

# SPAB CONFERENCE REPORT

## The Old House Show

A programme of talks on the art and craft of building care



The Old House Show presented by the SPAB  
Friday 7 and Saturday 8 September 2018  
The Chapel of St Peter and St Paul, Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich



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# Talks Programme Aims

An accessible, informative and enjoyable introduction to key aspects of understanding, caring for or working with old buildings, and to the SPAB's Approach to conservation. The programme also offered the opportunity to hear more about the venue for the Old House Show – the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

## Forum participants

### **Getting Started and Moving On in Conservation: careers and professional development forum**

Chaired by Rebecca Thompson – director, Thompson Heritage Consultancy

with expert panel members:

Nina Bilbey – senior stone carving tutor, City and Guilds of London Art School

Natalie Cohen – archaeologist, the National Trust

Sarah Freeman – inspector of historic buildings and areas, Historic England

Chloe Granger – architect, Crosby Granger Architects

Rachel Morley – director, Friends of Friendless Churches

### **Living with your Old Building: forum**

Chaired by Douglas Kent – Technical and Research Director, the SPAB

with expert panel members:

Sue Bowman – heritage property solicitor

Roger Hunt – author and journalist

James Innerdale – architect and historic buildings consultant

Emma Lawrence – head of casework, the SPAB

Tanya Szendeffy – conservation officer, Rother District Council



# William Morris and conservation: the SPAB Approach to historic buildings

## **Matthew Slocombe - SPAB director**

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) is the oldest conservation charity in the UK. It provides help and support to owners and professionals involved with old buildings, and campaigns for the conservation of our shared built heritage. Its work embraces planning and technical advice, skills training, campaigning and building performance research. Matthew's introductory talk described the uniquely practical nature of the SPAB's interest in conservation and how its distinctive approach has built on the knowledge and experience gathered since its foundation in 1877 by writer, designer, craftsman and campaigner William Morris, architect Philip Webb and others.

Matthew explained the influence of writer and thinker John Ruskin's ideas on the SPAB's founders and elucidated what their principled approach to conservation – still advocated by the Society today – means in practical terms. This is based on protection of a building's fabric – the material from which it is constructed – as the primary source from which knowledge about the building and understanding of its history and essential character can be drawn. Firstly, the SPAB recommends regular care and preventative maintenance to 'stave off decay by daily care'. Where larger scale work is needed, the Society advocates conservative repair, based on understanding of the building and of the problem to be addressed, and carrying out essential work only – not seeking to 'restore' the building to an earlier or ideal form. The SPAB believes that damaged or missing elements do not need to be replaced unless there is a functional need, and that where intervention or localised reinstatement is carried out, it should be done modestly and effectively using sympathetic materials and appropriate craft skills. New work should fit to the old (not vice versa) and although conservation often requires creative thinking, the methods used should be tried and tested. The SPAB recognises that, from time to time, old buildings may need sympathetic adaptation or extension to ensure their continued use. It believes that modest and sympathetic new elements that fulfil modern needs in a way that respects the old building can contribute positively to its interest and continuing story. Matthew concluded by echoing William Morris's feeling that 'we are only trustees for those who come after us' and commended the SPAB's approach of understanding, care and conservative repair as a means of sustaining historic for both present and future generations.

# Keynote: why heritage matters

## **Loyd Grossman CBE, entrepreneur, writer and broadcaster**

In his entertaining and thought-provoking keynote address, Loyd Grossman explored why heritage matters (and should matter), what the current threats and challenges are in the built environment, and what the future may hold for historic buildings and their conservation. He reflected that over a hundred years on from the Ancient Monuments Act of 1913 (which first introduced the concepts of designation and guardianship of historic sites) we are in changing times and, whilst research tells us consistently that people enjoy and value the historic environment because it contributes positively to their quality of life, it faces political, social and economic challenges. Loyd expressed concern about the declining role for expertise in identifying and protecting built heritage (for example, falling numbers of local authority conservation officers), but also welcomed growing public engagement in defining what heritage is and how it can be cared for – noting both that what is considered ‘heritage’ has diversified and broadened and that six million people in the UK are members of and/or volunteer with a heritage organisation.

