



**B**ALTIC REGION HERITAGE COMMITTEE



## Good practices on built heritage conservation/restoration

### *Dobele Castle Ruins.*

#### **Main idea/goal of the intervention.**

The goal of the project is to preserve, protect and develop a significant item of cultural/historical heritage in Zemgale and to restore this cultural monument of national significance – the Dobele Castle Ruins, creating a new tourist facility within them, and to provide, in this way, for the development of the ruins' socio-economic potential and integration into the local economic structure.

#### **Location.**

Dobele City.

#### **Functions.**

Up until 1730 it was the Livonian Order's stone castle. Currently, a multifunctional culture, crafts and tourism development centre.

### Owner/manager.

Dobele District Municipality.

### Heritage category.

Listed site of state significance.

### Short historical background.

The Dobele Castle Ruins is one of the most iconic fortification monuments from the Middle Ages in the country. It stood initially as a 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century wooden fort for a Semigallian tribe. From 1330, it was a residence for the Livonian Order, and from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was the property of the Duchy of Courland. In the last 300 years, the ruins have been gradually disappearing and lacking in function. This architectural and archaeological monument of national significance is worthy of protection and is the property of the Dobele District Municipality.

Only part of the castle wall which was in a state of ruin had been preserved in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays, it has also allowed for the approximate reconstruction of its dimensions and planning outlines.

The first known preservation and local restoration of a fragment of the chapel ruins was undertaken in 1884 under the leadership of the Baltic German local researcher August Bielenstein. This was the first known conservation, in today's understanding, of castle ruins in Latvia.

The remains of three towers had disappeared by the 1930s, and the height of the long wall declined by 50 – 100 cm.

In the 1990s, a large part of the rubble-filled wall on the northern façade collapsed. The chapel's window frame arches on the northern façade had also lost about 60 – 80% of their stability.

Temporary conservation of critical fragments of the chapel ruins was undertaken in 2008. Warning signs about the dangers of approaching the ruins were installed due to the rapidly increasing and critical danger of collapse.

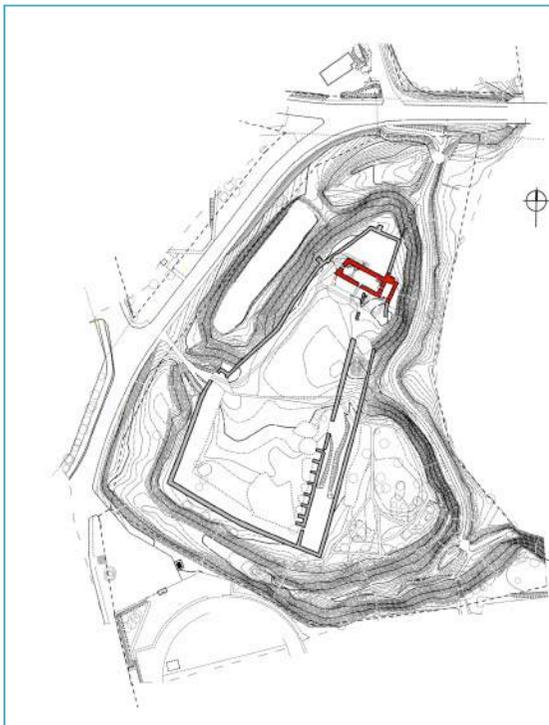
The oldest graphic portrayals:

- 1659 – Dobele Castle plan –
- 1661 – Drawing of the overall view of Dobele Castle (aut. *Storno*) in Friedrich Adelung, *Sammlung Von Ansichten, Gebräuchen, Bildnissen, Trachten U.S.W.: Welche Der Röm. Kaiserl. Gesandte Augustin Freyherr Von Meyerberg Auf Seiner Reise Und Während Seines Aufenthaltes In Russland in den Jahren 1661 und 1662 hat entwerfen lassen*, 1827.

