

Gravure van Remacle le Loup (ca. 1740)
(uit: P.L. Sanmery, Les delices du Pais de Liege..., Luik 1744, IV)

HERKENRODE

The revaluating of the site of the former Cistercian Abbey of Herkenrode by integrating into it a new monastery for the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre. (Situated in Kuringen, near Hasselt, Belgium)

by ir.architect Lucas VAN HERCK , Lector at K.U.Leuven .

The abbey , founded in 1182 by the Counts of Loon , near to their new castle at Kuringen, was the first abbey for Cistercian nuns in the Netherlands. It became the funeral church of the counts, and was very important for the development of the region. From 1317 it started to be an important centre for pilgrimage, due to a "Miraculous Holy Sacrament".

Later , in the 16^o century , the county and also the abbey came under the direct influence of the Prince-Bishops of Liège. They contributed a lot to the welfare and the power of the abbey and stimulated at that moment the renovation and extention of the abbey. Important buildings of this period still exist, as well as the new constructions built in the 17^o century during the contra-reformation.

Finally in the mid 18^o century a totally new abbatial abbey plan in classisistic style was developed by architect Laurent Benoit Dewez . Only the stil existing new abbesshouse was constructed.

So , during its history, the abbey had a lot of important building activities, and was, until its abolition in 1796 by the French invaders after the French revolution, one of the most important and richest abbeys of the country.

After the confiscation the decline started: Art objects were sold out all over Europe; the monastic buildings were partly converted into factories and burned down or were dismantled in the following decades; Other buildings were divided and let to different farmers by the new landlord, who transformed the new 18th century abbesshouse into his castle. Also in the 19th century he changed the monastic garden behind his castle into a wonderful english garden.

In 1972 the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre began to buy parts of the site with the intention to build their new monastery within this historical moastic area. The site was at that moment partly in use by farmers and partly ruined , but still recognizable as a structural unit, and had practically no new construction since the end of the 18th century.

Our studies, wich started in 1976, intended to integrate this new monastery into the existing site, and by this we tried to give the site new life and meaning in relation to its original values. Therefore our team, composed of arthistorians and architects, made a global study on the following topics to determine the new structural development of the site according to its historical remains, meanings and values , as well as to the structural meaning and needs for the buildings of the new monastery.

Preliminary study topics were :

- + The significance of the Cistercian monastic life, and how this was reflected in their monasteries in general and in Herkenrode in particular (Rules of St. Benedictus and influence of St. Bernardus). The Cistercians wanted to remove them far from the towns to build their own microcosmos of praying and handwork.

- + The significance of the monastic life of the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, following the rules of ST. Augustinus and this had to be expressed in their monastery. These rules are typical for monastic orders, which want to retire to a monastery for praying and studying on one hand, but on the other hand want to share this spiritual quality with the outside world. So they serve in hospitals, schools, etc. The Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre do this service on one hand by serving the "Holy Places", the reason for their foundation in Jerusalem during the crusades, (to serve the church of the holy Sepulchre), and now on the other hand they also want to serve by creating a public centre for reflection.

- + A historical analysis of the abbey of Herkenrode in general , and the construction area in particular was made. In this construction area some previous archeological research was also done.

- + The meaning of the remaining buildings and the existing structural lay-out has been analysed.

- + Finally, a technical evaluation of the remaining buildings in the construction area (the former 16th century abbesshouse and the former new 18th century abbesshouse) has been done.

The structural analysis learned that the site was divided into two clearly individual parts :

- The first zone was restricted by the part of the abbey organically grown since its creation, and wich consists of; the church and cloisters, the farm , the zone of working buildings (watermill, brewery, etc) , the infirmary and finally the 16th century abbesshouse. All of this was served by the original lane to the 16th century main gate-way building.

- The second zone was formed by the white classical building (the 18th century new abbesshouse of L.B. Dewez) with its 19th century English landscape gardens and new entrance lane, parallel to the first one.

On the basis of these elements ,and related to the duality in the monastic life of the Augustinesses of the Holy Sepulchre, we drew up the following plan for the new development of the site, also dividing it into two parts:

- Firstly ; The original lane and gatewaybuilding will again give access to the monastic site with :

+ the farm and watermill; necessary infrastructure to preserve the surrounding area as an agricultural transit zone between the growing town and the monastery.

