

Editorial

The unprecedented turbulence in the global financial markets and the consequent downturn in the interlocked economies of the developed world have brought to an end a prolonged period of growth and prosperity. As the financial world spins off its axis and assets turn toxic, we all need to adjust to a world that will never be quite the same again. Not only has confidence in the monetary policies of past years been shaken to the core but there is also an uncomfortable realization that the 'inconvenient truth' of climate change can no longer be ignored. The time has come for radical action by the governments of the industrialized nations if disaster is to be averted.

Although the outlook at present may appear bleak, a careful re-examination of our built environment will reveal ample physical evidence of man's ability to successfully adapt to changes in the past. Responses to previous social, economic, political and religious upheavals have helped to shape much of the built environment that we treasure today, and we value it not only for its aesthetic qualities but also for what it can tell us of the ways in which our ancestors adjusted to change. Indeed, the current slowdown in world and local economies provides a timely opportunity. Free from the unrelenting development pressure on the fabric of our historic towns and cities, there is a chance to reflect on those buildings and places that should be valued so that secure and sustainable futures can be formulated for them. By using this intermission wisely, we have the opportunity to be ready, when the economic recovery occurs, with robust local planning frameworks and policies that will effectively reconcile the aspirations of developers and property owners with the constraint that comes from protecting and enhancing our historic urban cores so that they have a vibrant and sustainable future.

Part of the process of securing a sustainable future for any building is a proper appreciation so that decisions relating to it will be as informed as possible, thus minimizing the risk of loss or damage to important building fabric or the compromising of its architectural integrity. The papers in this volume of the Journal look at different ways of acquiring an understanding of the buildings under consideration.

Elizabeth Green's paper presents the approach taken by the National Trust to a farm building complex at Egryn in North Wales, and in particular its medieval hall house. The undertaking of a very detailed analysis ahead of the building work was essential for guiding the decision-making and giving the building a sustainable financial future. The practical and pragmatic approach adopted has not only secured the future of the building, but has also provided opportunities for local people to engage with the building on open days, whilst the site remains a working farm.

Aylin Orbasli investigates the traditional coral stone buildings of the northern Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia. These buildings are in grave danger as they face the twin problems of redundancy which leads to neglect, and a lack of understanding on the part of building operatives and supervising professional practising in the region about the construction techniques associated with coral building stones and their appropriate repair.

In contrast to the gathering of information largely from careful inspection of the visible fabric, supplemented by archival research, Jonathan Spodek and Elisabetta Rosina demonstrate the value of applying non-destructive, non-contact methods to gather and evaluate information. They describe the potential of infrared thermography for gathering data about materials, their conditions and state of decay that may not be evident from visual examination. The value of this technique, which exploits the principle that heat flowing through a material is altered by anomalies, is well illustrated by reference to case studies in Italy and the USA.

To secure the simultaneous well-being of the fabric of a building, its contents and occupants requires a proper understanding of the interplay of relative humidity, air temperatures, both internally and externally, and the temperatures at the surface and within materials. Only by measuring and monitoring these data can environmental strategies be devised and suitable corrective measures applied. Based on her experiences working with National Trust properties, Linda Bullock provides in our final paper an overview of the issues related to the control of the internal environments of historic buildings.

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