- 1701 – Plan of the Dobele settlements and Swedish king Charles XII's army camp. Swedish War Archive
- 1792 and 1795 - Dobele hillfort and castle ruins were drawn and described by Johann Christoph Brotze, while around 1827, the castle was measured and drawn by K. G. Rečs for Governor-General Filippo Paulucci (Филипп Осипович Паулуччи) album.

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*Image No. 1, plan of the Castle ruins, photo: SIA Konvents grafika    Image No. 2, castle tower before restoration, photo: P. Blūms, 2016*



*Image No. 3, Western view to the castle before and after intervention; photo: Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision" 2020*

### **Main issues.**

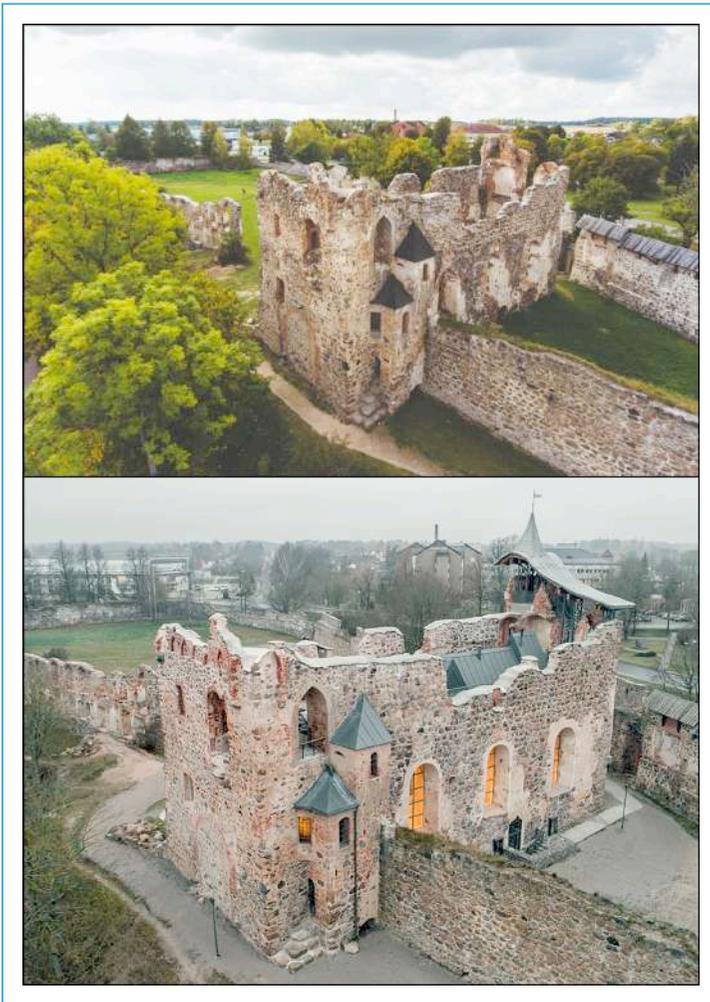
The Dobele Castle Ruins have been subject to a continuing and dynamic process in which the masonry architecture, finish and interior have been gradually disappearing over the past 300 years. The entire roof and ceiling structures have completely disappeared, including the arches, 3 of the four corner towers, the filling of the apertures, the stairs, the majority of the interior decor and finish, and all of the upper sections of the external walls to a height of 1 to 5 metres.

In the early 21st century, the castle ruins and the chapel especially, critically lacked:

- Elementary safety;

- Nominal accessibility to the environment;
- Conveniences and minimum sanitary facilities;
- The availability of information;
- In 2004, it was included on the register of the 100 most endangered cultural monuments.

The basic task for the Planner from the Contracting Authority was to develop proposals for the most sustainable possible preservation for the chapel ruins, improving the access and convenience of the environment, and to resolve the acute safety problems.



*Image No. 4, Castle view before and after intervention, photo: Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision" 2020*

## Research.

In 1869, August Bielenstein commenced the unearthing of the castle church from the ruins, and this unearthing work was continued in 1883 and 1884 by Carl Boy and A. Bielenstein.

