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Understanding Conservation Unit 1 Need to be Skilled in Cultural Significance

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Understanding Conservation

The Need to be Skilled in the Built Heritage

Council on Training in Architectural Conservation (COTAC)

COTAC originated in 1959 in response to the need for training resources for practitioners in the repair and conservation of historic churches. Since its inception the Charity has consistently worked to lift standards across the UK's conservation, repair and maintenance (CRM) sector. This has involved working in partnership with national agencies, professional and standard setting bodies, educational establishments and vocational training interests.

The Pedigree of Understanding Conservation

The 5 Understanding Conservation Units are based on and created around the 1993 *International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Education and Training Guidelines*. During the late 1990's and early 2000's an analysis of the ICOMOS Guidelines was produced but, at the time, this was considered 'academic' in its translation and a subsequent more pragmatic '*Framework Document*' was produced that distilled the preliminary work into five basic units of understanding. This subsequent document was developed and condensed with the support of the pan-professional Edinburgh Group under the auspices of Historic Scotland from 2003, the results of which created the original www.understandingconservation.org website that was launched during 2007. From 2008 the Edinburgh Group and the [understandingconservation.org](http://www.understandingconservation.org) website has been enabled by COTAC, with the website content being updated in 2015 to incorporate Guidance offered by the revised edition of *BS 7913:2013 Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings*

The relevance of the 1993 ICOMOS Guidelines is that they have been adopted by the UK's Conservation Course Directors Forum (CCDF) where all the member courses agreed to observe them in their delivery. In addition, the Guidelines underpin all professional body peer-reviewed Accreditation in Architectural Conservation Schemes currently operated by a pan-professional spread of bodies in the UK and Ireland, and the 2013 ICOMOS CIF International Training Committee '*Principles for Capacity Building through Education and Training in Safeguarding and Integrated Conservation of Cultural Heritage*' intentions.

This new 2021 PDF edition of *Understanding Conservation: The Need to be Skilled in the Built Heritage*, whilst retaining the previous 5 Unit structure, totally revises and updates the previous website content whilst also incorporating a wide range of illustrative examples especially chosen to enhance the text. Across the 5 Units images have been primarily sourced from Ingal Maxwell's © photographic archive, with a small number incorporated from other sources in a manner as fair use educational material under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (CC-BY-NC-SA) license, identifying and acknowledging the copyright holder wherever that has been possible. Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of information in the *Understanding Conservation* 5 Units, COTAC and its authors specifically exclude any liability for errors, omissions or otherwise arising from its content.

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Cover Image: Temple of Isis, Phylae, Egypt

Understanding Conservation

Unit 1 Need to be Skilled in Cultural Significance

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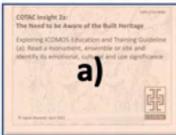
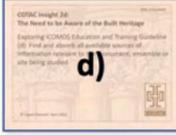
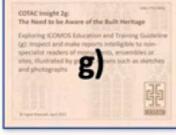
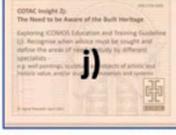


Parthenon, Athens. Column drum

Preamble:

Unit 1 Need to be Skilled in Cultural Significance

Unit 1 focuses on informing the practical and pragmatic substance and assessment of significance that underpins conservation - integrating a detailed consideration across 9 of the 14 ICOMOS Education and Training Guidelines (5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, 5g, 5h, 5i, 5j & 5m). The Unit is divided into seven sections that are equivalent to and in compliance with the Guidelines. It aims to assist users on how to contextualise their thoughts and approach with a greater understanding of current conservation philosophy and ethics. Each section comprises textual and illustrative information that together with recommended reading, further reading and web sites to visit will assist you in gaining an understanding of what cultural significance means and how to evaluate it.

 <p>a)</p> <p>15 images</p>	 <p>b)</p> <p>17 images</p>	 <p>c)</p> <p>15 images</p>	<p>Self-assessment Questions will be posed and are rhetorical in nature requiring you to respond in your own way. These in-text questions are progressive in nature. You should respond to them by reference to both the text of this Unit and by reading the material suggested. Omission of these actions may reduce understanding of the Unit's focus; completion of the reading suggested will provide better understanding of the discipline of conservation and how professionals within it function and operate to preserve and protect the historic environment:</p> <p>For a more detailed illustrative exploration of the 9 relevant ICOMOS Guidelines to this Unit please refer to Insight 2 where each of the nine highlighted guidelines (opposite) can be reviewed.</p>
 <p>d)</p> <p>21 images</p>	 <p>e)</p> <p>17 images</p>	 <p>f)</p> <p>18 images</p>	
 <p>g)</p> <p>15 images</p>	 <p>h)</p> <p>24 images</p>	 <p>i)</p> <p>18 images</p>	
 <p>j)</p> <p>18 images</p>	 <p>k)</p> <p>19 images</p>	 <p>l)</p> <p>17 images</p>	
 <p>m)</p> <p>21 images</p>	 <p>n)</p> <p>16 images</p>	<p>Insight 2 Links to Understanding Conservation Unit 1</p>	

You should consider how the body of conservation knowledge is constantly being questioned, expanded and added to by specialists within the field and how the principles, ethics and philosophy of conservation informs and structures any intervention response: This is particularly relevant when dealing with modern, say, 20thC reinforced concrete structures or buildings adopting contemporary construction methods and materials. A personal acceptance of this fact will help you to understand that you must also continually expand your own knowledge of conservation philosophy – it is subject to continuous change and your understanding of it needs constant updating.

The important fact to recognise is that it is a process of personal improvement that needs to be self-generated through enthusiasm for the subject!

1.01 Unit Overview

This Unit is intended to introduce you to the concepts on which the significance of a building or site is based. Cultural significance and its assessment are vitally important. It underpins all other actions. The consequent assessment of that importance imposes on you a responsibility to question your motives for intervention.

“The concept of cultural significance underpins the whole philosophy of architectural conservation. Historic buildings and sites are part of our cultural heritage and require special attention and treatment. The determination of cultural significance...is the first and most crucial step in every successful conservation project. The success of every conservation project depends upon understanding a site’s cultural significance. It is the common thread that holds all aspects of the project together and forms the aim of any investigation undertaken.”

