

Conservation Guidelines

Conservation Principles/ General Information

Foreword

This series of booklets has been produced by the Department of the Environment to increase awareness of the value of our architectural heritage and to provide information on the basic principles and methods of conservation and restoration. The titles in the series are listed on the back of each booklet.

These texts are not intended to be comprehensive technical or legal guides. The main aim is to assist architects, builders, owners and others, in understanding the guiding principles of conservation and restoration. They will facilitate the identification of the most common problems encountered in heritage buildings, and indicate the best solutions. It should be appreciated that specialised aspects of conservation and restoration will require professional expertise and more detailed information.

The Department acknowledges, with appreciation, the efforts of the authors of the individual booklets, the Irish Georgian Society who coordinated their production, the Conservation Advisory Panel established under the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development and all others involved.

Summary of Conservation Principles

- Research prior to planning work
- Minimum intervention - repair rather than replace
- Respect the setting.

Summary of Conservation Procedure

- Research and analyse history of building
- Survey building and identify original material
- Plan work according to conservation principles
- Use experts where necessary
- Record all work
- Install maintenance procedures.

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Introduction

Conservation

Conservation of historic buildings can generally be considered as the action taken to prevent decay, and to prolong the life of our national architectural heritage. The conservation process should be carried out without damaging the building, and without destroying or falsifying historical evidence. Conservation aims at ensuring the long term survival of our heritage for the enjoyment of our own and future generations.

Since the 1960s Ireland has seen more changes to its landscape, and to its architectural heritage, than in any other period of history. The changes are evident in both town and country. Much has been lost, but much remains which now requires ongoing care, maintenance and protection. There has been a significant growth in public interest in and awareness of our built heritage, from thatched cottages, great country houses and shopfronts to bridges, mills and stone walls. Frequently, a new and compatible use has to be found for historic buildings, and this becomes one of the challenges of today.

Restoration and reconstruction

Restoration can be taken as the process of returning a heritage object to a known earlier state, without the introduction of new material. Reconstruction generally means altering a heritage object by the introduction

of new, or old, materials into the fabric, to produce a work which respects the original. The two processes are often intertwined and both must be approached with the utmost care.

Work is often undertaken on an old building, with the best of intentions and enthusiasm, which, through lack of information, or by the employment of inappropriate or incorrect methods, causes a great deal of unintentional damage, both aesthetic and technical. In many cases intervention may have been unnecessary in the first place.

Inappropriate pastiche is to be avoided, but well-executed replicas may, in certain cases, be acceptable. In new work, in a conservation context, the use of well-designed modern forms and materials, carefully chosen and respectful of their older environment, can be rewarding.

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Brief History

The first time that agreed international principles of conservation were laid down was in the Athens Charter of 1931. The charter was reviewed and updated in 1964 in the Venice Charter which deals with the conservation of historic buildings, the Burra Charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance (1979) and the Washington Charter of 1987 which deals with historic towns and districts; these charters were published by ICOMOS (the International Committee for Monuments and Sites).

At the time of the Venice Charter in 1964, other than the good conservation work being carried out by the National Monuments Service of the Office of Public Works, and by the Museums, there was limited general awareness in Ireland of the need to care for the country's historic heritage. This lack of awareness was particularly evident in the area of architecture, and some interesting and significant buildings were lost around that time in the course of redevelopment. While, to some extent, this is still happening, there is now a much greater awareness and appreciation of our built heritage.



An example of our varied built heritage

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Main Conservation Principles

- **Retention or restoration of historical significance**
- **Conservation process based on research**
- **Minimum physical intervention**
- **Maintenance of visual setting**

Retention or restoration of historical significance

The aim of conservation, as stated in the Burra Charter (ICOMOS), should be to retain, recover or reveal as much of the historical significance as is possible of the heritage object, whether building or artefact. Provision for its security, maintenance and future must be part of this aim. The end use of the restored or conserved building is therefore of vital importance, as any new use has to be compatible with the needs of the building.

Conservation process based on research

It is important to know and understand the history of the building, and its current physical condition, prior to the commencement of work. If this is not done, costly errors can be made and the completed project flawed.

Minimum physical intervention

It is hoped that these guidelines will encourage all those working in the field to adopt the basic guiding principle of minimum physical intervention. This means making the

minimum change to an historic building or place, in order to retain wherever possible the original fabric and character. It means, for example, repairing windows or shopfronts instead of replacing them. It means the careful striking of a balance between carrying out necessary repairs and eliminating problems, and preserving the authentic sense of history that many buildings and places in Ireland still possess.

Repair rather than replace

A logical outcome of the principle of minimum intervention is the concept of repair rather than replace. All too often original features, such as floor boards or old lime plaster, are consigned to the skip without a second thought. Initially the window frame or joist or cornice may look totally beyond repair to the untutored eye. However, on detailed examination original plaster or joinery can, in many cases, be retained or repaired, and there is no need for wholesale and expensive replacement. The result is a more authentic building which preserves the feeling of age and history, and respects the fabric and original craftsmanship.

It must be emphasised that at first sight the appearances of decay and damage in a neglected building may be misleading to the inexperienced eye.