From 1916 to 1917, Bernhard Schmidt surveyed and measured the hillfort and stone castle. Ernests Brastiņš then led an expedition in 1923. Jolanta Daiga organized and led excavations in 1958 and 1959.

From 1987 to 1991, Mārtiņš Ruša undertook excavations in the territory at the front of the castle. Archaeological supervision and research work took place in 2012 and 2015, and from 2018 to 2020 headed by Andris Tomašūns.

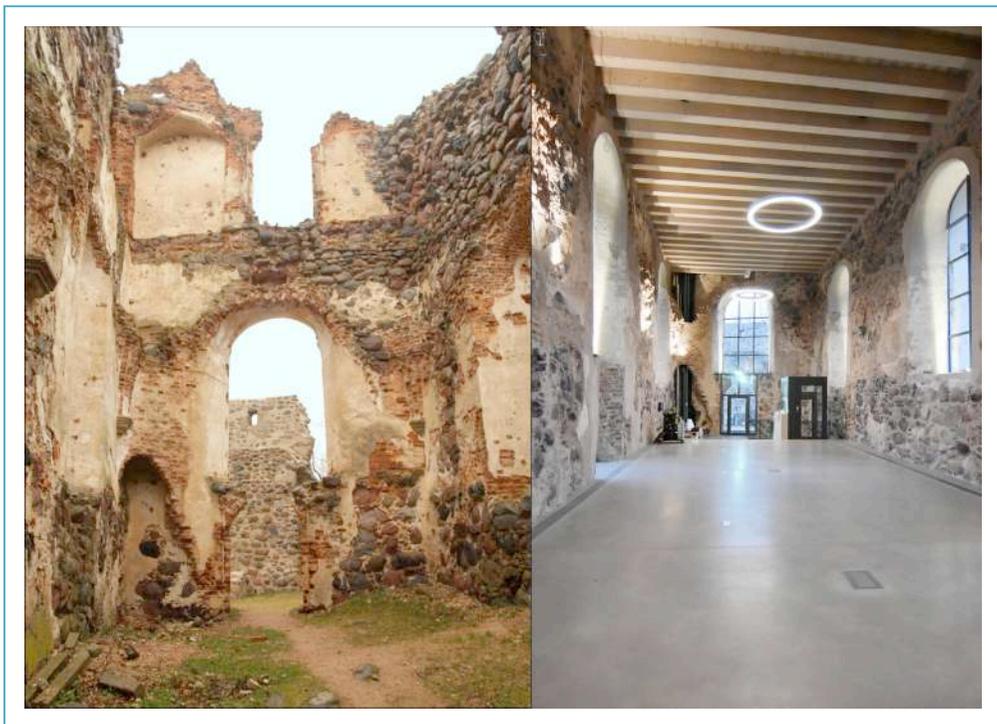
Perimetric conservation of the defensive walls of Dobele Castle Ruins has been taking place in sections since 2002 (headed by arch. P. Blūms).

In 2004, the preservation, conservation and revitalization concept for the former castle chapel (the Dobele Castle's main building up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century – the convent building) was formulated (P. Blūms).

In 2008 – 2009, the architectonic research, measurement and documentation of the chapel ruins was drafted.

In 2010 – the conservation and reconstruction plan was developed and approved, but work was not commenced.

In 2016 – the conservation and reconstruction plan was approved and implemented.



*Image No. 5, interior view before and after intervention; photo: to the left - P. Blūms, 2016, to the right - Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision", 2020*

## Implementation of the conservation works.

Work on the implementation of the plan took place in 2018 – 2020.

The implementation of the castle chapel revitalization plan was a new, innovative preservation and functional regeneration concept for ruins from the Middle Ages. Principally, it moved away from the "restoration" and renewal of missing sections as the dominating method. The primary task was put forward as being the sustainable preservation of the existing substance and its authenticity and the logical application of contemporary architectural and design solutions in the preservation techniques in the construction, materials for the design and the details to realize new functions.

## Contractor.

Consistent with the results of the open competition, the construction work was undertaken by the RERE Meistari 1 construction company.