Stirling, Bolling. Framework document 2002



Glasgow and Newport Rhode Island. The variable application of classical significance

Understanding and interpreting is essential: Why are you doing this; what is important about this building; what deterioration processes are occurring; how are they threatening significance; how are you to protect it; what are you doing it for and how shall you achieve it? You must always question your motives for intervention; you should never automatically accept the correctness of your reasoning.

“Let us always be aware of the uncertainties of private judgement, remembering that what to us may be without merit may well prove to posterity, who can view in perspective, of considerable value.”

Osbert Lancaster 1976

Aim of this Unit

This Unit is designed to stimulate and encourage you to ask yourself some fundamental questions about why and how you intervene in the historic environment. Perhaps an even more fundamental question to address to yourself is — what, why and how is this building important enough to make me question my motives for intervention and how shall I plan and execute any work of intervention?



Dublin, Norwich and Footdee, Aberdeen. The application of local significance

Additionally, it is intended to stimulate you to improve the breadth of your understanding of cultural significance, its use and interpretation and how it informs, assists and underpins any intervention process affecting the historic environment. It outlines personal challenges, skills and procedures necessary to enable you to evaluate cultural significance.



Westphalia, Germany. The accepted character of local significance in use

“Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related place and related objects.”

Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter 2013.

Reflect on why the above quotation is important to the philosophy and ethics of conservation.

This Unit and the other four Units in this suite offer guidance to assist your own developmental improvement of knowledge. It will be a personal challenge intended to test your knowledge and, hopefully, point you in the direction of where to seek additional knowledge or, improve your understanding and encourage you to reflect on your own experience. The Unit offers a framework for you to develop; it is not intended to provide answers but merely stimulus and routes to comprehension.

The Unit will be a personal challenge, requiring you to question your established values and perceptions. It is not the aim of this Unit to provide definitive answers to the open question of the philosophy, ethics and principles of conservation thinking. In contrast, it aims to provide the spark to ignite your own investigative and reflective processes. After completing it you will be better able to assemble a portfolio of evidence in support of your application for accreditation.

“The distance is nothing; it is only the first step that is challenging.”

Mme. Du Deffand. 1697 – 1780

It is intended to challenge your understanding of the skills necessary to act as a conservation practitioner – it is not an easy route to accreditation! Self-assessment/reflective questions will make you question your understanding and knowledge.



Chateau Champ sur Marne, France

1.02 Cultural Significance

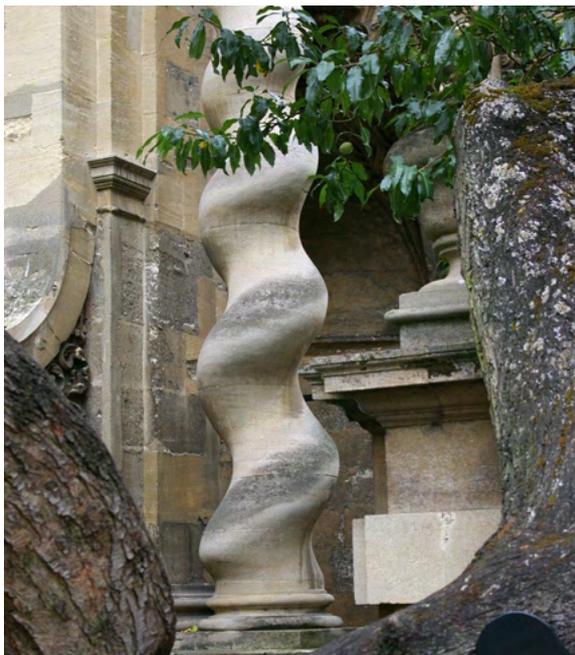
Perhaps the fundamental question you should ask yourself is what exactly cultural significance is in respect of a building, place, environment or artefact. In simple terms it is the perceived value of that place to society, established as a result of its continuity of presence and worth to society. This worth is a synthesis or composite of its historical, emotional, cultural and spiritual significance. The historic environment will also have established value for its social, architectural and aesthetic worth. Over its period of existence, it is likely to have been subject to interventions of all types, probably brought about by societal needs and aspirations and reflecting society's patterns of change over time. Therefore it will offer a palimpsest, as readable as any book or painting, portraying or offering a key to an understanding of the procession of historical events to which it bears witness.

The following is an example of the complexities of the word 'palimpsest':

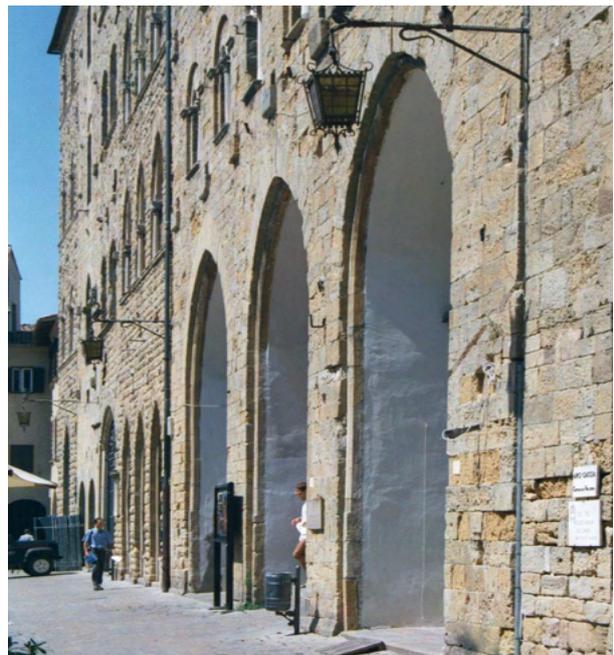
"The city of Montreal is important, a series of surfaces upon which various actors, communities and organisations have left their trace in the form of the built environment. What is the nature of the relationship between a city, its memories and community, and its on-going transformation?... using... [sites and heritage] archival resources and visual culture, contributors to Montreal as palimpsest explored their ...[sites and heritage] as cultural landscapes, reading them for their investments in specific pasts, and revealing the traces of their polyphonic histories."

Dr. Cynthia Hammond, Department of Art History, Concordia University.

