

**Practical building conservation: conservation basics, by English Heritage,  
edited by Iain McCaig, Ashgate, 2013, 382 pp. 226 x 248 mm. £65.00 (hardback),  
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What philosophies and decision-making processes corroborate approaches to conservation of cultural heritage? This authoritative and well-illustrated volume lays out the theories and principles involved in making decisions about conservation treatments and adaptation of buildings in the twenty-first century. It sets out the legal framework in which conservation work is undertaken in the UK. Practical aspects of conservation are contextualised within the myriad of laws, policy documents and guidelines available, as well as wider aspects of heritage conservation.

The focus of education, training, and research in building conservation is devoted to materials and their interactions with the environment. These were emphasised in the first series of *Practical Building Conservation* in 1988 authored by John and Nicola Ashurst, which was set of five concise volumes. Since the publication of the first series, significant advances have been made in characterising the historic built environment and its surroundings. Similarly, the approach taken to managing heritage has developed. The scope of what is considered as heritage has widened to include intangible aspects and buildings much younger than what would have considered important assets in the past.

This volume is one of ten in the new series of *Practical Building Conservation*. In contrast to the material and environmental focus of its counterparts, Conservation

Basics expands on the first series by introducing the concept of conservation planning. It argues for a values-based approach to making decisions: managing change such that all aspects of cultural significance can be preserved. It is astutely aware that building conservation is an ever-changing field: it is forward-thinking in its consideration of heritage futures and future uncertainty.

Building on the first series and the work of John Ashurst, Conservation Basics is broadly based on the experiences of his successors in the Building and Conservation Research Team at Historic England. This is strengthened by drawing on the wealth of insight provided by the extensive team of practitioners, consultants, and researchers with whom they collaborate.

Conservation Basics begins with an articulate chronological outline of the development of building and conservation philosophy from the mid-sixteenth century to the present day. The remaining sections succinctly outline the wider context in which practical building conservation is undertaken: the framework of laws, policies, and guidance; conservation planning for maintenance and repair; survey and investigation methods; ecological considerations; managing maintenance and repair; and emergency planning.

Its strength lies in the significant number of case studies used to demonstrate the complexity of decision making in heritage contexts, and the risks of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. With each chapter is included a relevant list of references, enabling further reading on a specific topic.

Due to its emphasis on brevity, it can be difficult to distinguish between the sheer volume of past and present legal, policy, and guidance documents mentioned. The use of a chronological 'timeline' throughout the first chapter that charts the development of building conservation ideas and practice to the present day provides a useful reference framework.

Conservation Basics is recommended for anyone working in building conservation practice, consultancy, or research. It is especially useful to re-examine current perspectives and approaches to decision-making, and the range of topics covered in later chapters are a convenient starting point to become familiar with new aspects of building conservation. It provides succinct and critical introductions to a wide range of relevant survey, conservation and management techniques. Although it draws heavily on experiences in England, the principles of conservation planning and a values-based approach within cultural heritage are relevant to the international community

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