+ Passing by the archeological site of the former Cistercian cloister and church the route leads to the new monastery. In this way the ruins become a zone of transgression, reflection, and feed back from the past.

+ The new cloister itself is integrated into the area with the remains of the 16th century abbesshouse.

- Secondly ; the external serving part, the reflection guesthouse, will be carried out in the 18th century Dewez-building, with its white extrovert classisistic style showing the opening of the monastery to the outside world.

- The link between both parts is situated on the entrance square, at the south wing , using this way, the former coach-porche of the cistercian abbesshouse as entrance for the new monastery itself.

The plan itself, is the result of long discussions about the meaning and the relationships of the different spaces in the new monastery. Originally started from a simple functional wish-slip of the sisters , it became a very deep discussion on the real values and significances of their monastic life and how this had to be architecturally translated. So the preparation of the buildingprogram became a real resource for the sisters in relation to the substantial and the superficial elements in their monastic behaviour.

The new chapel, the Church of The Holy Sepulchre , being the central and main pole of the monastery, and the reason of their existance (" to serve the Holy Sepulchre of the ressurected Lord ") is situated in the centre, and is closing again this way the innercourt of the former abbess-house , creating the new "cloister". The chapel has a separated entrance for the guests in relation to the central square.

The entrance of the monastery itself is planned in the former porch in the south wing, and leads by passages to the chapel and the cloister, passing by the portarsroom and the parlours. The latter are situated in two gothic vaulted rooms with splendid 16th century wall-paintings , discovered and restored during the works. The upperfloor of the south wing contains some guest-rooms and the monastery administration.

The monastic rooms are situated in the east wing, with on the groundfloor the chapter-room, the library, and the refectory; and some work- and recreation rooms in the north-wing. The wonderful gothic cellars with romanesque remains, have been arranged as a permanent exhibition area about the history and the meaning of the former cistercian abbey and the new monastery. The newly constructed upperfloors contain some 30 cells and service-rooms.

In the south-east corner we constructed a new kitchen and guest-refectory. In this way dividing and individualising the park behind the buildings into two parts : one belonging to the monastery itself, and the other part, the english landschape garden, in relation to the 18th century abbesshouse , becoming now the guesthouse for reflection.

The building philosophy was outlined in three levels:

+ firstly: careful restoration:

Where the new functions were about the same as the original ones, and where the existing buildings and the historical and archeological studies offered sufficient information for a correct restoration. This has been done for the 16th century parts of the south wing and for a part of the cellars and the stairtower in the east wing.

+ Secondly: Conservation:

Where the still existing original building substance did not offer the right information for a non hypothetical restoration. So we tried to validate the existing elements and we added where necessary with up to date design. It has been mainly applied for the 18th century coach-porch in the south wing, and will be applied for the remains of the north-wing.

+ Thirdly : New construction :

Where the original buildings had been destroyed, or where there was a need for expansion, we tried to design an up to date sober monastic architecture, always leaving a kind of gap between the original buildings and the new ones in the contact zones, and preserving the ruined state as basis for the additions. This was done for the floors of the east wing, the new kitchen with guest-refectory, and the chapel.

