Memories Carved in Stone

by Agnes Zeiner

Nuremberg, the "City of the Nazi Party Rally", was selected by the Allies as a particular target for wartime bombing missions. The Old Town quarter was destroyed in 1945 and the entire city suffered severe damages. St. Sebald's Church, which is the resting place of the bones of the founder of the city, was also affected. The church has finally been restored to its former splendour and can now be explored on-line in a 3D animation. The restoration is a testament to the commitment of the citizens of Nuremberg: the modelling owes much to Erwin Christofori, his engineering consultancy, and Leica Geosystems laser scanners.

The destruction of St. Sebald's Church at the end of the war was also a significant spiritual loss to the citizens of Nuremberg because it was the last resting place of the bones of the founder of the city, St. Sebald, who died sometime before 1070. "Town churches tell the history of their citizens. They underpin a city's identity and represent its memories, carved in stone. This applies to St. Sebald's Church, too", explains Father Gerhard Schorr.

Animated history

From the exhibition brochure "St. Sebald's Church - 50 Years of Reconstruction".

St. Sebald's Church was built in the second quarter of the 13th century as a late Romanesque style pillar basilica with two chancels. It had a west chancel, a three-aisle nave, a single-aisle transept and an east choir with three apses.

In the 16th century the side aisles were extended and a large hall chancel added in the east. The present layout of the church was completed with the last raising of the towers in the 15th century. The following centuries saw many extensions, changes and repairs, the most extensive being the major reconstruction between 1888 and 1906.

The Second World War soon spelled the end for St. Sebald's Church. A ruin was all that was left of the once-proud building. But much of the church's artwork was already in storage before its destruction. The church took twelve years to rebuild.

The reconstruction video shows the changes to the building from 1225 to today using a combination of point cloud and reconstruction model", says Christofori. The animation was revealed to the citizens of Nuremberg as part of the exhibition, "St. Sebald's Church - 50 Years of Reconstruction", in autumn of 2007.

Complex animation

The citizens of Nuremberg have produced a further record of St. Sebald's Church: this time not in stone, but in bits and bytes. The state of the church from 1225 to 2007 is depicted in a nine-minute video animation. The complex animation was made possible by the team of consulting engineers Christofori & Partner, who are based in Rossital near Nuremberg. "We were asked last year by the St. Sebald Church Council to carry out a 3D laser survey of the external facade of the church. The Bavarian Office for the Preservation of Historical Monuments then created the animation based on our data", explains Erwin Christofori.

"The whole of the external facade was recorded using a Leica HDS6000 laser scanner and an external camera system. Erwin Christofori: "The results of the survey are to be used over the longer term to produce a drawing of the actual existing state of the church, fully correct in terms of shape and masonry detail."

The results of the work - the video animation and photographs produced during the survey - were used in the Heritage Network "CyArk" project. They can be seen on the project website at www.cyark.org.