

Guide to

The principles of the conservation of historic buildings

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- Ancient Monuments Society
- Architects and Surveyors Institute
- Association of Building Engineers
- Association of Conservation Officers
- British Property Federation
- British Wood Preservation and Damp-proofing Association
- Building Conservation Trust
- Chartered Institute of Building
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- Council for British Archaeology
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- Redundant Churches Fund
- Royal Institute of British Architects
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- Royal Town Planning Institute
- Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
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Contents

	Page
Committees responsible	Inside front cover
Foreword	ii
Guide	
1 Introduction	1
2 Scope	2
3 Informative references	2
4 Definitions	2
5 Legislation and standards	3
6 The objectives of conservation	4
7 Conservation in practice	8
Annexes	
A (informative) Legislation and guidance	16
B (informative) Sources of finance	18
C (informative) Bibliography	20
D (informative) Conservation manuals, log books and five-yearly inspections	24
E (informative) Useful names and addresses	25
List of references	Inside back cover

Foreword

This British Standard has been prepared by Subcommittee B/209/12.

This guide is intended to provide building owners, managers, archaeologists, architects, engineers, surveyors, contractors, conservators and local authority building control officers with general background information on the principles of the conservation of historic buildings, when considering conservation policy, strategy and procedures.

It is important that this guide should be read in the context of the historical development of the theory and principles of conservation. When using the guide it should be recognized that the principles enunciated neither conform precisely to any previous manifesto or charter, nor are they intended to be definitive or prescriptive. It is inevitable that conservation theory will continue to evolve and that this guide will itself become historical and be subject to review in due course.

The guide stems from and has been prepared at the request of English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments) and the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment (NI).

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Summary of pages

This document comprises a front cover, an inside front cover, pages i and ii, pages 1 to 26, an inside back cover and a back cover.

Guide

1 Introduction

1.1 General

The immediate and obvious objective of building conservation is to secure the preservation of the nation's stock of buildings, and in particular its historic buildings and fine architecture, in the long term interest of society.

The underlying objectives are cultural, economic and environmental.

Attempts to separate out the objectives of conservation into distinct components, however, are usually unsatisfactory, since the issues are complex and often interlocked.

1.2 Vernacular building

When people first began to build, they built for themselves, without the aid of specialist builders. What they built was, in the precise meaning of the term, 'vernacular', that is native or of the country (in French 'du pays') and the system by which the people of a particular place built was developed empirically over many generations; interlocked with land use and seasonal patterns. Ways of building varied more or less from settlement to settlement, following variations of topographical, geological, climate and transport limitations and other geographic, social and ethnographic factors. Even the more refined ways of building were, until very recently, subject to the same local and vernacular influences. Such is the basis of what can be termed the architectural geography of the United Kingdom. It is the local and vernacular materials and construction of buildings of all sorts which reflect local geology, climate and culture and which contribute to a sense of place.

1.3 Architecture as cultural expression

The aim of good builders throughout the ages has been to produce buildings which were as well built as they could be with whatever materials and skills were available. Such buildings served the needs of the people who required them, and their form and decoration were refined as a means of cultural expression. In the first century BC the Roman architect Vitruvius defined the three essential attributes of architecture, and these were translated into English in the seventeenth century as 'commodity, firmness and delight'. The integration and balancing of function, sound construction and aesthetics remains the essential objective of all architectural activity. Buildings of all sorts and of all periods contain information about the way in which people lived, worked and worshipped, about how they built and about how they thought and wished to present their own culture, or even their spiritual values. They can also be beautiful, or potentially so, either in a formal way as fine architecture, or in a narrative, picturesque way, or in both ways.