Loyd argued that although the UK ‘does heritage’ well, with two-thirds of overseas visitors citing it as their primary reason for coming to the country, he discerned a number of threats, including pressure for ill-considered development, financial burdens such as VAT levied at the full rate on repairs to old buildings, and a shortage of skilled builders and craftspeople. He observed how many everyday activities take place in historic buildings either built or adapted for that purpose: education, healthcare, entertainment, politics, religious observance, culture, finance, and other work and social interaction; and how closely heritage can be related to how the country thinks about and presents itself. Loyd concluded that it is now more important than ever to speak out clearly and positively about why and how heritage matters, and to ‘shout about the benefits’ without being afraid to use words like ‘joy’ and ‘beauty’ alongside arguments about the financial contribution it makes through, for example, tourism and property values. He argued strongly in favour of developing more inclusive ways of seeing and talking about heritage to reflect what matters to people; of nurturing a new generation of craftspeople in developing their practical skills; and adopting a more respectful approach to the care and repair of old buildings, typified by that followed by the SPAB.



*William Morris and conservation: the SPAB Approach to historic buildings*  
Photo: Wall at the Archbishop's Palace, Charing, Kent. Photo credit: SPAB



*Keynote: why heritage matters*  
Photo: Preston Bus Station – saved from demolition by a public outcry, listed at Grade II and refurbished as the result of a local and national campaign.  
Photo credit: *The Telegraph*

# Dealing with damp: diagnosis and treatment

## **Douglas Kent, technical and research director, the SPAB**

How to diagnose the causes and solve the problems caused by damp in old buildings is one of the questions most frequently asked by callers to the SPAB's technical advice line. Many conventional surveys can miss or wrongly diagnose the source of a damp problem and propose remediation work that would be inappropriate, ineffective or even highly damaging – often because the differences in how old and new buildings are constructed and perform are misunderstood or ignored. As a corrective to this, Douglas explained the common sources and symptoms of damp; how to spot their causes and diagnose the problems they create; how to specify work that will treat the problem effectively; and how to introduce controls to prevent it recurring.

Damp is generally understood to be excessive moisture, from liquid water or water vapour, that might harm both an old building and its occupants. It can cause timber decay and metal corrosion; spoil plaster, painted surfaces and furniture; increase salt and frost damage to walls; exacerbate symptoms of respiratory conditions, such as asthma; and affect a building's energy efficiency, making it cold and unpleasant. It is important to distinguish between damp caused by rain penetration (leaking roofs, overflowing gutters etc) which causes wet patches and staining; below-ground moisture (rising damp) which can often be seen as green algal growth on external walls or discoloured patches on floors and the lower parts of walls inside; and condensation, seen intermittently on cold surfaces such as window glass when moist air is cooled to its 'dew point'. Poor building maintenance and unrepaired damage can allow water to get into a building; rising damp may come from ground moisture or from undetected leaks; but condensation is usually caused by inadequate ventilation. Diagnosis should take into account: the date and type of building, including its materials, construction and situation; whether or not it is occupied or heated; how it is used; prevailing weather conditions; and the location, duration and symptoms of damp, such as staining or mould, and salt deposits appearing on surfaces. Douglas stressed that solid-walled buildings of traditional construction must be able to 'breathe' i.e. moisture enters the fabric through permeable building materials but can then freely evaporate out again without causing damage. By contrast, modern cavity wall construction relies on barriers to keep moisture out. Problems can arise when this distinction is misunderstood and methods suitable for one type of building are applied to another – for example hard cement mortar rather than softer lime mortar used to point or render a



solid stone wall, or applying or injecting chemical damp proofing products to soft brick or stone walls. Douglas advocated measures such as regular maintenance, good drainage, sufficient insulation while ensuring adequate ventilation and taking care to retain breathability, used appropriately according to the type and nature of damp. He recommended the SPAB's technical advice note on damp for further information and guidance.