Construction supervision was undertaken by SIA RS Būvnieks, author supervision was undertaken by SIA Konvents, and archaeological supervision was provided by Andris Tomašūns.

## Main planners.

SIA Konvents - Pēteris Blūms – certified architect, architectural restoration qualification – an experienced professional (section head for the building project, architecture, restoration and conservation, building project concept author, and main author supervision);

SIA Konvents - Līva Garkāje (architect's assistant, building planning and territory section specification and implementation (2016), main author supervision assistant);

Irēna Boks (building construction section head and author supervision) and Ilmārs Andrējevs (building construction section and author supervision assistant) from SIA Office of Architect. Ināra Caunīte.

Main building contractor: *PS RERE MEISTARI 1*

Main subcontractors:

- *Bartłomiej Kubiak konserwacja zabytkow*, Director - Restorer Bartłomiej Kubiak (Wall conservation and restoration);-
- Archaeological research and supervision - Archaeologist Andris Tomašūns;
- *SIA TIMBERO LATVIA* Project Manager Ritis Lapienis (Wooden ceilings and wooden roof structures);
- *SIA Cascade Mining* Project Manager Ronalds Gofmanis (General construction and metal structures);
- Zaļenieki Commercial and Craft Secondary School, Deputy Director in the Education Section Valija Barkovska (restoration assistant trainee)
- SIA J.E.F.* Project Manager Jānis Fogels and Gatis Zerviņš (external and interior, low intensity current and electrical system construction);
- *SIA KRONE IB* Project Manager, Jānis Gagainis (windows, glazed façade's internal partitions and glazed doors);

### Sources of funding.

The project was implemented as part of a joint initiative: *The Preservation and Development of Significant Cultural Historical Heritage for the Improvement of the Supply of Cultural Tourism in the Zemgale Region*, which includes the renewal of several items within the region.

Financing was received by the Jelgava City Municipality.

The total cost of construction was 2,544,371 euros, with 939,593 euros of this being ERAF co-funding, while the contribution of Dobeles District Municipality was 1,604,778 euros.

The scope of financing was not exceeded during the work.

### Main issues during the works.

Archaeological monitoring of earthwork took place throughout the period of building construction.

The most complicated types of substance conservation/preservation work:

- The project was developed with the ruins being in critical danger of collapse, prior to the inspection of the upper zone of the ruins and prior to the uncovering of the collapsed cellar;
- Authentic preservation of deeply eroded brick decor elements and part of the wall from the Middle Ages;
- Consolidation of large fields of rendering from the 15th -17<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- Strengthening of the shell masonry of the supporting wall and renewal of lost sections;
- The renewed construction of all underground engineering communications from a distance of 50 to 150 metres (electricity, gas, water mains and sewerage) was completed for the object with oriented horizontal micro-tunnelling technology without affecting the archaeological cultural layer;
- The need for handmade bricks of a specific size;
- A very high proportion of highly qualified preservation work, of the walls from the Middle Ages by hand;
- Risks that are associated with extremely large moisture-saturation of historical walls;
- The item and all of the territory adjacent to it is an archaeological monument.

The following should be noted as important innovations in preservation techniques:

- the covering of the upper part of the sculptural relief of the wall ruins with a detached, ventilatable fibre-reinforced concrete protective layer – the solution was developed by *SIA Konvents* and was used for the first time in this project;
- Special chapel window glazing techniques.

### Discoveries.

1. In the upper section of the building's northern wall after the construction of the scaffolding:

a) Evidence was established of conservation work dated 1884, on the top section of the wall;

b) After the work on the cleaning up of the rendering – restoration work on the elements of the wall from 1884;

c) Research was undertaken on the original substance of the top section of the 16th century western wall, in areas that had been physically inaccessible up till now and had been in danger of collapse;

2. A rich range of 13<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century artefacts was obtained during the archaeological investigation period and evidence of buildings around the chapel that existed in the 6<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century were established.