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Accurate replacement

In the context of restoration, any necessary replacement should adhere exactly to the original, if possible. For instance, if parts of window joinery, or a cornice, are damaged beyond repair, and replacement is deemed necessary, then the emphasis should be on accurate replacement. At this stage it is important (1) to decide if the damaged or rotten portion is original, (2) if so, a sample of any existing moulding should be kept and (3) an exact copy should be made by a reputable craftsman.

It must be emphasised that very precise instructions, measurements and samples need to be given to craftsmen or builders to ensure that what is meant to be an exact copy does not turn out in the end to be a carelessly detailed imitation. This can happen, not through lack of expertise but through the craftsman or builder not realising the importance of accurate replication. There is scarcely a town in Ireland without a pseudo old-world shopfront where the details are clumsy imitations of original patterns.

Particular effort should be made to match the type and colour of the original for necessary stone and brick replacement work. Where possible, traditional and local materials should be employed in repair work. For example, damaged stone paving should be repaired by sourcing local stone where possible, rather than using stone from elsewhere, or manufactured paving.

Maintainance of visual setting

As stated in the Washington Charter, the setting of an historic building is integral with the whole and should be dealt with accordingly. This means that the demesne lands of a country house, the original frame of a painting and the historic streetscape of a town are all elements which should be conserved or restored where possible. Care should be taken to preserve historic parkland, as far as possible, when development proposals are being considered. In some instances maintenance of the setting may prove difficult in practical terms, but respect for the setting is of paramount importance in conservation/restoration work.

General Conjecture

Restoration and reconstruction aim at revealing cultural and historical values and should have authenticity as their base. Ideally, conjecture should not play a part in the process. However, in pragmatic terms, there may be occasions when educated conclusions can be implemented in order to ensure the viability of the whole project.

Identification of new work

All significant new work should be recorded, and identifiable, by documentation or photographic processes, and be visually identifiable where appropriate.

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Reversibility

Where any intervention in an historic building is planned, the concept of reversibility should be applied where possible. The endeavour should be that no work is undertaken which precludes the possibility of return to the original state.

Major intervention may be required to enable a building to survive, particularly as a result of a new usage. In all conversions the work should be limited to essentials and the approach should be that as little damage as possible is done to the building, and that all good architectural detail is retained. Any element of significance, unavoidably removed, should be kept safely, so that reinstatement is possible in the future.

Sustainable conservation

The process of conservation is an attempt to ensure the long term survival of our heritage. Part of this process involves finding appropriate uses for historic buildings, encouraging building owners to carry out proper maintenance and repair, and promoting the purchase of buildings which have been abandoned.

Conservation zones

In the context of buildings which have undergone considerable decay, the fabric requires evaluation to determine conservation zones within the building.

Conservation zones may extend throughout the whole building and its surroundings, in the case of important buildings in reasonable condition. Conversely, there are other buildings where the condition of the fabric, or the architectural merit, does not warrant a rigorous conservation approach throughout. In such buildings there may be areas which are not required to be conservation zones and where intervention can be tolerated and the need for accurate restoration lessened. Thus it is important to carry out a careful assessment of the building to establish if, and where, conservation zones exist. In order for the process of conservation to be sustainable, it is important that resources are directed to preservation and repair rather than replication, and the establishment of conservation zones within buildings is an important part of this process.

Modern solutions

In setting out the above principles, ingenuity in providing modern solutions to facilitate a change of use in a building, should not be ruled out, as the survival of the building may depend on such solutions.

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The conservation of modest original detail, such as this fanlight, is important.

Sequence of Conservation Work

1. Research and analysis of history and fabric

This is the vital first stage of conservation and restoration work. The history of a building can be discovered by searching out documentary evidence through old papers, maps, registers etc., and through written accounts and photographs of the period. The fabric of the building itself will also give clues to the past. Information gained from all these sources can be used in planning the conservation and restoration.

For more details see booklet No. 2 of this series *Sources of Information*.

2. Survey of Building

It is necessary to record the existing building by means of an overall and accurate measured survey, be it a cottage, castle or modest shop, prior to commencement of work. The survey should include plans, sections and elevations. Properly carried out surveys are often invaluable in identifying the building's history. A photographic record should also be

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made and a survey of the building may be necessary to establish if there are structural defects or other problems.

Identification of existing original material

Identification of original material is of great importance. Many original features are lost or damaged inadvertently through lack of knowledge. Decisions may have to be made as to whether or not it is appropriate to remove later additions. Many later alterations or additions may be valuable in their own right, and can be left as part of the 'story' of the building.

3. Plan restoration with minimum intervention

Restoration should be carefully planned and guided by the principles of conservation to ensure that the least intervention possible takes place. As always, repair rather than replace is the guiding rule. If missing features have to be re-instated, accurate detail must be ensured by careful research and precise instructions. Professional help should be sought in putting together the overall plan.

4. Implement under experienced supervision

Many owners of buildings do not possess the knowledge or experience needed for most restoration projects. Calling in a sympathetic professional, with experience of conservation and restoration work, at the early stages will

minimise the risk of costly error or unintentional damage being done.