*Supported by grant aid from Historic England, the SPAB's technical advice line is free to use and open to callers on weekday mornings between 9.30am and 12.30pm, 020 7456 0916.*

*More information and advice on damp and other topics can be found in the SPAB's online knowledge base at [spab.org.uk](http://spab.org.uk).*

## Working with World Heritage: conservation at the Old Royal Naval College

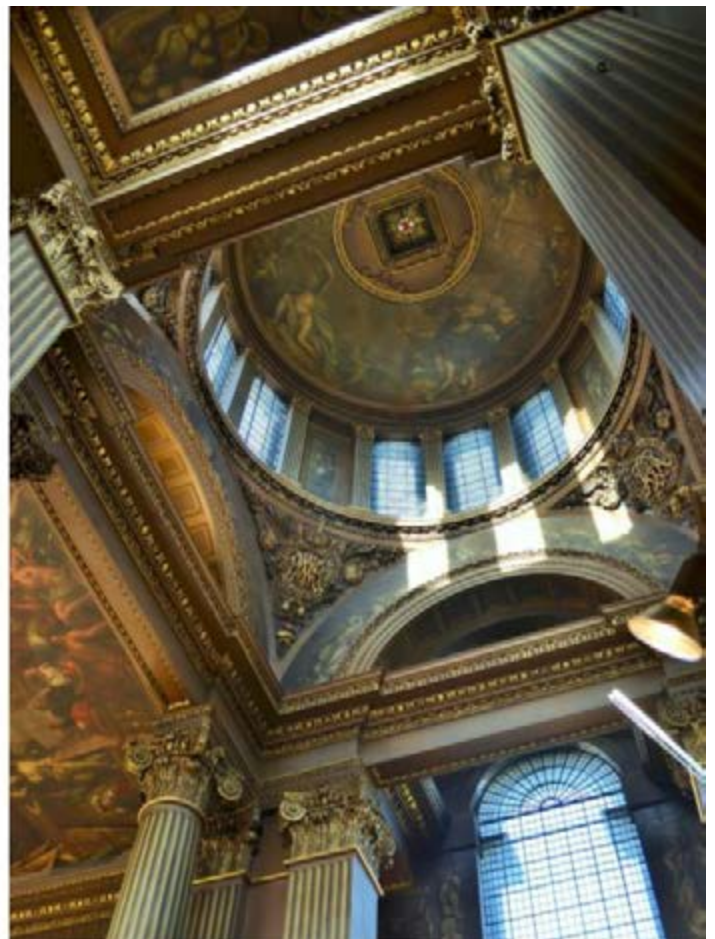
### **Martin Ashley, partner and senior conservation architect, Martin Ashley Architects**

For over ten years Martin has been the architect responsible for the Old Royal Naval College (ORNC), both its daily maintenance and repair, and major capital projects such as the painstaking conservation of the Painted Hall which is due for completion in 2019. He described the significance of this complex of historic buildings at the heart of the Greenwich Maritime World Heritage Site, which also encompasses the Queen's House, the National Maritime Museum, the Cutty Sark, the Royal Observatory and their landscape setting, which has been recognised by UNESCO as an outstanding architectural ensemble of universal heritage significance.

Martin gave fascinating insights into the challenges of caring for a physically complex site, begun to a masterplan by Sir Christopher Wren in 1696 as a royal hospital for seafarers, but now a thriving university campus, visitor destination, events venue and film location. He outlined the role of the World Heritage Site management plan in guiding a ten-year rolling inspection and maintenance schedule addressing hundreds of windows, acres of roof and miles of railings and paving. The ORNC is additionally complex in that the 17th-century hospital buildings, which are designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument



(SAM), overlies the buried remains of another SAM: the Tudor Greenwich Palace. A heritage partnership agreement between the Greenwich Foundation (which manages the site), Historic England and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in place to streamline the process of obtaining consent to carry out work, is underpinned by no fewer than 32 separate method statements. Martin concluded with a brief summary of current work to conserve the fragile historic surfaces of the Painted Hall, with its allegorical scenes celebrating George I and the new Hanoverian Dynasty his reign inaugurated. The wider project to provide enhanced visitor access via an undercroft space necessitated an archaeological investigation which revealed basement storage spaces from the Tudor palace. Martin described the discovery as part of 'the every day joy of working in this place' where he always had to expect the unexpected.