You are encouraged to reflect upon the fact that Cultural significance can mean a variety of things to different people. It is worth repeating that, despite experience gained through practice, there is a more complicated, challenging and philosophical knowledge base that requires constant updating.



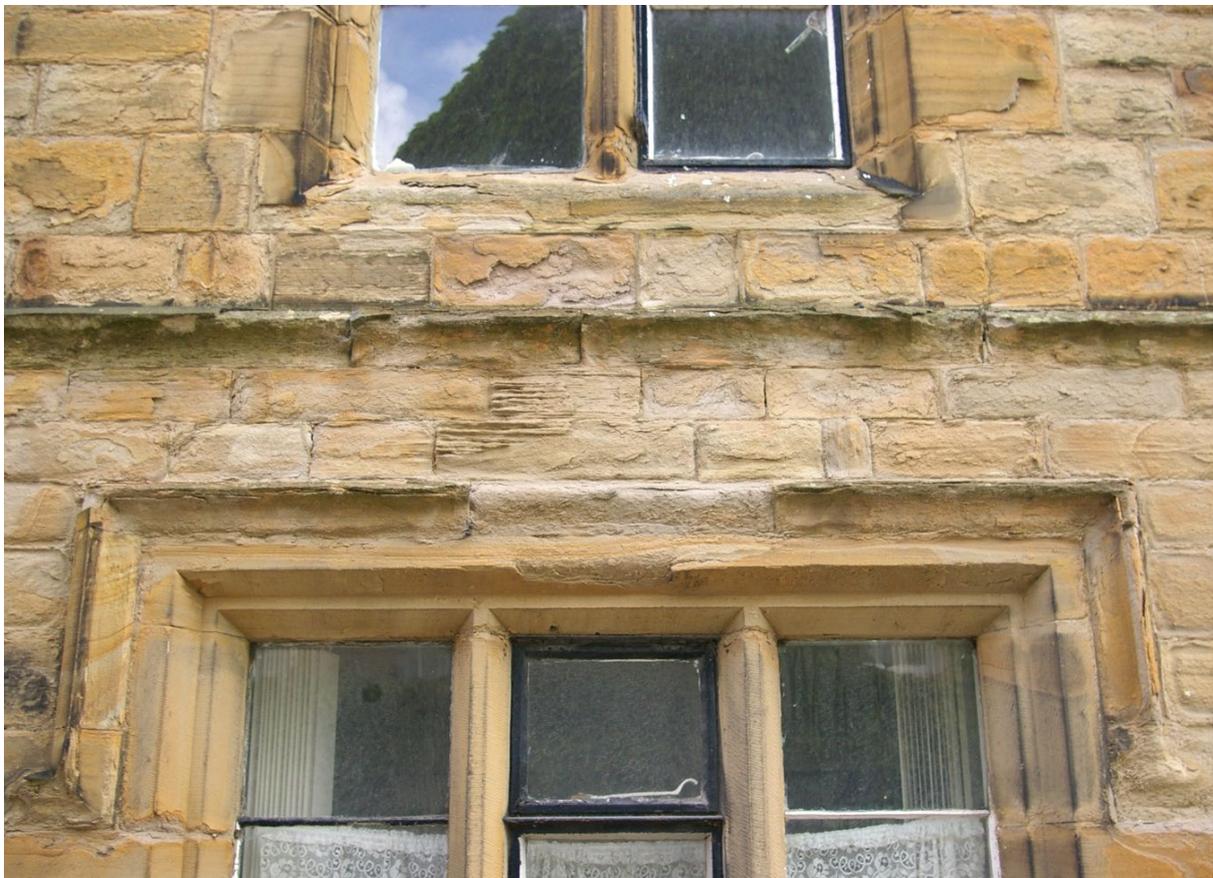
Oxford. The significance of an element



Volterra. The significance of location



Yoyogi Centre, Tokyo. The significance of the modern



Durham. The significance of original structure partly diminished by erosion

“The decision to conserve buildings can be justified on social, cultural, economic and/or environmental grounds, and usually a combination of these. Conflicting pressures often need to be balanced to assist good decision making. Good conservation depends on a sound research evidence base and the use of competent advisors and contractors.”

BS 7913: 2013 Introduction

“Understanding the significance of a historic building enables effective decision making about its future”.

BS 7913: 2013 Section 4 Heritage Values and Significance.

To clarify your understanding of the words cultural, culture, significance, signify and significant together with history, you should look up these words in a good dictionary and assimilate their meaning. Was the meaning different to that you were familiar with and had assumed prior to looking them up?

Assessment of cultural and historical significance is an essential precursor to any proposed intervention ensuring that the best possible planning for intervention work is made and based on a clear understanding of what is significant about the historic environment, its fabric, artefacts and context. Such assessment will allow you to prepare a statement of significance associated with a heritage asset. A statement of significance should address historical significance, cultural significance, spiritual, emotional values and social significance.

See *Informed Conservation*. Section 6.8. Clark, K. English Heritage.

“By pinpointing a site’s qualities, it becomes apparent which features need protection from decay, intervention or removal and how rigidly this protection should be enforced. By working within a common ethical framework, it will be easier to avoid applying contemporary social, political or individual bias to what needs to be preserved.”

Stirling, Bolling, Framework Document, 2000



Eiffel Tower Access Lift. Significant in the Tower’s operation but perhaps not fully recognised by visitors

Based on your present understanding of significance, prepare a bullet point list of factors influencing cultural significance and how that evaluation process will assist in writing a statement of significance.

Identify bullet points outlining significance in respect of the following: To assist you in this process review web-sites covering these examples

- National Trust: Stonehenge
- Gillies Hill, Coxet Hill and St. Ninians Kirk, Stirling – See Historic Environment Scotland
- The Eiffel Tower
- Campanile San Marco, Venice: Consider the early 20th century rebuilding operation
- National Trust: Beatles childhood homes



OS 25-inch Norfolk LXIII.11 1907 + Google Earth



St. Andrews St, Norwich: A small remnant from the past requires investigation into its context

Refer to the above photograph of a building in St. Andrews Street, Norwich. From it and the maps assess the effect that the adjacent developments have had on this historic structure and its setting. It formed part of the house of Francis Rugge in the 16th century. Who was Francis Rugge?