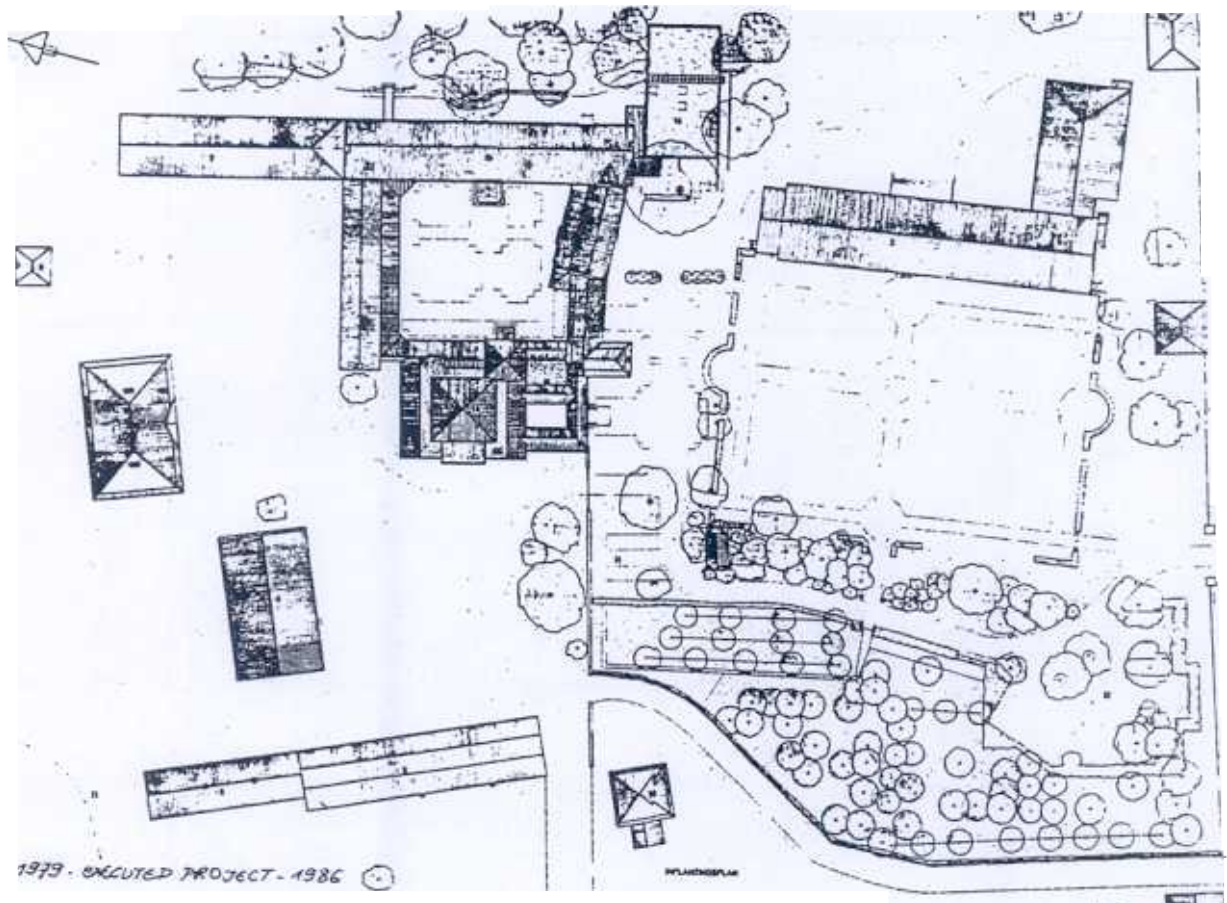
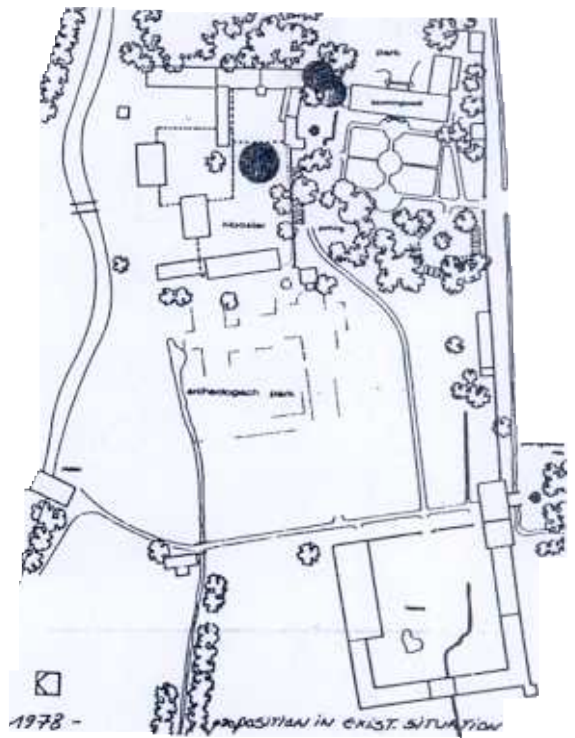
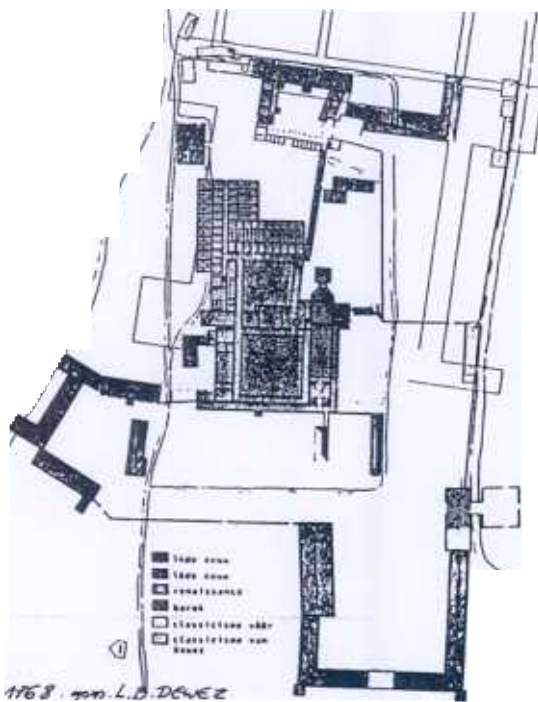
The restoration and new construction works started at the end of 1981 and were finished in may 1986.