1.4 The artisan tradition

With the development of specialization, and particularly with the growth of the trades in the well-ordered burghs, or boroughs, of mediaeval and post-mediaeval Britain, building practice advanced steadily and became more standardized and subject to regional, national and, indeed, international cultural influences. While some rural buildings, particularly in more remote parts of the country, remained self-built in the local tradition and thus genuinely vernacular until the beginning of the twentieth century, most ordinary town, village and estate building in the post-mediaeval period was by carpenters (or wrights), masons and bricklayers, often with the aid of pattern books, and should properly be termed artisan. The empirical development and refinement of building practice in response to changing needs and circumstances was continued by the trades until the onset of the industrial age and beyond. The architecture and the craftsmanship of many of these buildings are of a very high order.

1.5 Fine architecture

Societies, communities and powerful people of all periods have used their principal buildings as a means of expressing their authority, sanctity, wealth or sophistication, and often all of these things at the same time. The fine architecture which a society produces is as much a reflection of its culture and ethos as dress is an expression of individual personality. Whether major churches, public or institutional buildings or private houses, such buildings, although commonly built of local materials and by the local trades, were characteristically designed by people who could be described as architects. The architecture of such buildings tended to be sophisticated, fashionable, to express national cultural characteristics and often international influences which were representative of the intellectual orientation, political or trading alliances of the time. Fine architecture, as much as painting and sculpture, literature and music represents the high culture of the age in which it was created.

1.6 The age of industry

The rapid development of Britain's power in the nineteenth century through a combination of empire and industrialization led to a major increase in the total quantity of building, largely but not only in the cities. This in turn led to major technical advances in the mechanization of building in traditional materials, through the introduction of Portland cement and through the use of iron and steel, most notably in large engineering structures such as bridges and train sheds, but also in the development of framed buildings. Throughout much of the country, however, the artisan building tradition was largely unaffected and most ordinary buildings continued to be built by hand from basic unprocessed materials until well into the twentieth century. Nineteenth century buildings of all sorts survive in use throughout the country in very large numbers and make up a substantial part of the fabric of present day towns and cities.

1.7 War, modernism and planning

Largely as a consequence of the two world wars, the twentieth century has seen development and change at a rate which is of a different order to that of any previous period. In the course of the century, the building trades, ways of building and attitudes to urban development have changed substantially. As the cost of labour and skill increased, and the price of energy fell dramatically, builders turned increasingly to mechanized and industrialized methods based on the rapid assembly of large and small factory-made components and cast-in-situ concrete. Such was the confidence in the possibilities which the new technology offered that it was believed for a time that in the future all buildings would be replaced by new ones at least once and perhaps twice per century. Traditional building methods were rejected, misunderstood or forgotten. Maintenance was to be superseded by renewal and towns were threatened with wholesale redevelopment. The rapid growth of the architectural conservation movement was in response to this threat, and became part of a wider environmental movement. Pressure for renewal receded and the desirability of retaining sound buildings, particularly historic buildings, gained wide acceptance. The best modern architecture, as much as that of any other period, evokes the spirit of the age which produced it. Paradoxically, since much of it was designed neither to last nor to be maintained, the conservation of post-war listed buildings presents new technical challenges.

1.8 The conservation movement

The conservation movement has its origins in eighteenth century enlightenment, antiquarianism and romanticism and developed in the nineteenth century through the writings of Scott, Pugin and Ruskin, the manifesto written in 1877 by William Morris for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the first Ancient Monuments Act and the founding of the National Trust.

In the twentieth century, the consolidation of ruins and the care of ancient sites by the State was developed by HM Office of Works, while accelerating change led to the growth of preservation and amenity societies. After 1945 the listing and legal protection of buildings was established through a succession of Town and Country Planning Acts. This growth of interest in buildings and landscapes of cultural heritage was matched by increasing concern for the natural heritage and pressure to control pollution, ecological damage and resource consumption. These once separate strands together make up the modern conservation movement.

International recognition of the importance of building conservation was achieved in 1966 with the publication of the Venice Charter by ICOMOS, followed in 1981 by the Burra Charter of ICOMOS Australia.

2 Scope

This guide provides information, advice and guidance on the principles of the conservation of historic buildings, and is thus applicable to buildings, civil engineering and other standing structures which are either included in the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest or are scheduled ancient monuments.