*Working with World Heritage: conservation at the Old Royal Naval College*  
Photo: The Painted Hall, ORNC  
Photo credit: Martin Ashley Architects / Greenwich Foundation

# Retrofitting old buildings for energy efficiency: key principles

**Jonathan Garlick, technical officer, the SPAB**

Over recent years the SPAB has conducted research into the thermal performance of old solid-walled buildings and demonstrated that they perform more efficiently than had previously been thought. The Society runs retrofitting courses and publishes guidance, such as its Old House Eco Handbook, and is often approached for advice on options for thermally upgrading traditional buildings while protecting their special interest, increasing comfort and reducing utility bills. Jonathan's talk examined how to approach this work, looking in turn at options for windows, doors, roofs, floors and walls. He also emphasised the innate advantages old buildings may have, such as thick walls and substantial roofs which aid heat retention, and building materials and components capable of a long life. Energy performance certificates (EPCs) are not required for listed buildings, and Jonathan noted that the Building Regulations Part L (2010) allows local authority officers discretion in applying performance requirements to traditional buildings, in order to protect their physical authenticity and historic character.

The long-term 'whole house approach', a term coined by the Sustainable Traditional Building Alliance, was advocated: considering how all elements of the building act together, carrying out essential maintenance, using compatible methods and materials for works, and thinking through the likely impact overall of interventions made in one area. Jonathan emphasised the value of establishing a base point: understanding your building's energy use e.g. via a Smart Meter, and of carrying out simple measures to improve draught proofing, simple insulation (e.g. pipe lagging), using heating systems more efficiently, changing to low-energy bulbs and appliances, and conserving water. Simple measures were often effective – blinds, curtains, shutters, letterbox plates, and secondary (not double) glazing where feasible. Insulating under suspended floors and in roof spaces at ceiling or rafter level can increase comfort and energy efficiency, but should be carefully specified and installed to avoid the risk of increased condensation through inadequate ventilation. Spray-on foams are damaging, irreversible and should be avoided. The complexities of insulating solid walls (brick, stone, timber framed etc) internally or externally were discussed, outlining factors to take into consideration. Jonathan also touched on microgeneration options, but stressed that good building care and energy efficiency measures should come first, and that how a building is used will matter, reminding listeners that it is people, not old houses, that use energy.

# New design for old buildings: the SPAB Approach

**Iain Boyd, SPAB chair, co-author of New Design for Old Buildings**

The SPAB recognises that old buildings may need to adapt and develop in order to remain in use, but believes that extension, alteration, installation of modern facilities, and adaptation for new uses should be carried out with understanding and sensitivity towards the building's historic fabric and character. Drawing on its established approach to old buildings, the Society has sought to articulate principles for how new work can be integrated successfully with historic contexts both functionally and aesthetically, most recently in Iain's 2017 book (with Roger Hunt) *New Design for Old Buildings*. Through examples, large and small, Iain explored these principles and how they can be applied in practice. He demonstrated how new work could respond to the old through rhythm, mass, proportions, juxtapositions and design features without resorting to historical pastiche. Careful handling of junctions between old and new was especially important, as was the dialogue established between parts.

Iain selected a wide variety of projects that all had three key things in common. Firstly, respect for the old building, based on deep understanding and appreciation of its history and fabric. Secondly, thoughtful and sensitive selection of compatible materials, whether matching or contrasting. And, thirdly, high standards of design and craftsmanship that gave the new work a lasting quality. In conversion, adaptation or extension, as in conservation and repair, the new should fit to the old. Design should be informed by practical considerations - how the building will be used and by whom - and its long-term maintenance considered. Iain concluded that new interventions worked best as part of a single conservation and design vision for the whole building and where they were seen as the next stage in the long and continuing life of the building. The SPAB does not advocate copyism or a particular architectural style, but that changes should answer contemporary needs in an honest, contemporary way while respecting the old.

