

SPAB Scholarship Information Pack



The following information should help you decide whether the nine-month travelling Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Scholarship programme is for you.

Please email Scholarship Officer Catharine Bull with any questions, to apply in alternative format, and to be put in touch with past Scholars before submitting your application: catharine.bull@spab.org.uk.

Key 2026 Scholarship Dates

7 October 2025	Open access zoom Q&A for applicants
21 October 2025	Closing date for applications
18 November 2025	Shortlisted candidates notified
10 December 2025	Pre-interview gathering Candidates and their partners are invited to the SPAB offices to meet current Scholars, the interview panel and other candidates
11 December 2025	Interviews
w/c 15 December 2025	Candidates contacted All candidates informed of the outcome of the interviews
Mid-March 2026	Scholarship start date Scholarship launches at SPAB office
May 2026	The Repair of Old Buildings Course Week-long course
September 2026	Dance Scholarship Trust AGM Candidates and their partners are invited
Mid-December 2026	Scholarship ends Final presentation to Education & Training Committee, SPAB Guardians and candidates for 2027 Scholarships

Background

Academic training can lack practical experience with traditional buildings, materials and techniques. The SPAB Scholarship aims to address this.

SPAB was founded by architects like Philip Webb who championed the importance of working on buildings with their own hands. These architects would travel from site to site to gain a practical understanding of the traditional materials and techniques used in creating, maintaining and repairing old buildings.

It was in this spirit that the SPAB committee awarded its first Scholarship in 1930 for an architect to “take the opportunity to see and understand the organisation necessary for the successful repair of an ancient building and the methods best employed to that end”. That ethos remains to this day, though the Scholarship has since expanded to include building surveyors and structural engineers.

The Scholarship teaches young professionals SPAB’s philosophy of sympathetic repair of old buildings, focusing on the importance of properly understanding and appreciating old buildings before beginning work on them.

It is open to those who seek to be the decision-makers who shape the repairs and interventions to historic buildings, set specifications and oversee their implementation.

The past nine months have been transformative, offering an incredible breadth of knowledge that has significantly enhanced my professional confidence. I now feel equipped to engage in more meaningful conversations around conservation, asking thoughtful and considered questions. This experience has prepared me to approach my work with renewed confidence, and I am eager to apply these insights to practice.

Sarika Jhawar, 2024 Scholar

Most of the programme involves visits to buildings across the country, either in the planning phase or as working sites, guided by experts. There are no formal lectures or submissions apart from a selection of pages from sketchbooks at the end of the programme.

Funders

The SPAB Scholarship would not be possible without financial assistance from Alan Baxter Foundation, Drake Trust, Dance Scholarship Trust, Historic England, Robbins Family Charitable Trust, Cathedral Architects Association, Patrick Plunket Memorial Fund, Jonathan Vickers Scholarship Fund, Banister Fletcher Scholarship Fund and Ernest Cook Scholarship Fund.

Typical Programme Content

The Scholarship programme is bespoke and flexible each year, based on the opportunities available and Scholars' needs and interests. Learning takes place through site visits, first-hand experience and informal discussion rather than formal lectures or submissions.

Scholars meet leading conservation professionals across the country. They visit architects, surveyors, engineers, conservators, analysts and craftspeople at building sites, offices, workshops, yards, quarries and foundries to see repair work first-hand. An informed host will guide them through the topics demonstrated by the site in question and there is ample opportunity to discuss the issues and ask questions.

They discuss the philosophy and principles of building conservation and gain hands-on experience where possible. They record visits in notebooks which are submitted at the end of the programme.

Two elements will recur throughout the programme:

- the philosophy of careful and considered repair
- excellence in crafts skills

Careful and Considered Repair

"A building's fabric is the primary source from which knowledge and meaning can be drawn."

The SPAB Approach

Essential to the SPAB Approach is the retention and care of historic fabric. Scholars will engage with crucial issues relating to methods of repair and the key dilemma facing those concerned with historic building work: restoration versus repair; when to keep and repair what survives and when to renew.