After having made your assessment of the effect of adjacent development refer to George Plunkett's Photographs of Old Norwich and re-evaluate your assumptions made prior to visiting the web page.

This exercise may assist you in comprehending why you should not jump to conclusions without full knowledge and understanding of a site's history.

Make an assessment of how the cultural significance of Queensbury House, Edinburgh, white building on the right of the following image, may have been affected by the development of the Scottish Parliament building, left of image.



Queensbury House, Edinburgh + OS Town Plan 1:1056 Sheet 30 1852 illustrating locational changes

You may wish to pay regard to and compare its significance before and after association with the Scottish Parliament. Think about the fact that its significance may have been raised by its newly acquired association with the Enric Mirales building and the contemporary history of Scotland or, has it been detracted from by its interaction with and absorption into the new Scottish Parliament building? To assist your research you may wish to visit The Scottish Parliament or The University of Edinburgh websites.

The term intervention, in conservation terms, is used as a collective noun to cover any works to change, modify, repair or maintain the historic environment in good condition and, in so doing preserve its historical and cultural value or significance. It is discussed in BS 7913: 2013 in para 6.11 "*Interventions and Judgement*" and as defined in 3.11 "*Action that has a physical or spatial impact on*

a historic building or its setting."

The following is a [non-exhaustive] list of terms commonly used in conservation to define interventions:

- Alterations
- Conservation
- Conversion
- Intervention
- Maintenance
- Preservation
- Protection
- Rebuilding
- Reconstruction
- Reinstatement
- Renovation
- Repair
- Restoration
- Reversibility

BS 7913: 2013 discusses the term reinstatement in para 6.17 which, under the previous 1998 version, was referred to as "Restoration".

When and under what circumstances might reinstatement be appropriate?

You should read BS 7913: 2013: para 6.9 "*Reinstatement of lost features*" as doing so may assist you in responding to this question. You may wish to note that other definitions may vary to that of BS 7913 to reflect international attitudes that are different from the UK.



Parthenon, Athens. Significance being preserved?

The terms restoration and anti-restoration have their origins in the Anti-Scrape Movement of the mid 19th century. You might also wish to refer to Stephan Tsudi Madsen's book *Restoration and Anti-restoration*, Universitetsforlaget 1976, which offers a discussion of the origin and interpretation of the term restoration. You may wish to identify other sources and references for this term. Doing this will enable you to compare and contrast the terms reinstatement and restoration. Reference to the previous 1998 version of BS 7913 is informative.



Parthenon, Athens. Marble column drum: machine cutting flutes on insert piece

1.03 Components of Significance

Cultural significance encompasses a broad range of emotional, social, spiritual, architectural and aesthetic values

Historical significance



Ring of Brodgar, Orkney: Creates emotional and spiritual connotations

“The more you can find out about the building [environment, place or artefact] from documents and other non- destructive sources the better informed your decisions about further investigation and repairs will be.”

English Heritage (1994) Investigative work on historic buildings

“The philosophy advocated is that of understanding cultural significance of a building with full documentation before any intervention and then a clear diagnosis and appraisal of what need[s] to be done... all concerned should let the building speak to them.”

Sir Bernard Feilden in his foreword to Earl, J. (1991) Building Conservation Philosophy Donhead/College of Estate Management, Reading.

Primary historical sources: Mostly physical: The building itself and its associated original archival records.

Secondary historical sources: Mostly documentary: may be local, national, or international:

Local	National
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authority records. Sites and Monuments Records and Historic Environment Records Local reference and history library • Local history web sites and building/site focused web sites • Local records office • Local photographic archives • Local history museum Archaeological studies and reports • Local archaeological societies or bodies Local listing documents, statutory lists Diocesan records • Quinquennial reviews • Local newspaper archive libraries • Local authority records, especially planning and building control • Guidebooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Archives • Site and Monument Records (SMR) • Historic Environment Records (HER) • Pevsner: Buildings of... Specific to the region in which the building exists. • Research theses and dissertations • English Heritage; Historic England; Historic Environment Scotland; Cadw; Northern Ireland Historic Environment Division, Department for Communities • Geographical or regional surveys • British Geological Survey • Photographs, prints, and other artworks • Historical Manuscripts Commission • Ordnance Survey and other maps • Google Earth and Google Street View • Metrological archives

Social, cultural and emotional significance: Possible sources on a non-exhaustive list basis:

Primary sources	Secondary sources
<p>Mostly emotional and spiritual and possibly subjective from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The building itself and associated archival records, particularly how the public perceive the building • The uses to which they put the building • Local lay perception of why the building is important • The need for public consultation as to why the building is important. • The tangible heritage 	<p>Mostly documentary and may be local, national or international.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local records office • Parish records • Local historians and societies Local history library • Local authority records • Local newspaper archive library Local reference library • Research theses and dissertations • Folk music, folklore, oral history, literature, etc. • The intangible heritage

See also: ICOMOS (1990) Guide to Recording Historic Buildings



Elm Hill, Norwich: Almost destroyed, the physical context requires related research/understanding

Architectural and Aesthetic Significance

Great buildings may have been created to satisfy a societal need, to commemorate an event, make a statement of importance and express an artistic or developmental period in history (not necessarily recognised at the time). Over the passage of time such buildings become structures of local, national or international importance. Their architectural or aesthetic significance may become established at the point in time that they were created or may develop as a result of society's evaluation over time. They may have been created by a famous architect or artist and be looked on as an example of his/her work. The structure may have gathered layers of significance over time; these additional layers being authentic of their period of introduction.

The qualities of architectural or aesthetic value may be altered by intervention and thus, a clear understanding of value must be established prior to intervention. The evaluation of importance must be made in the absence of subjective or conjectural response. This is particularly relevant in respect of recent structures that, because of the absence of historical effect, may not have established a value that is easily recognised by the lay public (the recent reduction of the period of time considered appropriate for listing from 30 years to 10 years). It is also important to give credit and establish value for all periods of interventions. It might be wrong to assume that any intervention post the original design is of lesser or greater value than the original.

"...Let us always beware of the uncertainty of private judgement, remembering that what to us may be without merit may well prove to prosperity, who can view it in perspective, of considerable value."

