
(Re)constructing History – How Building Archaeology Can Profit from the Knowledge of Engineering

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Introduction

When, in 1924, Armin von Gerkan, a German architect with many years of experience in archaeological excavations, first spoke of “building archaeology” as an independent scientific discipline, he placed it on a level with archaeology and its associated sciences (Ref. [1], 9). However, with a lack of institutional structures in Germany, the budding building archaeologist was forced to teach himself and gain the necessary qualifications for his further career through practical activities (*Fig. 1*). According to von Gerkan, being an architect in itself involves “familiarity with materials and design, the verifiable feeling for structural relationships and an understanding of working practices – even those of previous ages” (Ref. [1], 10). With no training opportunities or structures in the early 20th century, von Gerkan called for a clearer demarcation from other disciplines through the institutionalization of this subject. As early as 1926, von Gerkan’s efforts led to the foundation of the Koldewey Society, the “association of archaeological architects”, which campaigned for the training of young architects in the field of building archaeology in Germany and for participation in heritage conservation issues.

Although the training situation for building archaeologists has changed noticeably over the intervening years and is now a separate field of study in Germany, the demands placed on graduates of this subject have changed little. Only the professional field that feeds the discipline of building archaeology now covers a much wider area owing to the master course of study, as offered by several German universities and polytechnics. Whereas in the past building archaeology was exclusively the province of architects, studies in Germany now attract graduates from archaeology, art history, restoration, geography and history in equal numbers, likewise construction engineering and other disciplines with appropriate background knowledge and, last but not least, landscape and interior architects. In other words, building archaeology courses now have a wide appeal and are characterized by greater polyvalence. Opening up this professional field to arts and engineering graduates brings with it enormous advantages because it does justice to the