Scholars will begin to understand the decisions involved as they spend time with craftspeople known to advocate a repair approach. Over the course of the programme, Scholars will see a number of solutions and viewpoints and develop their own conclusions about the best approach for old buildings.

Excellence in Crafts Skill

Traditional building skills used to be passed from generation to generation, but that rarely happens now. This has led to a gap in the sector's awareness of the best ways to look after old buildings and resulted in the inappropriate treatment of many historic buildings. The Scholarship allows buildings professionals to visit people working with materials and tools, see a range of conservation approaches, and witness first-hand the value of skilled repairs.

Outline Syllabus

The Scholarship is a nine-month, continuous training programme running from mid-March to early December. It is split into two parts: the Lethaby Scholarship and the Plunket Scholarship.

The Lethaby Scholarship takes up the first six months of the programme and involves travelling to sites across the country to meet a range of the country's leading building conservation professionals and see a wide range of trades and repair techniques.

The Plunket Scholarship takes up the last three months of the programme and is spent visiting a small number of country houses selected with each individual Scholar.

This syllabus outlines the kinds of topics covered but is not prescriptive – the Scholarship is different each year.

Stage I: The Lethaby Scholarship (6 months)

The philosophy of repair and conservation: Understanding the philosophy of honest and skillful repair and how this is applied in practical conservation work. Scholars will encounter the dilemmas which abound in conservation work. Through practical application, discussion and debate with leading exponents in the field, they will be encouraged to develop a sound practical and philosophical basis for all future conservation work they undertake.

The history of architecture and vernacular construction in the UK: An introduction to the historic framework within which old buildings have their place demonstrated through visits to buildings, town walks and guided observation.

The materials of building: The origins and processing of materials central to traditional building and historic building repair demonstrated via visits to places of extraction and production.

Stone and slate the characteristics of different stones, quarrying and working methods

Timber the growth of timber in managed woodland; methods of drying and conservation

Brick and tile the characteristics of various clays, their preparation and manufacture

Mortars the properties of mortars; their constituent materials; preparation, use and analysis

Various visits to bell foundries, lead casting shops, glassworks, plaster workshops etc.

Building craft skills: An appreciation of the skills and techniques required in the field of building repair including stonemasonry, carpentry, joinery, plumbing, roofing, glazing, metalwork, rendering, painting and decorating.

Structural analysis of historic buildings: An introduction to the structural principles and methods used in the construction of historic buildings to understand their present condition and the diagnosis of defects.

Decay mechanisms in historic buildings: Site visits to demonstrate the various problems of decay in historic building fabric, supplemented by lectures and visits to research laboratories where possible.

Repair methods and techniques: Consideration of commonly used methods of repair and how to choose the right one based on longevity and financial, practical and aesthetic considerations.

Conservation techniques: How to conserve various materials and how to apply these to buildings, e.g. stone, timber, plasterwork, lead, cast and wrought iron, painted decoration (including wall paintings), wallpaper and mosaics.

Alteration, conservation and the design of new construction: Solutions for new design in the alteration or sensitive conversion of redundant buildings to new uses and to new construction in historic settings.

Energy conservation and retrofit: An introduction to the use of green technologies, retrofit and the contribution of traditional materials to energy conservation.

The design and installation of building services: Principles involved in the introduction of building services into historic building fabric.

Fire protection and security installations: The conflicting demands of these related issues may be discussed on site, at research labs or with those pioneering new approaches.

Professional skills related to historic buildings: How to analyse historic buildings, prepare proposals and run jobs on site.

UK conservation law and finance: A basic introduction to the roles of central and local government, voluntary societies and the Church, and to grants, listing and legal controls.

Continued care and maintenance: A thorough understanding of the importance of planned maintenance and the need for continued and regular care of historic buildings.

SPAB's Repair of Old Buildings Course: Scholars attend the five-day repair course for buildings professionals introducing the complex issues involved in the conservation of historic buildings.