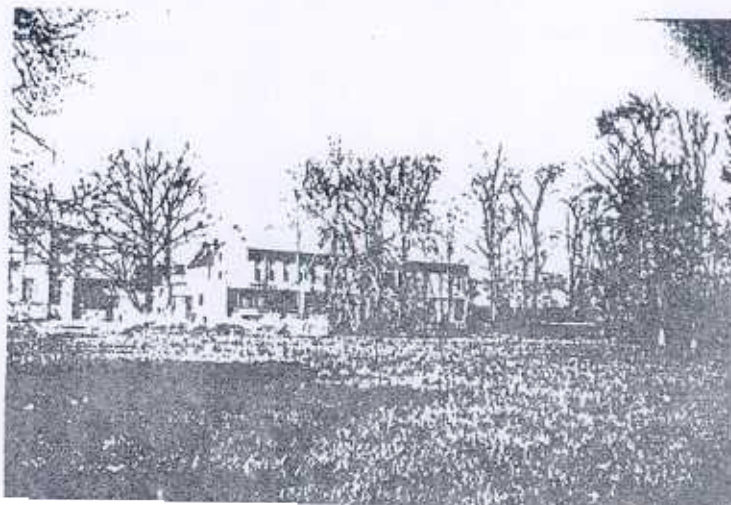
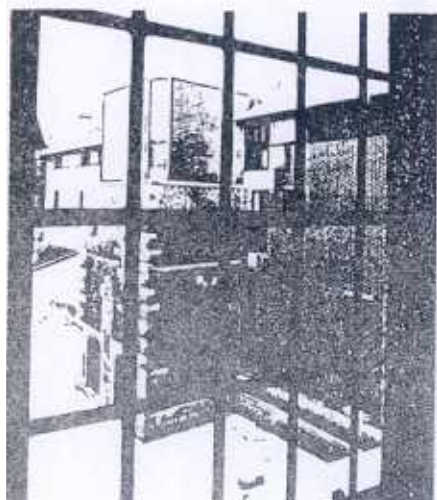
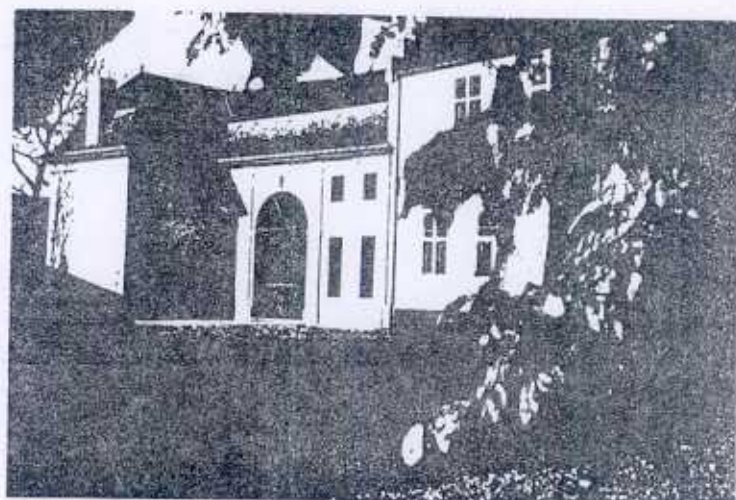
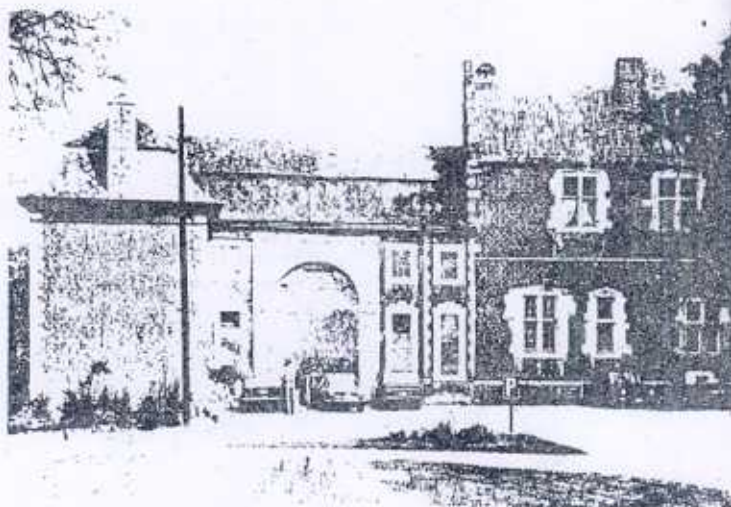
The previous description shows that the existing structural situation and the remaining buildings together with their significance gave the direction and the inspiration for the revaluation of the former abbatial site by integrating in it a new monastery of a totally different order.