Osbert Lancaster 1976 [repeated here for emphasis]

Consider the value that the listing of a Victorian hexagonal post box may have compared with a 1950's red cast iron telephone kiosk. See the Bath Postal Museum or National Telephone Kiosk Collection websites.

Consider within this evaluation process the comparative values of a Victorian terrace house and 20 Forthlin Road, Allerton. See also the National Trust website

Consider the effects of a major fire on a building of local and national importance where a substantial part of the fabric and structure of that building was lost as a result of fire. Undertake a Google search for images of the Glasgow School of Art and its damage after the fires of May 2014 and June 2018 and consider the impact that these have on you.

Reflect on how intervention and repair work might be structured to retain as much authenticity and historical importance as possible. Consider how the interaction of historical and cultural significance is symbiotically linked and how the general public might perceive the need for reconstruction. Consider also the need for absence of conjecture and deceit within the process of post trauma intervention and how both secular and philosophical requirements may be subsumed into the processes of pre-intervention planning and strategy.

In respect of a redundant urban church, consider the question as to the extent to which it is acceptable to convert the church to a drop-in centre with coffee bar.

You may wish to consider the effect of loss of religious importance against providing access to the wider public and their consequent exposure to the importance of the aesthetic appeal of church architecture and history. Consider how in the early history of the church and particularly how the nave may have provided a social/secular focus and assembly centre.

Consider how the exercise might be achieved without loss of authenticity, minimal fabric loss, reversibility, absence of deceit and honesty of intervention.

You may wish to read Powell & de la Hey (1987) Churches: A question of conversion SAVE Britain's Heritage

Consider how contemporary judgements of significance must not be allowed to hinder further changes that might freeze an historic structure in its present state.

You might consider the affect on the historic structure of later interventions in respect of aesthetic importance and contextual importance, together with the effects of building deterioration.

Why should assessment of these factors not become subjective or conjectural?

Consider the statements/questions in the last few paragraphs and analyse why they are important and evaluate if, in your own view, they are correct or incorrect.



Stromness, Orkney. Subtle evidence of change in this maritime community

Might it be wrong to assume that any intervention post the original design/construction is of lesser value than the original? Significance and importance of certain buildings is not exclusively applicable to ancient structures and may also be applied to 20th (and 21st) century structures. For example, the Firestone Factory, London; Greenside, Wentworth; Odeon, Edinburgh.

Identify at least one other example of a 20th or 21st century building that may have significance in respect of:

- Celebratory or commemorative importance (related to an event or societal need to commemorate an event).
- Aesthetic importance: an example of good design or an example of a famous architect's work.
- Identify a 20th century building that was an example of a particular architectural design period that has recently been lost through demolition and reflect on why such loss is significant.



Great Russell Street, London. The significance and impact of modern design

Consider how intervention works for example, to a 1960's concrete building may be in conflict with the fundamental tenets of conservation ethics. You may wish to consider how contemporary constructional methods may make compliance with minimal intervention difficult. An example might be deterioration through the effects of use of high alumina cement in reinforced concrete structures. See the following Building Conservation Directory articles:

- Bloomfield, J. (1996) The Repair of Reinforced Concrete
- Farrell, D & Wood, C. (2019) Concrete Repairs: Traditional Methods and like-for-like Materials
- Farrell, D & Davies, K. (2019) Repair and Conservation of Reinforced Concrete

Consider how a building can have different degrees of significance for different sectors of society.

Consider when and how a heritage asset that has been subject to very extensive damage, say by fire, or terrorist bomb action, becomes beyond repair and when reconstruction might be considered in order to maintain place, setting, record and value.



Glasgow School of Art. Pre and post fire incident damage (and adjacent school developments)

In respect of the Glasgow School of Art consider how access, to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, might be achieved. Consider the site's topography in that the site on which the building sits is steeply sloping in two directions.

Consider the impact of the two recent fire damage incidents to the building and how this and repair/restoration/reinstatement works might be carried out to protect significance and historic value.

See Glasgow School of Art website.

1.04 International Charters

The UK and International response to understanding cultural and historical significance and society's response to it.

These old buildings do not belong to us only...they have belonged to our forefathers and they will belong to our descendants unless we play them false. They are not...our property, to do as we like with. We are only trustees for those that come after us."

William Morris 1889.



Acropolis, Athens. The subject of many interventions over the years

The genesis of the modern conservation movement stems from the thinking, writings and principles of philosophical thought by people such as John Ruskin, William Morris, Pugin et al. who were instrumental in germinating the anti-scrape movement of the mid-19th century - a reaction to the conjectural intervention by restoration of many of our medieval churches by people such as James Wyatt, Lord Grimthorpe, and in France, Eugène-Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc et al.

See also Stephan Tschudi Madsen. "Restoration and Anti-Restoration". Universitetsforlaget 1976.

The anti-scrape movement culminated in the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the SPAB Manifesto of 1877. Until the early/mid 20th century, the conservation movement was essentially a British (English even) reaction to the interventionist practices of the Victorian restoration movement. A similar conflict of philosophies between the interventionists (seeking conjectural perfection) and the anti-interventionists was also occurring in France during the 19th century.



Norwich Cathedral. Attention to detail is required to appreciate the full extent of significance

How do you consider the 1877 SPAB view now sits with contemporary thinking on the value and recognition of all periods of intervention post that of the original fabric?

Consider the difference between original and authentic.

It was not until the League of Nations Athens Conference of 1931, that the first attempt was made to set down a code of ethics and the conservation movement took on a truly international mantle. In 1964, the Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings approved a text for an International Charter for the Conservation of Monuments and Sites - The Venice Charter: This charter was adopted by the newly formed International Council on Monuments and Sites in 1965 (ICOMOS).

In 1981 Australian ICOMOS adopted the Burra Charter (originally published 1979). This charter was the first to identify the importance of Cultural Significance. The charter set down definitions of commonly used terms and conservation principles. The Burra Charter was revised in 2013

In 1985 the International Institute for Conservation Ottawa drew up its own Code of Ethics for Practice for Those Involved in the Conservation of Cultural Property in Canada. Third Edition published 2020 entitled: Canadian Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice.