Stage II: The Plunket Scholarship (3 months)

The country house: An in-depth look at the arts and craftsmanship that go into country houses. This was introduced in 1980 with funding from Patrick Plunket and provides a complete contrast to the Lethaby Scholarship, giving Scholars the opportunity to pursue a topic of study of their choice.

Supervision and Assessment

There are no formal lectures or submissions apart from a selection of pages from their sketchbooks at the end of the programme.

The Scholarship is organised by the Scholarship Officer. Scholars have regular contact with the Scholarship Officer throughout the programme, providing feedback and discussing past and potential visits. They also have contact with a volunteer mentor (usually a past Scholar) who can help them get the most out of the Scholarship experience. Individual hosts may also provide useful support and feedback.

Scholars present and critically analyse one or two of their visits at meetings with SPAB's Education and Training Committee. There are also smaller subgroup meetings to discuss each Scholar's progress.

Scholars make a record of each site visit in their sketchbook, developing their own style of sketching and recording what they see. These sketchbooks are periodically reviewed and submitted at the end of the programme, after which they remain important reference documents in the SPAB Archive.

Scholars are also asked to contribute to the *SPAB Magazine*, website blog and social media channels.

Practical Information

Funding

There is no course fee. Training costs are covered by the SPAB, sponsors and by the individuals and organisations providing the training.

Scholars receive a non-taxable bursary in the region of £12,772 paid in monthly payments from March to November inclusive (approx £1,600/month). The final payment is made in November, with £200 held back until we receive copies of the Scholar's notebook pages.

This bursary is a contribution towards costs and will not cover full expenses. Additional funds beyond the bursary payments will be required, normally between £4,000 and £6,000.

To find out more about the financial implications of the course, please email Scholarship Officer Catharine Bull who can put you in touch with recent Scholars: catharine.bull@spab.org.uk.

Accommodation

The programme involves constant travel, and Scholars have to arrange their own accommodation with the support of the Scholarship Officer. Scholars stay with hosts or local contacts, or make their own arrangements with friends and family, camping, B&Bs or other accommodation. Scholars are provided with contact details of past Fellows and Scholars who help wherever they can.

Travel

The Scholarship is demanding. There is a lot of travel; you will be away from home most weekdays and sometimes at weekends. We hope that at least one of the Scholars chosen will have the use of a car, which will allow the group to travel together; otherwise, we recommend that a joint car is purchased for the programme. Funds may be advanced for this purpose and the monthly payments reduced accordingly.

Accessibility

Owing to the nature and style of the Scholarship programme, it is not completely accessible. If you would like to discuss particular access needs, please contact Scholarship Officer: catharine.bull@spab.org.uk

Application Information

The Scholarship programme gives a practical basis to the education of designers and specifiers of building repair. It is aimed at architects, building surveyors and structural engineers who have completed the academic based part of their courses. Applications are also welcome from those seeking to be decision-makers in the shaping of repairs and interventions to historic buildings, setting specifications and overseeing their implementation. Applicants should have some practical experience and, though near the start of their careers, they should be aiming towards, if not completed, their full professional qualification. For further guidance on eligibility please contact the Scholarship Officer.

Eligibility

Successful applicants will be:

- Early-career architects, structural engineers, building surveyors and related heritage conservation professionals who have completed the academic part of their courses
- Enthusiastic about old buildings and seeking to be decision-makers in the shaping of interventions and repairs to historic buildings
- Willing to learn, ask questions, and argue through difficult ideas, and reflect on and question what they have been taught at university
- Polite and able to get on with other Scholars and hosts who generously support the Scholarship on a voluntary basis
- Reasonably fit as the programme is physically and mentally demanding
- Permanently UK-based for the duration of the programme
- Prepared to contribute to SPAB and spread its principles after their Scholarship

They may also have:

- Practical experience working with old buildings and be practically minded
- Practical experience working with their hands

Overseas Candidates

Eligible overseas candidates are welcome to apply provided that they have good spoken English and a UK base for the duration of the programme. Please note that the offer of a SPAB Scholarship is subject to the applicant providing evidence of their right to live and work in the UK. SPAB is not a registered sponsor body for the purpose of visa applications. Applicants from outside the UK and Ireland should check their eligibility for a UK visa before applying to the scheme. Please check the [UK government website](#) for more information.