3. 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative polychrome features (window frames, corner details etc.) of the façade that had been unknown up till that point were discovered in the investigatory work undertaken during the author supervision process.
4. Features of warm air heating equipment from the Middle Ages were discovered during the work.
5. A map from 1701 of Dobele Castle and manor, that had been unknown in Latvia up till now, was discovered in the Swedish War Archives during the author supervision process.

## Results.

The rebirth of the whole castle, or its *renaissance*, as it can also be called, has taken place along with the renewal of the chapel. Dobele Castle has gained specific new ways of being utilized, while the city – has regained its origins in the image of a *living castle*; The city has gained a wonderful place for formal events (educational, social and cultural events, chamber concerts, wedding registrations, the receiving of guests, official receptions etc.).

The city's silhouette has gained a contemporary and symbolic summit;

A safe and conveniently accessible place to find out about the castle's history and the beginnings of the city up close, and without the risk of falling stones, has been developed in the castle ruins. The chapel building, its construction history, destiny, and artefacts close up, starting from the cellar and finishing up with the terrace at the level of the roof gallery can be discovered in an information-rich and informative way;

An opportunity has now come about to see the surroundings and the city from the roof terrace, from a view which the defenders of the castle once had, and with a quality that had never been possible before;

Convenient access has now been ensured for the upper parts of the wall for its maintenance needs and regular upkeep;

The southern facade of the chapel has become an outstanding architectural background for large open-air concerts and events;

The night lighting of the chapel's façades is a completely new quality in the Dobele city environment.

Dobele's Livonian Order Castle ruins, the rebuilt chapel building of which is the property of the Dobele District Municipality, Dobele Local History Museum affiliate *Dobeles Pils*. After its handover for use, it has become a multi-functional, cultural and craft tourism development centre, employing professional and qualified personnel – guides, tourism and museum specialists and technical personnel.

The site is accessible to visitors 5 days a week.

For illustration: <https://www.facebook.com/DobelesPils/videos/883891395572786>

<https://www.facebook.com/DobelesPils/>

<https://www.latvia.travel/en/sight/dobele-castle-ruins>

<https://www.aula.lv/en/pasakumi-1/visit-to-dobele-castle>

<https://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv/dobeles-pilskalns/>

<https://www.atrastalatvija.lv/objekts/dobeles-pils/>

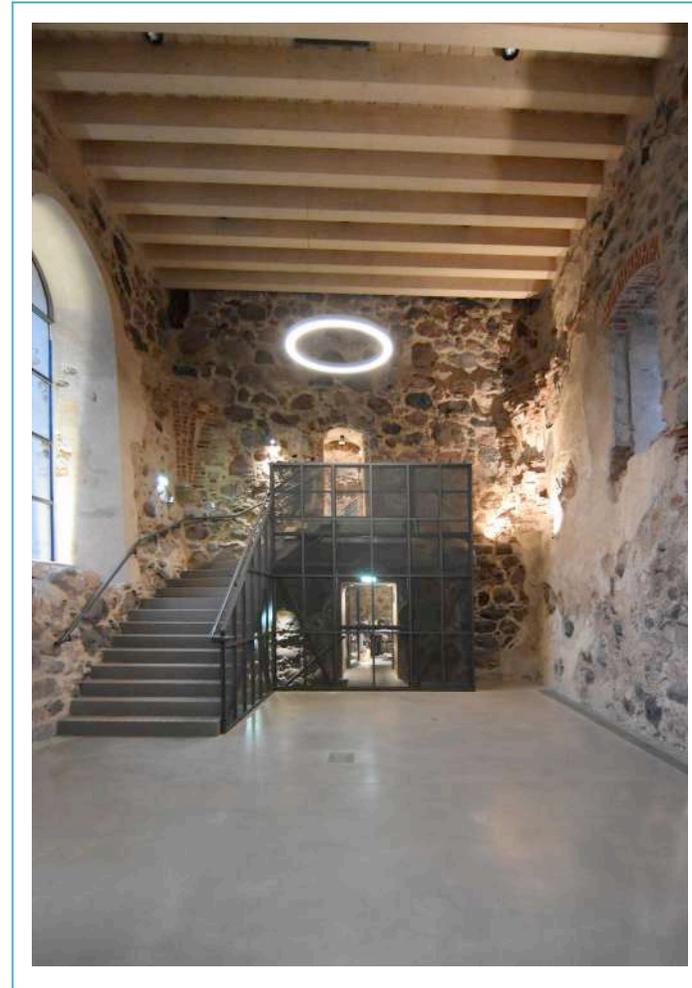
<http://pilis.lv/act/castls-manors/castle-popup?id=9392>