It also gives information on the settings of these buildings and structures, their interiors and associated contents, fixtures and fittings, and the design of new work in the context of historic buildings. Some of the information given can also be of relevance in assessing proposals for buildings of architectural or historic interest which are not listed or scheduled, particularly those which contribute to the special interest of conservation areas.

3 Informative references

This British Standard refers to other publications that provide information or guidance.

Editions of these publications current at the time of issue of this standard are listed in informative annexes A, B and C, and on the inside back cover, but reference should be made to the latest editions.

4 Definitions

For the purposes of this British Standard, the definitions given in BS 6100 apply, together with the following.

NOTE. The terms defined are those which can be regarded as having precise or technical meanings in the context of building conservation. No definitions are offered for such general terms as refurbishment, rehabilitation or renovation.

4.1 alteration

Work the object of which is to change or improve the function of a building or artefact or to modify its appearance.

4.2 archaeology

Scientific study and interpretation of the past, based on the uncovering, retrieval, recording and interpretation of information from physical evidence.

NOTE 1. Archaeological evidence in buildings is as likely to be visible or concealed in the superstructure as below the ground.

NOTE 2. Archaeological investigation can be destructive.

4.3 conservation

Action to secure the survival or preservation of buildings, cultural artefacts, natural resources, energy or any other thing of acknowledged value for the future.

NOTE. Where buildings or artefacts are involved, such actions should avoid significant loss of authenticity or essential qualities.

4.4 conservation area

Area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance.

4.5 conversion

Alteration, the object of which is a change of use of a building or artefact, from one use or type to another.

4.6 design

Abstract concept of a building or artefact. It can exist in the mind or on paper and if realized, it can be represented in the building or artefact itself.

NOTE. The design of a building can be original and unaltered, or it can be a composite made up of a series of successive designs.

4.7 fabric

Physical material of which a building or artefact is made.

NOTE. Its state at any particular time will be a product of the original design and of everything to which it has been subject in the course of its history, including deliberate alterations based on well considered secondary or subsequent designs, careless changes, the effects over time of weather and use, damage and decay.

4.8 intervention

Any action which has a physical effect on the fabric of a building or artefact.

4.9 maintenance

Routine work necessary to keep the fabric of a building, the moving parts of machinery, grounds, gardens or any other artefact, in good order.

4.10 preservation

State of survival of a building or artefact, whether by historical accident or through a combination of protection and active conservation.

4.11 protection

Provision of legal restraints or controls on the destruction or damaging of buildings or artefacts, natural features, systems, sites, areas or other things of acknowledged value, with a view to their survival or preservation for the future.

NOTE. Any intervention or work likely to affect the essential qualities of a building or its character, land or anything which is legally protected would normally require a consent to be obtained through a procedure established by the relevant legislation (see annex A).

4.12 rebuilding

Remaking, on the basis of a recorded or reconstructed design, a building or part of a building or artefact which has been irretrievably damaged or destroyed.

4.13 reconstruction

Re-establishment of what occurred or what existed in the past, on the basis of documentary or physical evidence.

NOTE. The strength of this evidence determines how accurate or hypothetical the reconstruction is.

4.14 repair

Work beyond the scope of regular maintenance to remedy defects, significant decay or damage caused deliberately or by accident, neglect, normal weathering or wear and tear, the object of which is to return the building or artefact to good order, without alteration or restoration.

NOTE. Most repair work should be anticipated and planned, but occasionally it can be required in response to a specific event, such as a storm or accident.

4.15 replication

Making an exact copy or copies of a building or artefact.

4.16 restoration

Alteration of a building, part of a building or artefact which has decayed, been lost or damaged or is thought to have been inappropriately repaired or altered in the past, the objective of which is to make it conform again to its design or appearance at a previous date.

NOTE. The accuracy of any restoration depends on the extent to which the original design or appearance at a previous date is known, or can be established by research.