Interviews

Candidates selected for interview will be given the names of one or two recent past Scholars to contact. It is important that applicants contact, and ideally meet, at least one past Scholar to gain an accurate impression of the Scholarship and what it entails personally, professionally and financially.

In-person interviews are held at the SPAB offices in Spital Square, London, with an informal evening event beforehand to hear from the current Scholars, meet the interview panel and a few staff members. The interview panel consists of six or so people, drawn from the SPAB's committees and staff. It always includes past Scholars.

Three or four Scholars are usually chosen each year. Candidates are generally notified within a week of the interview whether they have been successful or not.

Applicants are asked to bring to their interview a small selection of examples of their academic and work in a portfolio together with evidence of other interests, particularly of a practical or artistic nature.

Apply Online

Before applying, please email Scholarship Officer Catharine Bull catharine.bull@spab.org.uk to be put in touch with a past Scholar/s. This helps applicants gain a clearer understanding of what to expect from the Scholarship.

Scholars are invited to join a live Q&A with past Scholars on Tuesday 7 October. Please contact catharine.bull@spab.org.uk for details.

Please apply via the [application form](#) on the SPAB website by **21 October 2025**.

Our online application form includes two questions which we encourage you to respond to by uploading a file (pdf, .jpeg or .png) of a hand-written/drawn document or link to a video.

If you have any questions before you apply, or would prefer to apply in a different format, please contact Catharine.

Around eight applicants will be invited to for in-person interview, from which three or four will be selected and offered a Scholarship.

We are committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity in the sector. We particularly welcome applications by people from backgrounds under-represented in building conservation (such as those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, women and black and minority ethnic communities).

Terms of Acceptance

In accepting your Scholarship place, you should be aware of the following requirements and confirm that you are prepared to comply with them.

Attendance

Scholars are expected to attend all programmed visits unless serious unforeseen circumstances dictate otherwise. In these instances, you must notify the SPAB and the planned host at the earliest possible opportunity and request permission to absent yourself.

Failure to notify or turn up at visits may result in a written warning and the pro rata forfeiture of the Scholarship bursary (in the region of £40/day).

The SPAB must be notified, prior to your acceptance of the Scholarship interview, of all known commitments during the Scholarship period. Pre-existing commitments not agreed in advance may incur the bursary forfeiture above.

Conduct, Safeguarding and Disciplinary Procedures

Scholars are representatives of the SPAB and are expected to always act politely and respectfully.

Unacceptable behaviour may result in a written warning, deduction of bursary and even loss of the Scholarship place. Examples of unacceptable behaviour include lateness or poor timekeeping, swearing or abusive language, and lack of application.

While Scholars are not SPAB staff members, they will be expected to abide by SPAB's Disciplinary and Grievance Policy, Safeguarding Policy and Misconduct Guidelines, which will be circulated to successful candidates.

Working

No professional work may be undertaken during the Scholarship.

Health and Safety

Scholars must comply with health and safety at all times. They will receive a health and safety briefing in their first week which outlines what is expected.

Insurance

The Society's insurance may not cover you for every eventuality, so Scholars may wish to take out additional personal injury cover for the duration of the programme.

Further Obligations

In addition to the above terms, by accepting a Scholarship offer candidates agree to:

- write thanks to each of their hosts
- keep a sketchbook journal of their visits and submit a selection to SPAB in the January after the Scholarship
- submit a two-page report on Cathedral Week and miscellaneous casework and other reports requested by hosts
- periodically contribute to social media including a blog post for the SPAB website
- attendance at the Dance Scholarship Trust's AGM in September
- attendance at the Fellowship and Scholarship presentation
- present to next year's applicants in January
- give some time, in future months, to promoting the SPAB and the Dance Scholarship Trust