*The SPAB held a major seminar on new design in old buildings in March 2018, find the conference report online: [www.spab.org.uk/advice/conference-reports](http://www.spab.org.uk/advice/conference-reports).*

# Getting started and moving on in conservation: careers and professional development forum

**Chaired by Rebecca Thompson, director, Thompson Heritage Consultancy**

Following Loyd Grossman's call earlier in the day to get involved with old buildings, this forum explored the realities of working in conservation. It is a sector with a wide range of exciting and fulfilling roles, and where there is a constant need for talented people, particularly those with practical conservation, building and craft skills. Increasingly, conservation is one skillset among an inter-disciplinary team, encompassing experts in wildlife conservation, archaeology, architecture, building skills, education, outreach, communications, marketing, and volunteer management. Panel members discussed their own inspiration to work in the sector, their current role and the routes they had followed to train and establish their career. All stressed the value of finding out what interests and engages you most, of making contact with like-minded people (in work, through membership organisations like the SPAB, and through professional forums) and identifying training opportunities to help develop skills and networks, and to gain hands-on experience. While conservation is a specialist area, many different educational qualifications and practical skills are applicable to it and career-changers have a great deal to contribute. All panel members stressed the need for determination: to seek out relevant training, grants and bursaries, and mentoring or other learning opportunities (e.g. local and national amenity society lectures or volunteer projects). Many people established in conservation were willing to help and guide those starting out, although capacity could be an issue, e.g. small organisations could find it difficult to take on a trainee or apprentice. Roles within conservation were not always conventional; it is not usually a '9-5' job. In common with other sectors it is satisfying and enjoyable work, but wages are not necessarily high and many roles are fixed-term, which can sometimes be a barrier to working in conservation.

The panel observed that there are many small organisations in the field, for example heritage organisations with few full-time staff, small architectural practices specialising in old buildings, small building firms etc. Therefore, getting involved with professional bodies such as ICON (Institute of Conservation), IHBC (Institute of Heritage Building Conservation), IFA (Institute of Archaeology), RIBA (Royal Institute of Building Conservation) and RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) can be valuable in order to keep up-to-date with good practice and to widen your network. Where membership



is not obligatory, some employers may still require it for particular posts. Membership of a trade union was recommended. Once you are established in your career, next steps may include higher level training or accreditation, for example, for architects, via the AABC (Architects Accredited in Building Conservation) for which five years' experience is needed. All panel members stressed the value of continuing to learn via classroom and practical CPD. Many organisations in the sector offer courses and activities (the Building Limes Forum, Historic Environment Scotland and the SPAB's working parties were mentioned). Panel members hoped that the conservation workforce would continue to diversify with people from a broad range of backgrounds entering the sector, and looked forward to seeing the impact of recent thinking about vocational education after past decades' emphasis on academic routes.

*For more information about the SPAB's Scholarship training programme for architects, surveyors and engineers, and its parallel Fellowship for craftspeople, go to: [www.spab.org.uk/learning](http://www.spab.org.uk/learning)*

*For the SPAB's advice on working with old buildings see: [www.spab.org.uk/learning/careers-advice](http://www.spab.org.uk/learning/careers-advice)*



*Getting started and moving on in conservation: careers and professional development forum*  
Photo: Forum contributors left to right: Chloe Granger, Rachel Morley, Sarah Freeman, Nina Bilbey  
Photo credit: SPAB/Ralph Hodgson

# Maintenance matters: the routine care of old buildings

## **James Innerdale, architect and historic buildings consultant**

The SPAB Manifesto recommends we should 'stave off decay by daily care' and good maintenance lies at the heart of the SPAB's approach to old buildings. James explained what it is, why it matters, how and why old buildings decay, and how to spot and tackle common problems. One of the founding aims of the SPAB was to encourage and help owners to hand on their buildings to the next generation in good order and with their historic fabric, and hence their character and interest, intact. Maintenance is the routine work needed to keep a building in good condition; the day-to-day care that prevents minor issues becoming big problems requiring substantial and expensive intervention. James divided maintenance into two principal activities: looking – inspecting the building to assess its condition, noting any problems, getting advice if necessary and deciding what work might be needed; and doing – carrying out specific tasks such as clearing out gutters, putting back slipped slates and repainting window frames.