4.17 reversibility

Concept of work to a building, part of a building or artefact being carried out in such a way that it can be reversed at some future time, without any significant damage having been done.

5 Legislation and standards

5.1 Legal protection of buildings and sites

Structures, including buildings and buried archaeological remains, can be given legal protection by scheduling under ancient monuments legislation, or by inclusion in the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historical interest, or by inclusion in a conservation area under planning legislation (see annex A).

NOTE. Ecclesiastical buildings in use for ecclesiastical purposes may be exempt from listed buildings and conservation area legislation, particularly those of the Church of England. However, listed ecclesiastical buildings are subject to their own legislation (see A.14) and advice should be sought from the Advisory Committee of the Diocese (DAC).

Areas and sites can be protected under natural heritage legislation.

NOTE. Where buildings or sites are protected, intervention can require a formal consent to be obtained, through a procedure established by the relevant legislation.

5.2 Application of standards and codes of practice

Old buildings that have stood the test of time require judgement to be exercised when decisions are being made about their conservation. This judgement should be based on an understanding of principles informed by experience and knowledge, including that of relevant legislation. British Standards and other specifications and codes of practice should not be applied unthinkingly, in the context of building conservation. While the application of particular specifications, structural design codes and calculations can be appropriate in many circumstances, there can be other circumstances where it will be necessary to follow professional experience and judgement, on the basis of what has been proved to work.

6 The objectives of conservation

6.1 General

The conservation of buildings can be justified on cultural, economic and environmental grounds, usually in combination. Well researched analysis of the reasons for conservation will often help to resolve conflicting pressures, between which balances should be struck and assist good decision making.

6.2 Cultural objectives

6.2.1 Analysis of cultural objectives

There are two general reasons for the preservation of a building on cultural grounds:

- a) historical: for the information or evidence of the past embodied in it; and
- b) aesthetic: for its beauty, its value as a work of fine architecture, or for the works of craftsmanship or art incorporated in it.

A building should always be considered with regard to its history and as a whole, interior as well as exterior. Where appropriate, its setting, fixtures, fittings and associated contents should also be taken into account.

6.2.2 The historical component

An understanding of contemporary society as a basis for contemplating the future depends to a significant extent on knowledge of the past. Proper understanding and interpretation of history depends crucially on the evidence of primary sources, including original documents, artefacts and the results of archaeological investigation. Complete buildings and the remains of buildings incorporated within later structures are almost always of value as primary source material.

The more rare a building is (and older buildings tend to be rarer) the more valuable can be the evidence which it contains. However, many buildings are more complex than they appear and can contain work of several periods overlaid one upon the other, and it is often difficult to know what evidence the fabric can contain.

Consideration of the historical component of cultural value leads to the following general principles.

- a) Much work to historic buildings is of a specialist nature, and requires skills that are attained by specialist conservation training and by experience. The need for this expertise applies to all aspects of the work, including survey and archaeological investigation, design and specification, and any building and artefact conservation involving historic fabric.
- b) Authentic material within the fabric, fixtures and fittings from any period or phase of building is always of potential value and should be treated with respect.

NOTE. Where buildings or artefacts are involved, conservation should avoid significant loss of authenticity or essential qualities.

- c) In advance of any building operation, sufficient survey, investigation, evaluation and recording should be undertaken to give reasonable confidence that the building, its development and historical importance are sufficiently understood, that nothing of significant value is likely to be inadvertently damaged or destroyed, and work appropriately designed and specified.

NOTE. Such work should be designed, specified and carried out by people with appropriate knowledge and experience.

- d) As far as practicable, material should be left undisturbed and in situ.
- e) Material containing significant information which cannot, for any reason, be left in situ, should be carefully recorded and, if appropriate, separately preserved. The destruction of significant historical evidence without adequate recording is never acceptable.

- f) Any new work which is matched to the old for aesthetic reasons should be recorded and should be finished in such a way that it can be distinguished from the original by discreet dating or other means.