*Image No. 6, Southern façade after intervention, photo: Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision" 2020*



*Image No. 7, Façade element after intervention,  
photo: Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision" 2020*



*Image No. 8, Interior elements after intervention,  
photo: Kaspars Krauze "Krauzevision" 2020*

## Plans for the future.

The continuation of the improvement of the territory of the castle ruins and the realization of new projects is planned, to extend the educational, preservation process of the historical substance and the learning of practical skills, and to create an open-air amphitheatre in the northern courtyard.

The renewal of the walled-up gates in the southern wall and the bridge across the protective moat, which are needed to improve access conditions for visitors are planned.

The renewal of the lost parts of the castle to their original appearance is not planned, but the investigation and conservation of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17th century castle palace ruins will be continued.

## Evaluation.

The realization of the project has not had an impact on the physical dimensions of the cultural monument of state significance – the Dobele Castle Ruins - nor the chapel's overall external image. But positive changes have taken place in the perception of the harmony of the castle ruins and the non-verbal message which is provided by its new image, about the attitude of the community and the state's cultural processes to the preservation of heritage and the identity of the place.

At its very foundation, the results of the project change the context and semantics of the perception of the *main ruins* of the municipality's centre, as it confirms the dialogue between historical heritage and contemporary architecture, as well as the capacity to be an intermediary in the dilemma and solutions between society and the *inviolability of heritage*.

The results of the process motivate the further search for criteria and new attitudes towards the entirety of the Dobele Castle Ruins as such.

The results of the conceptual project do not change the physical scale of the item, but raise the Dobele Castle Ruins to a different category of value in the cultural historical environment.

The building stage of the conservation reconstruction project for the Dobele Castle chapel was completed relatively recently. Currently, the setting up of the interior exposition is continuing, while the realization of the improvement plan for the northern courtyard still lies ahead.

The realization of this project has created wide resonance within society. A range of articles have been written in the local and national media about it. Two lectures about the project from the authors and several videos are already available on the internet. The building gained 1<sup>st</sup> place in the competition for Latvia's Best Building in the Restoration category in 2020.

The National Cultural Heritage Administration has recognized the quality of this preservation project and delivered a positive opinion in the approval for its use. The Municipality awarded the architect of the idea and project, Pēteris Blūms, the highest personal Certificate of Distinction.

This site is beginning a new development process for public and national scale identity. It can be certainly stated that the Dobele Castle Ruins have never been visited by such a great number of people who want to see the specific results of this project.

One of the unexpected results in the public environment: Now in Dobele, they no longer say "Let's go to the castle ruins!", but – "Let's go to the castle!"

In one of the articles, the project architect has said that the greatest benefit of this project is the conceptual and practical diversity spectrum for the preservation of the castle ruins and the fundamental broadening of experience. This work marks a principally new dimension for the castle ruins' environment's preservation and perspective on development.

The conservation and reconstruction of the Dobele Castle chapel is, without exaggeration, a unique project which has no equivalent in the entire Baltic Sea region. It was and is daring to take a risk and challenge, as nothing similar has ever been done before. Starting with the initially unequivocally judged concept, a lack of faith and the possibility of it being realized, the lack of an analogy and range of technical difficulties. Almost every detail, item, and solution in this building was an innovation and an individual solution.

The second reason is the satisfaction and pride of local residents in it. There are no longer ruins in the centre of the city, and there is a castle again finally! With new life, light and hopes for the future.

### **More information.**

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