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TREFLUNIO DINBYCH
A'R RHYL
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TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE
INITIATIVE



THE PRINCIPLES OF REPAIR OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

SCOPE OF GUIDANCE

This guidance note will assist both building owners and their professional consultants to understand the principles of conservation and repair of historic buildings, including those assisted through the Townscape Heritage Initiatives (THIs). There can be no standard specification for the repair of historic buildings except that a sensitive approach, embracing the principles of conservative repair, should always be taken. It is essential to identify causes before specifying remedies, by means of careful and accurate diagnosis, including monitoring of the structure, where this is appropriate.

THE PRINCIPLES OF REPAIR

The Purpose of Repair

The primary purpose of repair is to slow the process of decay without damaging the character of the building, altering the features which give it its historic or architectural importance, or unnecessarily disturbing or destroying historic fabric. Works of repair must be kept to the minimum required to stabilise and conserve buildings, with the aim of achieving a sufficiently sound structural condition to ensure their long-term survival.

Avoiding Unnecessary Damage

The authenticity of an historic building depends most crucially on the integrity of its fabric and on its design, which may be original or may incorporate different periods of addition or alteration. The unnecessary replacement of historic fabric, no matter how carefully the work is carried out, will have an adverse affect on the appearance of a building, will seriously diminish its authenticity, and will significantly reduce its value as a source of historical information.

Inevitably elements of the fabric will decay, or become defective in other ways, but the rate and extent to which this occurs will vary. For example, certain types of roof covering will require periodic complete or major replacement. Other elements, in particular masonry and the framing of walls and roofs, are more likely to decay slowly and in parts, rather than comprehensively, and will require a more selective approach.

Analysing Historic Development

A thorough understanding of the historical development of a building is a necessary preliminary to its repair. This may involve archaeological and architectural investigation, documentary research, recording and interpretation of the particular structure, and an assessment in a wider historic context. Such processes may, when appropriate, need to continue during the course of repairs. Satisfactory arrangements should be made for the subsequent preservation of all records in appropriate locations such as the County Sites & Monuments Record (SMR) and the National Monuments Record (NMR).

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Analysing the Causes of Defects

In addition to an analysis of the historic development of the building, the detailed design of repairs should also be preceded by the long-term observation of its structural defects, together with an investigation of the nature and condition of its materials and of the causes, processes and rates of decay. To repair or replace decayed fabric without first carrying out such an investigation is to invite the repetition of problems.

Adopting Proven Techniques

Repair techniques should match or be compatible with existing materials and methods of construction, in order to preserve the appearance and historic integrity of the building and to ensure that the work has an appropriate life. Exceptions should only be considered where the existing fabric has failed because of inherent defects of design or incorrect specification of materials, rather than from neglect of maintenance or because it has completed its expected life. New methods, techniques or materials should not be used unless traditional alternatives cannot be identified, and only if they have proved themselves over a sufficient period. In deciding whether to adopt a new approach to repairs, it will be necessary to balance the degree of benefit to the building in the future against any damage which may be caused to its appearance, historic integrity or fabric.

Truth to Materials

Repairs should be executed honestly, with no attempt at disguise or artificial ageing, but should not be necessarily obtrusive or unsympathetic in appearance. The general principle is always to renew or replace the minimum necessary to safeguard the building. When the replacement of historic fabric is unavoidably extensive, or significant in other ways, the work may be discreetly dated for future reference.

Restoration of Lost Features

Some elements of a building which are important to its design, for example balustrades, pinnacles, cornices, hood moulds, window tracery, and members of a timber frame or roof truss, may have been lost in the past. Where these are structurally significant, they will be put back in the course of repair; but a programme of repair may also offer opportunities for the reinstatement of missing non-structural elements, for example windows, railings, rainwater goods or shopfronts, provided that sufficient evidence exists for accurate replacement, no loss of historic fabric occurs, and the necessary statutory consents are obtained in advance.

A full analysis of the historical development of the building should be used to inform and justify works which are not strictly repairs, and a skilled conservation professional should be able to identify those features which it is desirable to reinstate or remove. At no time is speculative reconstruction justified.



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A Historic Building Regeneration Grant Scheme

Removal of Damaging Alterations

Additions or alterations, including earlier repairs, are of importance for the part they play in the cumulative history of a building. There should be always a strong presumption in favour of their retention. Whilst a programme of repairs may offer the opportunity for removing features which are of no intrinsic value in themselves, and which seriously disrupt the architectural design and aesthetic value of a building, the full implications of doing so must be carefully considered in advance, and potential architectural and aesthetic gains must be balanced against any likely loss of historic integrity. Work of this kind must be carefully measured and recorded and the necessary statutory consents obtained in advance.

Safeguarding the Future

An historic building should be regularly monitored at least every five years, and professionally maintained. The best way of securing its future, and of keeping further repair requirements to a minimum, is to secure an appropriate and sympathetic use for the whole of the building. It is especially important to utilise upper floors fully, so that any structural or weatherproofing problems, which generally manifest themselves first at high level, will be detected early on.

Further Practical Guidance

A number of national bodies in the UK publish documents which are very reasonably priced, giving advice and guidance on the practical aspects of implementing work to historic buildings. Names and contact points of the most relevant are:

Historic Scotland, Edinburgh - Policy & Technical Publications - 0131 668 8638

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings - Technical Information - 020 7377 1644

Georgian Group - Brief Guides & General Introductions - 020 7387 1720

English Heritage - Information Publications - 0870 333 1181

Glasgow West Conservation Trust - The West End Conservation Manual - 0141 339 0092

Building of Bath Museum - Conservation Advisory Booklets - 01225 333895

Specialist suppliers, consultants and craftsmen in traditional building conservation can be accessed at www.buildingconservation.com

This guidance is taken from *'The Repair of Historic Buildings : Advice on Principles and Methods'* 1991, Christopher Bereton, English Heritage.

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