Neglect, poor original construction materials or methods, environmental factors, and the action of plants and animals might all influence the condition of a building and its maintenance needs. Well-intentioned but inappropriate repairs and poor choice of materials could exacerbate existing problems. For example, rather than affording protection, using a hard cement mortar to repoint a damp wall will trap moisture in the wall and hasten its decay. A softer lime mortar that allows the wall to 'breathe' (i.e. allowing moisture in, but then to evaporate out again) would be preferable. Moisture in the wrong place is the enemy of old buildings, leading to structural decay (e.g. rotten timbers, fungal growth and insect infestation) and an unpleasant environment. It is, therefore, vital to check and repair roof coverings and flashings; gutters, hoppers and downpipes; and gulleys and drains to prevent water ingress or damp from the ground. Floor voids and roof spaces need adequate ventilation to enable air to circulate and so prevent condensation and mould growth. James set out a handy maintenance summary: make a checklist to help you look at your building regularly, inside and out, and to keep a note of its condition year on year (photographs are helpful). If you spot problems, especially related to damp, look for the source, consider the cause and decide the remedy accordingly. It is helpful to inspect your building when it is raining to see where the water is going. Seek impartial specialist advice if needed, but avoid 'free surveys' related to the marketing of particular products. Carry out cosmetic repairs regularly. There are many maintenance tasks that you can do yourself but take care to work safely: call in skilled tradespeople for more complex or difficult

work. Finally, be aware that if you have a historic or listed building, some works may need permission. Check with your local authority what rules apply before you start work.

*The SPAB provides free maintenance resources on its website:*

*[www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-co-operatives-project/mcp-fim-resources](http://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/maintenance-co-operatives-project/mcp-fim-resources)*

## Exploring your home's history

### **Ellen Leslie, heritage consultant and historian**

The social and structural history of old buildings matter to both professionals and building owners; it may be required to set the context for a Listed Building Consent or Planning Permission application when changes are proposed, or may be explored for curiosity's sake. Ellen outlined to how to get started on finding out more about a building's history. Begin with establishing what is already known and what you want to find out, then move on to looking carefully at your building to note its features and read the clues embodied in its fabric to help you ask the right questions. Talking to your neighbours and contacting local history societies and archives can be helpful at the outset, before moving on to national or specialist archives (such as the National Archives at Kew, or Historic England Archive at Swindon). Parish records, maps, photographs, prints and paintings, directories, deeds, tenancy agreements, sales particulars, census returns and news cuttings can all be useful. Ellen used three old house case studies to demonstrate how observations and information from various sources could be pieced together to build a picture of how a house had been built, used, occupied and changed over time.

Census returns, gathered every ten years since 1841, indicate who lived at a house, their ages, relationships and occupations. This can illustrate change over time, e.g. a house moving from single to multiple occupancy, and its subdivision or extension, particularly after 1911 when the census began to record the number of rooms a house had. Newspapers in local archives or at the British Library can provide information about local events, properties for sale and their contents, and people and their lifestyles. Maps of all types can indicate property boundaries; position and footprint of buildings on a site; ownerships and tenancies – all of which might change over time. Architectural plans may survive for more significant individual buildings, but also for housing developments, laying out of terraces etc. Increasingly, a variety of material is available online as records are digitised or access to them is relaxed. Conversely, there may be frustrating gaps where material has been lost or disposed of and records are

incomplete. Much is freely available, though some repositories may require you to register as a user and some family history websites levy a subscription. Ellen encouraged owners to explore their building's history; knowing more adds to both understanding and enjoyment, and the detective work involved can be fun. She compared it to doing a complicated jigsaw – sometimes without the picture on the box to guide you.



*Exploring your home's history*

Photo: Rolled drawings in the SPAB Archive

Photo credit: SPAB



# Living with your old building: forum

## **Chaired by Douglas Kent, technical and research director, the SPAB**

Douglas opened this forum with a reminder that old buildings are more than just the sum of their parts and whilst the SPAB emphasises the maintenance and repair of their physical fabric, they can also have a profound effect on the human psyche – people enjoy and care about old buildings. The aim of the forum was to give owners helpful advice on all aspects of living with and looking after an old building. Each panel member indicated the most important considerations from their perspective. These included that regular maintenance is vital and that the quality of historic materials is difficult to replicate, e.g. old timber doors and windows are valuable and should be repaired and retained wherever possible. 'Miracle' products should be treated with extreme caution. Tried and tested methods and materials are usually better for old buildings, and both day-to-day care and any larger interventions should be based on understanding of the old building in question: how it is built, of what materials, and how it works (or is failing to work). Panel members also emphasised the value of taking expert but impartial advice, finding qualified and experienced tradespeople, and understanding the legal framework for work or change to old buildings. This might encompass the need for planning permission or Listed Building Consent for works, restrictions relating to wildlife (bats and protected birds, for instance), covenants and party wall issues. The panel also advocated taking time to understand a problem and address not only its effects but also its root cause, rather than rushing in with quick fixes.