In 1993 ICOMOS structured its Guidelines for Education and Training in the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites. The Guidelines identified 14 skills or competencies necessary to act as a conservation practitioner. This document offers a framework for education and training for all professionals involved in the field of conservation and forms the basis and structure of most, if not all, courses in conservation training today. It is this document that informs and structures this suite of CPD Units 1-5 and much of the related work by COTAC. See COTAC website.



Todai Ji Temple Nara, Japan

In 1994 ICOMOS published *“The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)”* in which the *Preamble* states: *“The Nara Document on Authenticity is conceived in the spirit of the Charter of Venice, 1964, and builds on it and extends it in response to the expanding scope of cultural heritage concerns and interests in our contemporary world.”*

In the UK the first British Standard 7913 covering conservation was published in 1998 *“The principles of the conservation of historic buildings”* This was revised and republished in 2013 under a new title: *“Guide to the conservation of historic buildings”*

See also: Building Conservation Directory – *“The Role of International Organisations.”* Drury, P. 2019

1.05 Conservation Strategy

A disturbing conclusion in a research paper under the joint authorship of Dann, Worthing and Bond was that: *“Conservation principles, aims and policies are rarely explicitly developed or disseminated within the majority of organisations.”*

“...the value of the site should be defined, and a philosophy to guide all interventions should be established.”

Bell, D. Technical Advice Note 8 Historic Scotland

“The conservation policy appropriate to a place must first be determined by an understanding of its cultural significance and its physical condition.”

ICOMOS Australia (1981, 1999 Ed.) Burra Charter [NB: latest edition 2013]

“...such documents [conservation plans] should flow from a common thinking process – understanding, assessment of significance, analysis of issues or vulnerability and policies for retaining significance. As long as understanding precedes action, the process will work well...if management or development proposals are defined without understanding, there is a strong possibility that significance will be at risk.”

Clark, K (2001) Informed Conservation



Reading: Might the remaining form and detail of the existing influence the modern?

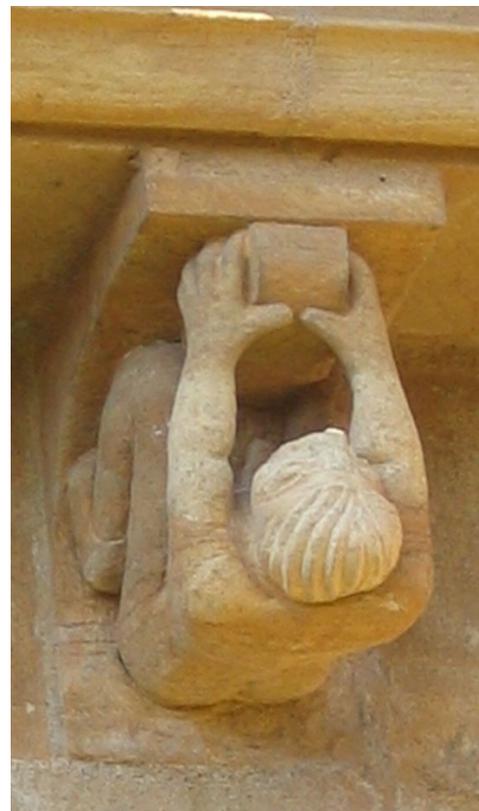
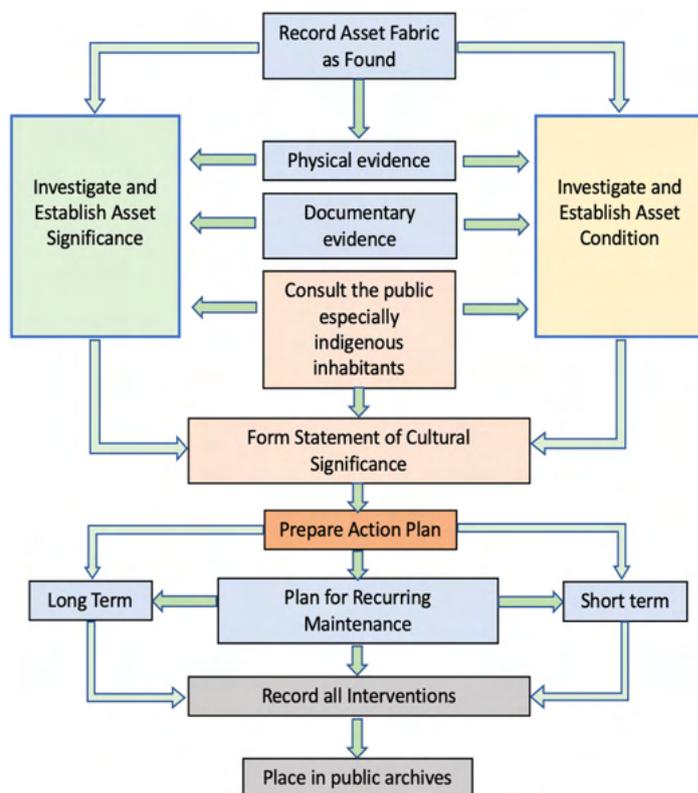
The establishment, through thorough research, of the cultural and historical significance of a building, place or artefact informs and underpins intervention and management strategy. It facilitates a

structured approach to intervention work and assists in ensuring that conjecture does not influence the process. It will have been established at the investigative stage of the work what is of vital value to the protection of significance, what (as a result of detailed analysis and in the absence of subjective response) is less important and what deterioration or decay processes are involved and how these need to be addressed in order to protect significance. See also: English Heritage (1994) Investigative Work on Historic Buildings. English Heritage, London

The importance of investigation of significance cannot be over emphasised as it underpins all other decisions and informs the preparation of any Conservation Plan. Principles and ethics of conservation philosophy, together with assessment of significance, should be synthesised in the conservation plan. The plan will address long-term strategies for the site’s survival. Fundamentally the principles of conservation may be simply stated as:

- Minimum loss of authenticity
- Minimum intervention
- Minimum loss of fabric
- Reversibility
- Absence of deceit, or honesty of intervention

Consequently, Conservation Plans should absorb these principles and, together with a significance study, aim to eliminate a conjectural response to works of intervention. For an example of conservation plan structure: See Building Conservation Directory article “Conservation Plans – a benefit or a burden.” Clark, K.



