

Editorial

Awareness of the importance of public sculpture as part of our cultural heritage has been growing steadily in the last two decades in Britain thanks to the efforts of bodies such as the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association. However, this rich heritage of monumental art continues to be under threat from vandalism, corrosion and well-intentioned, but misguided, applications of 'protective' coatings, resulting in loss of aesthetic quality and physical deterioration. In our first paper, Helen Thompson and Martin Cooper illustrate with two case studies how Nd:YAG laser cleaning, in combination with other more traditional cleaning methods, can be used to remove active corrosion deposits and paint layers from copper-alloy monuments in preparation for protective wax coatings. Once cleaned and repaired, public sculptures have the potential to make a significant contribution to the regeneration of run-down areas, especially when accompanied by sympathetic landscaping schemes.

In our second paper, Ian Hume reminds us of the importance of the critical appraisal of completed conservation works to identify any lessons that can be learned and carried forward to future projects. He reviews the engineering solution he developed to reconstruct the tall Tuscan columns that support the Doric peristyle of Nicholas Hawksmoor's monumental mausoleum in the grounds of Castle Howard, North Yorkshire. Built as a powerful and dignified repository for the remains of the 3rd Earl of Carlisle, his family and descendants, the mausoleum also serves as an eye-catcher terminating the view across the parkland from Vanbrugh's Temple of the Four Winds. The programme of work to take down each column, remove corroded iron cramps and damaged/decaying stonework, prior to rebuilding, reusing as much original material as possible, was not straightforward. It is pleasing to learn that since the completion of the works in 1983 the conservation work has successfully withstood the test of time and the author concludes that if he had to tackle the problem again he could not improve upon the methods and techniques that were employed then.

Readers will recall that Ian Hume published a paper in the July 2009 issue of the Journal describing how cantilever stairs work and giving some general guidance on how they should be repaired. Our third paper, by

Paul Ragsdale, provides an interesting case study on the recently completed programme of conservation work to the cantilever stairs, and particularly the Great Stair at Kedleston Hall, arguably the most splendid Georgian house in Derbyshire. This paper describes processes used to understand the construction of the various staircases and landings, grade them according to structural ability, weigh up the repair options and finally select and put in hand the most appropriate solution. The finished work provides safe access to the upper storage rooms around the top landing of the Great Stair without compromising its architectural impact.

The Rocks area of Sydney, Australia is of great character and cultural significance, much visited by tourists, who go to experience a wide-ranging and diverse urban fabric. In our fourth paper, Richard Mackay and Chris Johnston consider the heritage management plan prepared for The Rocks to examine how heritage management practice is evolving in Australia. In contrast to much of the literature about these plans, which tend to concentrate on the methodology and frameworks for preparing them, the authors also discuss the use of the plan as a practical tool to inform decision making. In so doing they make a valuable contribution to our understanding of what is involved in, and can be achieved by, wide-ranging community engagement.

In our final paper, and in sharp contrast with the sensitive approach to conservation that is developing in Australia, Enrico Fodde draws attention to the state of affairs in five of the former Central Asian Soviet republics. During the years of communist domination, ideological diktats forced the widespread neglect and destruction of religious buildings and the historic fabric of many towns to make way for the construction of new socialist-inspired utopias. When the Soviet Union disintegrated it was natural that the newly independent republics should wish to embark on projects to conserve what remained. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm to engage in such projects, without the underpinning of clear conservation policies, philosophies and a sound understanding of relevant repair techniques, has led to some regrettable outcomes, as three illustrated case studies demonstrate. On a more positive note, UNESCO initiatives are helping to build capacity in the region so that its architecture, monuments and sites can be conserved in more appropriate ways.

Lastly, Angel Ayón's paper about the philosophical issues raised during recent conservation work to Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum published in the November 2009 issue has prompted others involved in the project to contribute a short article. Norman Weiss and his colleagues supply additional information, in the interests of achieving a historically accurate account of the materials and colours previously used externally at this outstanding example of twentieth-century architecture.

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