

Editorial

March is a time of transition. We learned, as children, that this is the month that comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. That lion has certainly taken its toll this year. In the months that have passed since our last issue, much of the northern hemisphere has seen remarkably severe weather. Paradoxically, the phenomenon of global warming has given us dramatic and destructive winter storms on both sides of the Atlantic. These have served as a reminder that most of us on the planet, although increasingly electronic in the daily affairs of our lives, remain inextricably tied to the changing seasons.

The readers of this journal are, by discipline, a diverse group – architects and engineers, scientists and conservators, planners and administrators. Many of us have spent at least a portion of the winter in a kind of intellectual hibernation, working quietly and separately in offices and libraries and laboratories, in anticipation of the start of spring. Thus, March is also a time of optimism, as the results of these individual efforts are merged into the complex projects that are the core of architectural conservation. The papers in this issue represent the range of those individual talents, and demonstrate just how effective such collaborations can be.

Our first contribution is from Simon Bennett, who discusses the stiffening of the timber floor system at London's Somerset House. Constructed in the late eighteenth century, this long-span floor (with a decorative plaster ceiling below) was daring in its own time, but soon became compromised by the effects of shrinkage. Bennett's paper reveals to us the creative side of civil engineering, as it documents the skilful concealing of a sophisticated structural repair.

David Hughes, Simon Swann and Alan Gardner have co-authored a highly detailed study that reviews the history and technology of the well-known construction product called 'Roman cement'. It is a type of natural cement derived from coastal limestones containing a substantial amount of clay. A rapid-setting material, it pre-dates the introduction of modern Portland cement. Roman cement was patented in 1796 by James Parker, whose initial production was with nodules – called septaria – found on the Isle of Sheppey. This article, the first part of a two-part paper, discusses the

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manufacture and use of the material, along with a clear explanation of the relevant mineralogy.

Our third contribution is a paper by Robert Chambers on St George's Hall, Liverpool. This extraordinary building was opened in 1854 as a multi-purpose structure to house law courts, public meetings and concerts. In recent years, many of the spaces had fallen out of use. Chambers' paper discusses an extensive and complex programme of work that began in 2003, one that includes the repair of roofing, stonework and ironwork, and the restoration of finishes. Much of the undertaking involves design interventions carried out to make the building fully functional in the twenty-first century.

Paul Begg's paper explains the construction of timber cantilevered staircases, a subject that has been little discussed until now. He presents the basic engineering principles of cantilevered staircases in general, and then focuses on the details of their construction in wood through his own investigation of a c.1800 example in Aberdeen.

The results of a condition survey at Moenjodaro, Pakistan, are presented by Enrico Fodde. This Indus River valley site, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, dates from the third millennium BC. Much of it is constructed from fired brick, using mud mortar. Deterioration of the brick is associated with the cyclical hydration and dehydration of sodium sulphate, which is present (along with a number of other soluble salts) in the groundwater. Fodde notes the unsuccessful installation of cement-based damp proof courses in the past, and discusses the present return to some traditional local practices, including the use of thin, sacrificial mud slurries, poultices and wall capping.

Our final paper, by Jacqui Goddard and Alice Yates, is about the National Trusts of Australia. The authors compare these organizations with their counterparts in the UK and the US. Their emphasis is on issues of advocacy related to heritage conservation, and the inter-relationship of Australia's eight trusts with the various levels of government.

These last two contributions serve to highlight the increasing globalization of the journal, and to remind us of all that we share with conservation professionals working throughout the world. With particular reference to Goddard and Yates, we must also recall that for our readers in the southern hemisphere, March represents the onset of cool evenings, and a great opportunity to read through this information-filled issue.

Norman R. Weiss