Basic conservation activity sequence. After D. Bell. TAN 8, 1997

Anze-le-Duc. Getting a grip!

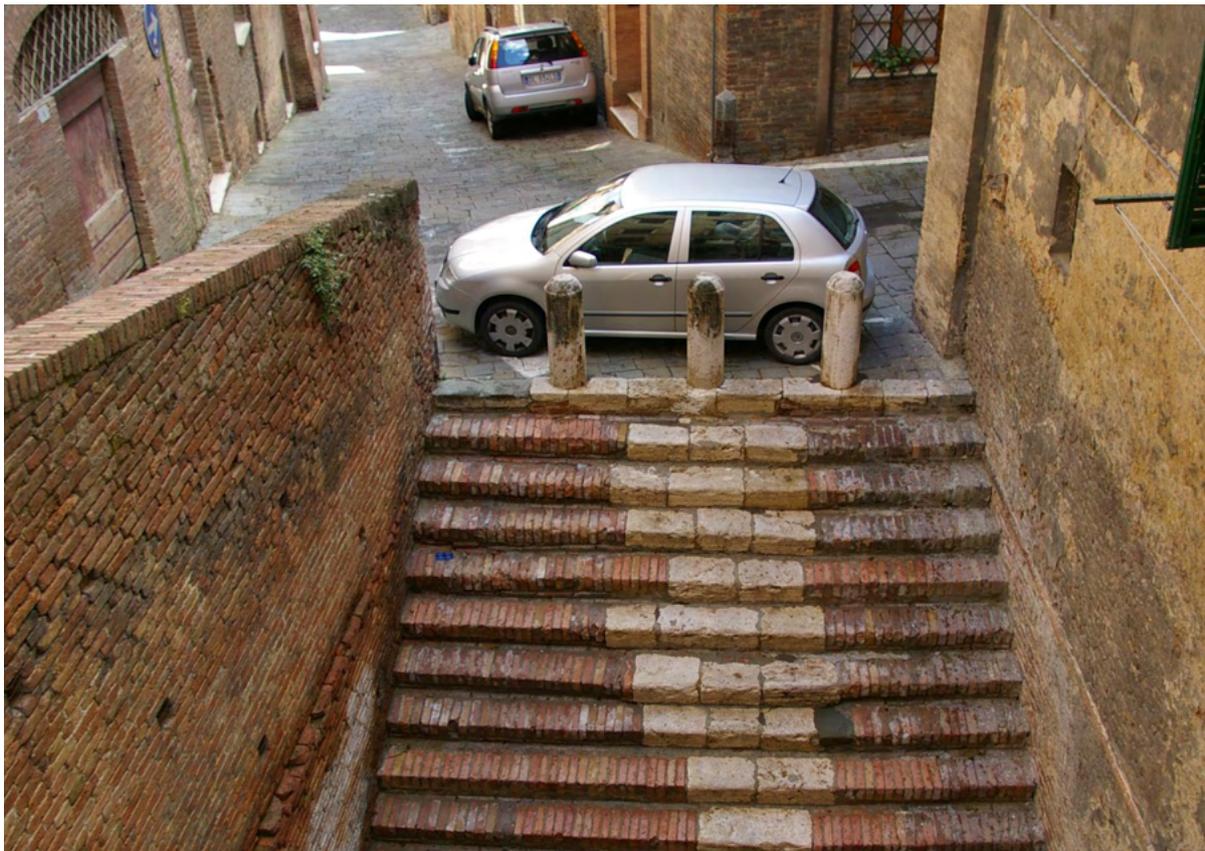
What factors, management decisions and processes might usefully be informed by the preparation of a conservation plan for a building with access by the public?

In respect of an historic building, what principles are you likely to use in determining how any works of intervention will be designed, planned and incorporated?

Reflect on how international charters influence/inform the decision process.

You may wish to consider short, medium and long term planning for expenditure on essential works of maintenance and repair, improvements etc. Assume that the building is funded from entrance charges; some lottery funding might be available.

You may wish to consider the Disability Discrimination Act [first published] 1995 [current version 2010 - 2015 in N.I.] and Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power) of Building Regulations together with requirements for periodic maintenance, improvements to services installations including upgrades to fire precautions, security installations etc. [NB: Part L is applicable to England and Wales]



Siena. Challenges to access

You may also wish to consider the fundamental tenets of conservation philosophy i.e., that only minimal intervention shall take place with only minimal loss of authenticity and that the intervention works should be reversible.

1.06 Recording

The process of recording follows on from archival research and information gathering and provides additional evidence of a physical nature to back up and support archives for future reference. The need for accurate recording of a site of cultural significance is twofold.

Firstly, to fully understand the nature of a building and its physical development - all aspects of its physical form need to be assessed. Accurate survey drawings can give valuable information about a building's development that might, otherwise, go undetected. Building archaeology is a useful science in this regard. Any new work will require recording: This to assist future intervention works and to provide a record for future use.



Chaterherault, Lanarkshire, Venerable oak forest. Recording settings can be as important as buildings

Secondly, comprehensive records should be kept throughout any project as a means of recording change and alteration for future generations. The method of recording should be specific to the requirements of each project.

Completing the process of recording provides a synthesis of archive material which helps to identify what to look for in your physical investigation (by back reference) and, can be combined with the results of physical investigation to give an overall up to date situation report. It also helps reduce the hazard of a conjectural response to understanding works of intervention for future reference and analysis.

At a management decision level you should always ask yourself the question: What level of recording is fit for the purpose of this building and my involvement with it.



Aberdeen, St. Nicholas Church. Basement archaeological investigation in advance of building work



Norwich: Pre-dismantling, numbering individual bricks

Consider a methodology for recording an historic building?

You might want to reflect on the manner and method of recording the building and you should consider what documents might be incorporated, where these might usefully be stored and also think about what outside consultants might be involved in the process of recording. Consider also a methodology for storage of records in suitable archival repositories.



Lady Victoria Colliery, Mid Lothian. Winding gear tangible link to a defunct, but important industry

1.07 Conclusion

Studying the material contained within this Unit and reading from the recommended and further reading lists should have challenged your understanding of what cultural significance means and how to evaluate it. You should be able to appropriately respond to your institute's requests for provision of a portfolio of evidence, prepared by you individually (not as part of a team) and submitted in support of your application for accreditation as a conservation practitioner.