This historical monastic site was the source of christianity in this region since the 12th century, singification wich the area had lost due to the French Revolution. By constructing in this site a new monastery, the Sisters intended to revalorize this source and to create an new source of spiritual life. At the same moment it was for themselves an action of returning to the real sources of their own monastic order within the cultural evolution . So the remaining relics of the former abbess-house, references to the former iconoclasts of the French revolution, have not been wiped out, but have been taken up as the actual initial stage in the new religious framework. The new monastery works up these historical sources not with a conservation reflex, but intends with the construction of the new centrally built Church of the Holy Sepulchre to become the new source, heart and signification-giver of the site. The restoration in this context is no longer a conservative act in the sense of immobility, with the only intention of preserving the material values of the past, but becomes an integrated part of the general revaluating of the site.

Finally it 's now the new monastery with the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, wich becomes the new centre and source for the further evolution and valorisation of the site within the structural connexion of the old abbey and the new monastery. The newly built Sepulchrechapel becomes ultimately the stimulus and the reason for the further restoration, conservation and revalorisation of the site. The old context preserves its previous values and meanings , but this has been lifted up and will be reloaded with new ones in the further development of the new monastery.

The present has taken in the past as its source of buildig up a new signification for the future.





THE REVALUATING OF HERKENRÖDE . (summary)

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A new monastery for the Regular Canonesses of the holy Sepulchre , following the rules of st. Augustinus, was constructed within the site of the former first (°1182) and largest abbey of Cistercian nuns in the Netherlands.

The paper discusses the different studies and the main options involved in the realisation of this project.