- g) Evidence and information retrieved in the course of work should be carefully logged. A proper record of the building and the work done should be made. In the case of particularly sensitive or significant buildings, this should be written up into a report, one copy of which should be kept in the building or with other building documentation and another deposited in an appropriate archive.

6.2.3 Human settlement patterns

Evidence of the past can lie in the way in which human settlements have developed, in property boundaries, the disposition of buildings within settlements and in the buildings themselves. Over time, and particularly in the twentieth century, there has been a tendency for plots to be aggregated and for large new buildings to replace groups of small ones. Where settlement patterns are of historical significance, it should be an objective that plot boundaries and the general scale and form of development are maintained. Buildings or ancillary structures which are neither old nor of intrinsic historical interest can nevertheless be significant because of their relationship with the principal building or the settlement as a whole and should not be disregarded or undervalued.

6.2.4 The aesthetic component

Nearly all buildings were built with the intention that they should look well, in addition to being sound and useful. Some were built with serious artistic intent. The beauty of a building, or a work of architecture, can depend on these intended or formal qualities of its design, or it can depend on the informal qualities which are derived from age, maturity, patina and the accidents of history. The beauty of a building as a component of its cultural value is quite independent of the contribution which that beauty can make to the immediate environment. It is intrinsic to the building, like that of a painting or a piece of sculpture.

Buildings also behave in different ways in response to the passage of time. Some survive unchanged, others are altered repeatedly; some are tolerant of change, others are not. Some, mainly older buildings, decay in a graceful way, others degenerate into ugly dereliction. Often, in the case of buildings of recent origin, using modern materials, little is known about their long-term performance; great care is needed to determine appropriate methods of repair. Unlike historical authenticity, which once lost can never be regained, the lost or buried beauty of a building can often be recovered, through a combination of conservative repair and, where appropriate, restoration.

Consideration of the aesthetic component of cultural value leads to the following general conclusions.

- a) The aesthetic response to a building can depend on:
 - 1) a single dominant architectural design;
 - 2) the interaction between two or more designs;
 - 3) an attractive or picturesque quality deriving from the juxtaposition of vernacular or artisan work;
 - 4) incorporated art or craft work;
 - 5) an archaeological approach to its narrative qualities and its legibility;

- 6) an art historical approach, based on knowledge of other work by the same architect, its place in architectural history etc;
- 7) the quality of its materials and craftsmanship;
- 8) patina and other qualities associated with age and long use;
- 9) historical or romantic associations;
- 10) setting or context;
- 11) fixtures, fittings and associated contents.

b) Before any decisions are made on an approach to conservation work, an appraisal of the aesthetic qualities of the building and aesthetic objectives of the work should be made.

c) Where the aesthetic and sensuous appeal of a building derives from the quality of its materials and craftsmanship, patina, etc., as well as its narrative power, the fact that it is picturesque, pretty and so on, the approach should be firmly based on the principles of minimum intervention and conservative repair.

d) While light cleaning and redecoration can form part of a normal maintenance regime, wholesale cleaning should seldom be undertaken on aesthetic grounds alone, and should be considered only where surface deposits can be shown to be harmful to the fabric.

e) Only on genuine structural or constructional grounds, or where beauty clearly depends on formal design qualities which have been compromised by changes not themselves of significant merit, should restoration be considered.

f) Aesthetic decisions should be based on an understanding of the history of the building and on an analysis of its aesthetic qualities and the objectives of the work.

g) It should be an objective that the building functions well, is structurally sound and looks well on completion of the work, and that these three aspects are well balanced and seamlessly integrated.

h) For the building to look well as a whole, new work should not attract more attention than the work of any other period. Whether it is carefully matched or discreetly contrasted, therefore, the composite result should be a well integrated whole.

i) New work should be carried out in such a way that the building is easy to maintain, and will age and weather gracefully.

6.2.5 Interpretation and education

The enjoyment derived from examining and understanding historic buildings can be enhanced by the availability of interpretative information. Its value will depend on its accessibility and reliability, and it should not interfere with the appearance of the building itself.