This Unit has sought to encourage you to think about what cultural significance means, what factors may influence significance and how it might be assessed. You should also have been encouraged to seek additional clarification of significance from other recommended sources and, in so doing, stimulated your need to research and extend your knowledge.

In that process you should have gained a better understanding of the importance of cultural significance, its assessment and primary status in the process of pre-intervention planning and how it underpins all other factors influencing the conservation/intervention process.

The continuity of the historic environment offers to society a constant or datum from which history may be recognised and from which society continually reinforces its identity through reference. It is vital that that reference source is not violated by inappropriate intervention that takes little influence from the recognised philosophical structure that underpins conservation ethics, principles and practice. This Unit seeks to encourage you to understand that fact and how you, as a conservation practitioner, are responsible to the wider society when contemplating intervention work to the built environment. This Unit and its associated Units offer a framework for development to ensure that your actions do not jeopardize the historic environment, as a resource, by inappropriate and misguided actions.

The guidance offered in this Unit will overlap information in other Units but demonstrates the important status that assessment of cultural significance has within the overall process of conservation. The synthesis of this early guidance will be explored in greater depths in the remaining Units.

A thought from John Earl

"...a sound philosophy is not based on a set of immutable rules but a clear understanding of what one is setting out to achieve. Comprehensive knowledge of all the relevant facts...will not in itself point the way. The practitioner...must develop a critical and self-critical frame of mind, nurturing the ability to proceed from facts by way of logical argument to defensible – if not inevitable – conclusions."

1.08 Self-assessment and Self-reflective Questions



Oxford: Understanding the meaning of cultural significance is critical

Based on the information contained in the preceding pages re-evaluate your understanding of the meaning of Cultural Significance and its importance in the process of conservation intervention.

Ask yourself again why we need to assess cultural significance.

Choosing a building that you know that has recently undergone works of intervention, assess how the cultural significance of that building has been affected by the work.

Prepare a statement of cultural significance for a project on which you have recently been involved. This to demonstrate how a statement of cultural significance should be constructed and what it should contain.

Consider the principles of conservation and how these are formulated with a Western World ideology - consider the view that different cultures may approach the subject with a different focus - Japan for example, cyclically may, dismantle, repair and replace components of some of its historic structures in order to ensure longevity! See The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)

To assist your understanding of cultural significance you should read Conservation: Significance, Relevance and Sustainability. Staniforth, S. Forbes Prize Lecture, IIC Congress, Melbourne 2000.

See also Informed Conservation Clark, K. Chapter 6 Conservation and Management Planning.

1.09 Recommended Reading

BS 7913: 2013 references and Unit 1 sections to which they relate:

1.03 Cultural Significance

BS 7913: 2013 offers useful guidance on what factors influence our understanding of Heritage values and significance. Contained within *Heritage values and significance*: Paras 4.1 - 4.4

1.04 Components of Significance

Section 5 *Using significance as a framework for managing the historic environment*

Para 6.9 *Reinstatement of lost features*.

1.06 Conservation Strategy

Paras 5.1 to 5.9 inclusive, and Section 6 *Significance as part of operational care and other interventions*.

Sections 5, 6 & 7. These sections offer useful guidance on intervention strategy/management.

Para 6.11 *Interventions and Judgement*

1.07 Recording

Para 8.3 *Recording*

Further Reading

Humberstone, J (1997) Taking the Philosophical Approach. The Building Conservation Directory Cathedral Communications

English Heritage (1994) Investigative Work on Historic Buildings English Heritage, London

Drury P (2019) The Role of International Organisations. Building Conservation Directory

Clark, K. Conservation Plans: Benefit or Burden. Building Conservation Directory

Wood, J (1996) Record Making and the Historic Environment. Building Conservation Directory, Tisbury

Furneaux Jordan, R. (1997) *Western Architecture* Thames & Hudson (Chapter 11) Macdonald, S. (ed) (2001) *Preserving Post War Heritage* Donhead Publishing

Jokilehto, J. (2002) *A History of Architectural Conservation*. Butterworth Heinemann

Macdonald, S. (ed) (1997) *Modern Matters. Principles and practice in conserving recent architecture* Donhead Publishing

Morriss, R, K. (2001) *The Archaeology of Buildings*. Tempus Publishing (Part III Recording the Evidence chapters 7, 8 & 9)

Historic Environment Scotland (2003) *Guide for Practitioners 4: Measured Survey and Building Recording*

Wood, J. (1996) *Record Making and the Historic Environment*. See also Stanbridge, R (1995) *Photogrammetry – A Practical Guide*

ICOMOS *Principles for the Recording of Monuments, Groups of Buildings and Sites*.

Clark, K (2001) Informed Conservation English Heritage, London (sections 7.3 & 7.5)

Morriss, R. K. (2001) The Archaeology of Buildings Tempus. Stroud (chapters 7 – 9 Recording the Evidence)

Building Conservation articles: 1. Conservation and the Role of the Archaeologist. 2. Record Making.

Switsur, R (2001) Dating Technology. Building Conservation Directory, Tisbury

Washington National Park Service (1977) Emergency Recording – One step ahead of the wrecker's ball p.41 – 42 for USA response.

Kerr, J et al (1989) Recording Standing Buildings. English Heritage

Cooke, Findlay, et al (1996) Recording a Church: An illustrated glossary Handbook in Archaeology 7. Council for British Archaeology, York

Parsons, D (1998) Churches & Chapels: Investigating places of worship. Handbook in Archaeology 8. Council for British Archaeology, York

The Ancient Monument Society (1988) The Recording of Threatened Buildings p. 28 – 45

English Heritage (2006) Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice. English Heritage, London
Historic England (2015) Metric Survey Specifications for Cultural Heritage

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Mercer, E (1975) English Vernacular Houses. RCHME, London

Swallow, P, Watt, D & Ashton, R (2002) Measurement & Recording of Historic Buildings. Donhead Publishing

Alcock, N. W. et al (1996) Recording Timber Framed Buildings: an illustrated glossary. Practical Handbook in Archaeology 5, Council for British Archaeology, York