

Editorial

‘Patina of age’ is a positive attribute and a characteristic we admire in historic buildings. Its loss is usually lamented and often cannot easily be replicated, nor in some cases should it be. Patina forms the ‘battle-scars’ marking the gradual, inexorable decay to which all man-made structures succumb. Decay can sometimes be slowed but rarely halted altogether.

Although poor care, inappropriate repairs or a lack of respect accelerate these destructive forces, thorough understanding, careful management and respect can slow deterioration ensuring the continued survival and appreciation of ancient buildings. Conservation professionals accord respect to the physical aging process because patina embodies in buildings the historic, cultural, social or religious values passed from one generation to the next.

The effects of climate change and increasingly frequent extreme weather events are now adding to concerns about physical decay and challenging our long-held assumptions about the speed of deterioration or destruction. Predictions about the direct impact of, for example, rising sea levels appear to be more immediate than hitherto. These are no longer issues to be addressed at some future unspecified date.

The topicality of flood risk and its mitigation is highlighted by Richard Davies’ paper about the Red Store, Lerryn, Cornwall, a humble modest scaled building in poor condition but nevertheless considered sufficiently valuable to the local community to justify its acquisition and conversion. Protection from intertidal flooding and potential climate change became integral to the adaptation to a new use. Here, neglect and decay had progressed beyond the stage of pleasing patina. The balance to be struck between the effects of aging and new work required to make it fit for the future is the intellectual dilemma facing all practitioners in this field.

Repair contracts conducted safely require appropriate working access. Protection from the elements is also crucial, but the skills of the scaffolder or of the structural engineer in this process are rarely described when the scaffolding is extensive or complex. There is often merit in having this preliminary element pre-designed and Ed Morton, an accredited conservation engineer, outlines a number of the common issues that arise,

illustrating these by the practical application of the pre-designed scaffolding to enable re-roofing of the main part of Stowe House, Buckinghamshire.

Patina as an indication of durability or decay also indirectly underpins Tim Palmer's article on Caen stone. The only French stone imported into England in the Middle Ages, it was widely used until the Reformation. While much survives and has a reputation for robustness, not all medieval material was of the same high quality. Despite a revival in the nineteenth century, weathering on some buildings was calamitous and damaging to its reputation.

Petrographic samples from both good and poor stone taken by the author have enabled comparisons to be made to examine the stone's variable durability. The behaviour of the different varieties is little defined and a more thorough evaluation is advocated. This will permit more informed decisions on the selection of better-quality stone – especially important where the preference among some specifiers appears to be based more on aesthetics than on long-term durability.

Tim Yates, Technical Director of the Building Research Establishment, follows Tim Palmer's analysis by examining problems associated with the stone types used to build and repair Cloister Court, at the Palace of Westminster, London and the difficulties of identifying appropriate replacement Caen stone. It is a practical illustration of the importance of understanding the petrography as described in the previous paper.

Survival of historic buildings is often dependent on robustness of use as well as durability of structure. Sometimes uses rooted in traditional customs and practices and social well-being are overtaken by the conveniences and practicalities of modern life. Fodil Fadli and Magda Sibley see these challenges exemplified in *hammāms*, the rarely studied historic bathhouses of Cairo, a building type now being lost but once important to the urban fabric of historic Islamic cities. The purpose of these buildings is placed in their wider social, religious and geographical context and, in the light of their neglect and disappearance, the authors suggest guidelines for their sustainable adaptive reuse. If it is not stretching the analogy too far, these are perhaps prescriptions for the patina of the historic city.

In the final article, Zuzana Slížková and Miloš Drdäcký address damage rather than pleasing patina in the context of nineteenth-century cast, in-situ plaster floors within the fourteenth century castle of Karlštejn in the Czech Republic. Parts that remain exhibit high durability and strength. These were analysed and compared with ancient mortars and the exposure tested so that a repair mortar with similar characteristics could be developed before new floors are installed.

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