6.3 Economic objectives

6.3.1 *Analysis of economic objectives*

There are two ways in which conservation of a building can be of economic value:

- a) directly, in that it has a function and thus represents a positive asset; and
- b) indirectly, in that its character, quality, interest or beauty enhances the value of the immediate area in which it is set, or of the wider area or country as a whole.

Apart from scheduled ancient monuments, whose preservation, whether as complete or ruinous structures, can be justified on cultural grounds alone, the survival or preservation of a building ultimately depends on its continued use and its ability to 'earn its keep'.

Buildings of quality and in good order can also contribute to the quality of the environment and the economic health of the area and the country as a whole. Old buildings in good order and everyday use also create a sense of stability, continuity and confident well-being.

6.3.2 *Using the building stock*

Almost all buildings are capable of beneficial use, whether this is the use for which they were first designed, an existing secondary use, or some new or alternative use. To survive and to be of economic value they need to be used. Most buildings, however, need to be altered from time to time, and some require to be converted from one use to another.

Alteration should always be kept to a minimum and should, if possible, be reversible. With skill and understanding, alteration should not result in significant or unacceptable loss of cultural value.

6.3.3 *Long life, stability and continuity*

While flexibility, mobility and change have been features of life in the twentieth century, experience has shown that the frequent replacement of short life buildings incurs social, cultural and environmental costs, which have economic consequences. Conversely, stability and continuity, through buildings which last and continue to be useful, can bring economic benefits in a variety of ways. Conservation policies can generate a perception of stability and continuity, confidence and a climate in which economic activity can flourish.

6.3.4 *The value of good environment*

Fine architecture and good buildings in sound condition can be of great importance to the establishment and maintenance of good environment, both as an indicator of economic health and a stimulus to economic activity. There is ample evidence that environment affects human happiness and that people like living, working and simply being in beautiful, established places, in which buildings, trees and landscape have had time to mature together. That such places are perceived to be desirable means that they have economic value.

Even in places where poor environment is associated with a lack of building maintenance and general decay, the buildings can have the potential to contribute very positively to the environment, and conservation can be an effective instrument of economic regeneration.

6.3.5 *Employment and training*

The general care, maintenance and repair of buildings depends mainly on labour and skill. Older buildings in particular are almost infinitely maintainable and repairable, using simple materials and tools, and require a minimum of energy and other non-renewable resources. Such work requires dedication, skill, care and craftsmanship to various degrees. The results will often be visible and can give pleasure and satisfaction.

6.3.6 *Travel and tourism*

Older buildings, whether vernacular, artisan or fine architecture, have come to symbolize the relationship between the physical and economic geography of a place, its people and its culture. This sense of place derived from buildings has also been a major factor in the growth of tourism and one of the main objectives of many overseas visitors to the UK is to visit historic towns and buildings. Historic buildings can thus be of considerable economic value to the community as generators of income from tourism.

Where tourism is regarded as the primary justification for conservation, there is often a danger of more traditional and commonplace activities being displaced. Difficulties can then arise should the tourist trade fail to materialize. Older buildings are likely to be much more attractive to visitors if they are seen to be working parts of an active local economy which reflects the culture of a living society.

6.4 Environmental objectives

6.4.1 *Analysis of environmental objectives*

In the relatively recent past, people living in simple societies everywhere took for granted the right to enjoy as good a living environment as they could create for themselves, within a stable, secure, global environment, upon which their buildings and way of life made few demands. Their material standard of living, health and life expectancy, on the other hand, were generally poor by twentieth century standards. In the modern world, people in developed societies have become accustomed to relatively high material standards of living and levels of consumption. At the same time it has become increasingly clear that the environmental consequences of development have not always been well understood. Good living and working environments are difficult to create yet easy to destroy and are frequently dependent on good buildings, mature landscape and established social and economic structures. The maintenance of such qualities, wherever they exist and whether or not in the context of a conservation area, should be an objective of conservation actions.