board with a narrow, sawn board, for instance, easily changes the overall impression. Another element not understood as an architectural detail at all is the degree of glossing of weather boarding, for example, in which respect sawn and planed boarding differ completely.

Parsonages are fairly often repaired and modernised with a self-made image in mind. Interior decoration magazines in part determine the trend to which Finnish timber architecture should conform. A person visiting a remote rural parsonage can be astonished when finding a repair solution that meets English manor ideals, including Laura Ashley's wallpapers and a whirlpool mounted in a former dining room now converted into a 'fitness room'.

People want to get rid of the slanting, wear and patina characteristic of old buildings, finding it impossible to give up the requirements set by modern building ideals. At the same time, however, they lose a large part of the antiquarian value of the building. It is often evident that the owner does not consider old things valuable as such, but rather strives for the status that an old building provides him.

There are also parsonages whose owners (repairers) have carefully documented the original mouldings, doors, panel widths and profiles on the basis of measurements, samples and photographs, only to tear them all away and replace them with new ones that look old, or to have new wear-proof parts made that match the dimensions of the original. In doing so, they have not repaired the parsonage, but rebuilt it. To achieve the old 'spirit', people have even used new, sandblasted timber.

6. Misunderstanding timber romanticism

The parsonage owner's beauty and tradition ideals are surprisingly often based on the notions once created by national romanticism, which favoured the use of large, robust timber as building material and emphasised its natural character. It is impossible to change a weather-boarded short-corner building into a red-hearted pine villa from the outside, and the interior may have to undergo irreparable changes. In its less severe form, this change may only have involved the lacquering of painted surfaces. In the worst case, however, the interior may have been sandblasted. After these changes, and echoing the ideals of national romanticism, many parsonages reflect the modern idea of how a rustic building should have looked like, not how it actually looked like. In any case, parsonages were after all something else. In reality, there was already a trend in the 18th century to shun the use of bare timber surfaces in parsonages, since they were considered too peasant-like. Instead, they were covered with paint, glazing or wallpaper to achieve a higher manor-like status typical of the upper social classes, for bare timber was not regarded as capable of conveying this status.

In the extreme, old parsonages are repaired using contemporary, standardised houses as model. Yet these are the result of a compromise between economic factors and ideals of beauty. Where in fact lays the value of an old building? If it has been completely refurbished to meet the standards of a new building, can we still refer to its cultural and historical value? Similarly, if the only place where its antiquarian value has been preserved is the log frame, is it justifiable to include the building in a protective scheme at all?

7. Parsonages reflect the values of their time

Parsonages have always conveyed the values and ideals of their own time. They reflect architectural development from double-room solutions of the Renaissance Era to Carolinian floor plans, and from farmhouses with a number of practicable small buildings to the manor-like impressive complexes of the 19th century. Parsonages built in the 1920's and 1930's reflect balanced Nordic Classicism or the pure lines and simplicity of Functionalism.

Even now, as some of the parsonages are being destroyed, losing the connection with their surroundings, turning into private dwellings or undergoing a radical modernisation that omits everything that is historical, they are still a permanent part of the flow of time, though changing to accommodate the values of our time. The remaining parsonages and their surroundings deserve to exist even after the decisions have been made during this selfish period of economically-oriented values in our society.

Based on the doctoral thesis work "The future of the past - Old parsonages in Finland", published in November 2000 (Soikkeli, Anu. Suomen vanhat pappilat - menneisyyden tulevaisuus. Acta Universitatis Ouluensis, C153, Oulu 2000).

ABSTRACT

Parsonages are a central part of Finnish cultural environment, and have had an effect on their surroundings in many ways. Until the early 1900's parsonages functioned not only as dwellings for the clergyman and his family, but also as farmhouses. In addition to the functional solutions dictated by agriculture, the architecture of parsonages has always displayed the social and cultural conditions and values of their inhabitants and builders. However, the period of modernization that followed the First World War began to erode the parsonage tradition, as the status of the clergyman in the community changed, parsonage agriculture was given up, and new industrial construction materials and thorough, modernizing repairs replaced traditional upkeep.

This study examines changes in the condition and renovation methods of the 550 preserved parsonages caused by modifications in their use. As the study progressed, it revealed that only about 20 % of the currently preserved parsonages are even partly used by the clergy. In addition to being a residence, other present-day use varies from parish hall to stone working shop, and from social reception facility to children's day care center. Changes made during the 20th century have often caused a new problem as far as the question of preservation is concerned. What are we actually preserving or wish to save? The parsonage culture, which has actually already disappeared due to the changes in the living habits of the clergy? The setting, which often has been radically modified? The building, which has very little of its antiquarian value remaining? Or are we only preserving a historical memory?

For hundreds of years, up to the 1950's, parsonages were commonly repaired in a delicate way that did not destroy their basic nature. Only parts of the building requiring upkeep were repaired. At the end of the decade and in the 1960's repairs were increasingly characterized by all-inclusiveness and industrial materials that were foreign to old buildings. In the frenzy of total renewal many parsonages lost not only their original layout and scale, but also their old materials and heating systems with tiled ovens. Fortunately, in many cases renewal and installation of surface sheeting were done hurriedly and conveniently by simply covering the old materials.

Similarly, old surfaces in need of repair were covered with brightly-coloured chipboard sheeting in the 1970's. However, in the 1980's all too often parsonages were repaired too thoroughly and carefully. Old materials were often discarded, leaving only the log frame to bear witness to the history of the building. In such a case nothing can be saved. Fortunately, in this decade we have increasingly begun to value things that are old. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to accept layered history in a building. We would rather see a building restored to the appearance of a given period, which often distorts the history of the building.

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Siuntio parsonage (1814) is protected by the law.



Köyliö parsonage (1845) was renovated in thr 1950's.
It is now difficult to determine when the building was constructed.



Punkalaidun vicarage (1890') is now part of a shoe factory.



Oulunsalo parsonage (1856) has an underground annexe with some technical facilities.



In Alatornio (1786) parsonage, renovation in the 1990's was far too extensive.
Almost all the old materials were dumped, apart from the log frame.
The interior doesn't differ anymore from the new houses of the 1990's.



In Jämijärvi parsonage (1856) the desire to renew practically everything has led to
the loss of the original scale and arrangement of space.



In Hongonjoki parsonage (1899) the interior has undergone irreparable modifications. This change has involved the lacquering of surfaces. In reality, there was already a trend in the 18th century to shun the use of bare timber surfaces in parsonages, since they were considered too peasant-like.