5. Record work

It is important that a record, both written and photographic, should be kept during the course of the work, for future reference, and information.

6. Put in place regular maintenance procedures

An ongoing programme of inspection and maintenance must be put in place to ensure the building remains in good condition. This makes good economic sense as it is infinitely better to maintain and repair regularly, rather than face major and costly work when problems reach crisis point. Safety and security procedures should also be installed and implemented.

See booklet No. 16 of this series *Fire Safety, Security and Maintenance*.



The conservation of 20th century architecture should not be neglected.

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Financial Assistance

Direct grants for repair and conservation of historic buildings may be available from the Department of the Environment, under the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development, the Heritage Council, some Local Authorities, and other bodies such as the Irish Georgian Society. Owing to limited funds assistance may not always be available.

Buildings most likely to be considered for grants are those with significant architectural or historical appeal, where as much as possible of the original building survives intact and unaltered and in the context of their contribution to the overall historical heritage. For example a grant for the repair and repainting of original, traditional shopfronts (not for replicas or replacements) in Irish towns and villages, might be given to an 'en-bloc' application on behalf of the owners of five or six shopfronts, through an agency such as a Local Authority.

Tax relief for expenditure on significant buildings may also be available where such buildings are open to the public. For further information contact any tax office.

Buildings of Artistic, Historic or Architectural Interest

A local planning authority may identify buildings of artistic, historic or architectural interest and that should therefore be protected. (These are commonly referred to as "listed" buildings.) The development plan of the planning authority will indicate which buildings are so protected; the plan is available to the public. Such buildings cannot be altered or substantially changed without planning permission. For example, changing the original windows, so as to alter the external appearance of the building, would constitute such an alteration and would be subject to planning permission. In addition, certain interior fixtures or features may be separately listed and works involving such fixtures or features may also require planning permission.

The Development Plan

The development plan sets out the land use, amenity and development objectives and policies of the planning authority, usually for a 5 year period. As well as identifying specific buildings or interiors of artistic, historic or architectural interest, the development plan will usually contain a range of objectives for the conservation of the local built environment, including specific policies for specific areas.

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In that respect planning permission may also be required for works to buildings which are not "listed". The local planning authority can advise.

National Monuments Acts

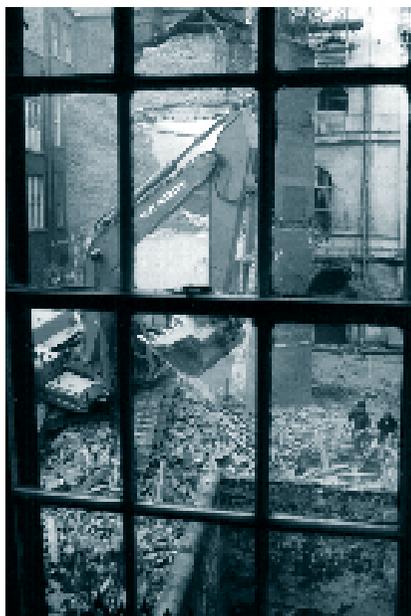
While in practice the National Monuments legislation has been used to protect medieval or earlier buildings, legal protection may be extended to structures of any date. More recently, several 18th century structures have been entered in the Register of Historic Monuments, which requires the owner to give notification of any proposed demolition or works to the Heritage Services of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

Architectural Inventories

No complete architectural inventory has ever been carried out in Ireland. However, the National Monuments and Historic Properties Service of the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht are currently carrying out a comprehensive survey of the buildings of major Irish towns and cities. The publication of the Dublin Environmental Inventory means that the area between the canals is now partially covered. The information contained in these surveys will be another useful source of information about any given building such as its age, its original features and its historical connections.

The Heritage Act 1995

Under the Heritage Act, the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, on the advice of the Heritage Council, may designate a building in the ownership of local authorities, State or Semi-state bodies or any other public authority as a "Heritage Building". Such a designation requires such a public authority to notify the Heritage Council of any proposed works which might directly or indirectly affect such a Heritage Building, or of the intention to dispose of the building or its amenities.



The threat of the bulldozer to historic buildings still exists

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Dos and Don'ts

- Do*
- be guided by the general principles of conservation.
 - remember that old buildings need to breathe;hermetically sealed windows and cement-rich renders and mortars prevent this happening,and are very damaging to the fabric.
 - allow an old building to retain its natural movement;this flexibility is necessary and enables it to adapt to climatic changes.The introduction of rigid elements to strengthen a structure, such as ring beams,can have a very adverse effect on the building.
 - seek expert advice.
- Don't*
- assume something is beyond repair just by its appearance .
 - throw out any original material.

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Sources of Information

1. Heritage Council
Tel:01-475 2736 Fax:01-475 2739
2. Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works in Ireland.
Tel. 01-661 533
Hon.Secretary Maighread McParland
3. Irish Georgian Society.
Tel.01-6767053 Fax:01-662 0290
4. Irish Professional Conservators and Restorers Association (IPCRA).
Tel.Belfast 381251
Hon.Secretary Alison Muir
5. Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI). Tel. 01-676 1703

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