



Introduction – Definition of Historic Buildings

The aim of this article is to highlight the differences in approach that should be adopted when dealing with historic buildings that are not constructed using mid to late Twentieth century/21st century technologies. Historic buildings present different challenges altogether. If there is one message to take away from this article it is that the technology and construction detail of any building (particularly those that are historic) must be known and understood before deciding how to repair and maintain it.



Key Objectives

The objective of repair is to reduce the long-term deterioration of a building's fabric by remedying the cause of any defects. This in turn sustains the significance of the building. For historic buildings, a conservative approach is fundamental to good conservation. Accordingly, and in order to achieve this objective we advise as follows:

- Retain as much of the significant historic fabric as possible.
- Understand how the building works.
- Understand the nature and condition of the buildings materials.
- Understand the causes / processes of decay.
- Keep changes to a minimum.

Any unnecessary replacement of historic fabric, no matter how carefully the work is carried out, can often adversely affect the character and significance of the property, and carrying out inappropriate or poorly-executed repairs may accelerate the deterioration of the building fabric. Sticking to the key objectives will greatly increase the chances of effecting appropriate repairs and preventing similar problems in the future, whilst also negating unnecessary and costly future maintenance repairs.



Approaches to Repair

When renovating historic buildings, it will often require a more holistic approach. The headline factors and considerations below provide a guide.

- Only techniques and materials which have been demonstrated to be appropriate to the fabric should be considered. These will normally be the same as the original or parent material.
- Where a material or product is no longer available or appropriate, any alternative must have compatible properties to the original material, both technically and aesthetically.
- Interventions should maximise the life expectancy of the building fabric and consistent with sustaining its significance.
- Interventions should be reversible (if technically feasible and practicable) or retreatable and should not prejudice future interventions when these become necessary.
- Details of all works should be adequately recorded for future reference.
- Interventions should contribute to or at least not compromise the sustainability of future management and maintenance of the building in question.





Other Factors & Execution

For anyone responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of historic buildings there will be a number of more practical considerations to consider. These might include the following:

- Ease of pre-work investigation and opening up.
- Ease of access (scaffolding, restricted areas, neighbourly issues).
- Constraints / requirements of statute (i.e. consultation under statute or requirements of leases).
- Limitations of timing – this may result in investigations, monitoring and knowledge build up taking years (perhaps over one or two repair cycles).
- Funding constraints.

Any or all of the above factors may in reality dictate the timing and extent of executing repair works. However, it is better (than not) to have an understanding of the objectives and approaches as set out in this article so that the client and building owner can at least be appraised and advised clearly and as early on as possible.

Finally, in terms of execution it is vitally important that the surveyor and contractor tasked with delivering a renovation project are experts in their field. For example, there is a marked difference between a painting and decorating firm and a specialist renovation contractor and likewise the choice of surveyor will be critical to ensuring that the correct approach and advice is adopted and their knowledge, experience and expertise marry up with the requirements of the historic building in question.

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