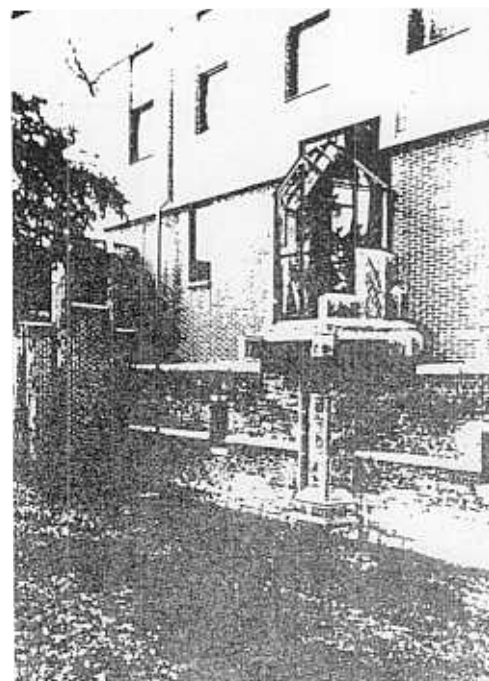
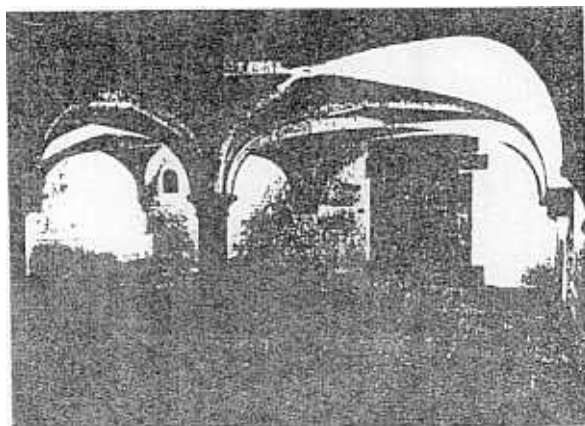
Since the abolition of the abbey (1796) during the French Revolution, an important part of the former monastic buildings were destroyed, altered, or given new secular functions. Nevertheless the main structural outline of the site and its surrounding landscape has been preserved, as well as some of the interesting buildings. Finally only some secondary farmers extension buildings have altered the partly ruined area .

In 1972 the Sisters of the Holy Sepulchre began to buy parts of the site ,with the intention of building their new monastery within this historical monastic area. Our revaluating study started in august 1976, and the restoration and new construction works started at the end of 1981 and were finished in may 1986.

The insertion of this new monastery within the site tries to revalue the remaining historical structural outline of the area and to give it a new sense in relation to the new buildings. The new Monastery, constructed within the remains of the former 16^o centuries Abbes-house, consists partly of restored buildings and partly of new constructions.

The new Monastery works up this historical source not with a conservation reflex but intends with the new centrally built church of the Holy Sepulchre to become the new heart and sensegiver of the site. The restoration is no longer a conservative act, with only the intention of preserving the values of the past, but becomes an integrated part of the general revaluating of the site, with the new buildings as new centre.

The present has taken in the past as its source of building up a new sense for the future.



LA REVALORISATION DE HERKENRODE. (Résumé)

Un nouveau couvent pour les Chanoinesses régulières du Saint Sépulcre, suivant la règle du St. Augustin, a été érigée dans le site historique de l'ancienne abbaye de Herkenrode. Elle fût la première (°1182) et une des plus grandes des abbayes des Dames Cisterciennes dans les "Pays-bas".

La présentation traite les différentes études et les options principales concernant la réalisation de ce projet.

Depuis l'abolition de l'abbaye lors de la révolution Française (1796), une grande partie des anciens bâtiments monastiques a été démolie et mutilée, ou a reçu de nouvelles utilisations séculaires. Néanmoins la structure générale du site et des paysages environnants a été conservée. Finalement il n'y a que quelques nouvelles constructions secondaires agricoles qui altèrent le site partiellement ruiné.

A partir de 1972, les Soeurs du Saint Sépulcre ont commencé d'acheter des parties des terrains avec l'intention de construire leur nouveau couvent dans cet ancien site monastique. Nos études de revalorisation ont été entamées en août 1976, et les travaux de restauration et de construction nouvelle ont démarrés fin 1981 et sont terminés depuis mai 1986.

En implantant le nouveau couvent, nous essayons de revaloriser et d'accentuer la structure original et historique du site d'une part, et de lui donner avec les nouvelles fonctions une nouvelle signification d'autre part. Le nouveau monastère, inséré dans les débris de l'ancienne résidence d'Abesse du 16^e siècle, se compose partiellement d'anciens bâtiments restaurés et de nouvelles constructions.

Le nouveau couvent n'intent pas d'assimiler cette source historique avec un reflex de conservation, mais par contre il veut devenir, par la construction centrale de sa nouvelle église du Saint Sepulcre, le nouveau coeur et l'instaurateur d'une nouvelle signification du site. La restauration n'est plus une operation conservatoire dans le sens de l'immobilisme, avec comme seul intention de préserver les valeurs du passé, mais devient une partie intégrante de la revalorisation du site, ayant les nouvelles constructions comme nouveau centre, tout en respectant la structure historique du site.

Le présent a relevé le passé comme source à fin d'élaborer la nouvelle signification du site pour son avenir.