When considering buying an old house it is easy to be seduced by property sales particulars, but it is always advisable to pause and consider whether the building is right for your needs and lifestyle or lends itself to adaptation. If you are buying at auction, there is less time to do background research but you should see the building if at all possible, and ask a surveyor who specialises in that building type to look at the property information pack before you bid. In a refurbishment, it is better to make the building itself sound before looking at attractive fittings such as bathrooms and kitchens. Managing your project is important: give it dedicated thinking time, monitor your budget and timetable, review and regularly discuss progress with your builder and do not be afraid to ask questions or ask for clarification. Something unexpected often arises in an old building project and it is wise to keep a contingency fund. If your building is listed, seek advice from your local authority before applying for consent for works. The panel was conscious, however, that many local authority planning departments are under-resourced and so obtaining pre-application and other advice can be time-consuming. Be aware that listing covers

the whole structure and not just selected features: the listed building description is a guide to aid identification and should not be used as an inventory of significant or protected parts. It is wise to check your building's planning history: for example, if a previous owner did unauthorised work you will become liable for it – although it is possible for buyers and sellers to take out insurance to cover the costs of any making good required.

The SPAB publishes a printed and online list of historic properties for sale for its members.

The Old House Handbook (2008) and Old House Eco Handbook (2013) by Marianne Suhr and Roger Hunt contain a wealth of advice about living with old buildings and upgrading them for energy efficiency. Buy online in the SPAB shop.



*Living with your old building: forum*  
Photo: Castlegate, York (from The List)  
Photo credit: Savills

# A building and conservation history of the Old Royal Naval College

## **Will Palin, conservation director, the Old Royal Naval College**

Will outlined the role of the Greenwich Foundation in maintaining the Old Royal Naval College (ORNC) and engaging people with its history and architecture. The Foundation was established in the 1990s when the naval college left the site and as the result of a public outcry at a proposal that the buildings might be sold privately. They are now occupied by Greenwich University and Trinity Laban music school, with the Painted Hall and historic chapel open to visitors. Will traced the development of the site from the long-demolished Tudor Palace (birthplace of King Henry VIII), which fell into disrepair during the Civil War, to the replacement classical palace commissioned by King Charles I from John Webb in 1664, planned on axis with the Queen's House of 1616 by Inigo Jones. Only one block was completed to Webb's design before funds were exhausted and the project stalled. In 1688 William and Mary decided not to use the palace themselves, but to establish an institution for retired and invalided naval officers on the model of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea. Sir Christopher Wren was charged with developing the plan, incorporating the existing King Charles block and preserving the Queen's House vista. These constraints shaped the layout of the ORNC, built in parallel blocks around an open axis to the river, with the architectural language – which mingles Baroque and Palladian – heavily influenced by Nicholas Hawksmoor. The first naval pensioners arrived in 1705.

The Painted Hall is the showcase and ceremonial heart of the site. It is a secular space in ecclesiastical form with a vestibule, and lower and upper halls. It was decorated by Sir James Thornhill from 1707 in a project that took 20 years to complete. He published a guide for visitors in 1720 explaining his composition, which celebrates the Hanoverian Dynasty, and identifying the key figures, real and allegorical. A substantial donation from King George II forty years later enabled Thomas Ripley to complete the chapel, which faces the Painted Hall over the central vista. In its lifetime, the Painted Hall has been used as a gallery to display a collection of maritime art (now at the National Maritime Museum) and as the naval college dining room. Gravy stains were amongst the damage to the decoration identified by paint experts at the start of the current conservation project in 2012. This £8.5m project, part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and due for completion in 2019, has seen conservators Paine and Stewart and specialists DBR Conservation work with ORNC architect Martin Ashley to clean and



stabilise the historic paint scheme, improve access and refit the hall undercroft for visitor use. Large projects such as this are, though, only one aspect of caring for this seven-hectare complex, which lies at the heart of the Greenwich Maritime World Heritage Site.



*A building and conservation history of the Old Royal Naval College*  
Photo: ORNC excavation showing remains of Tudor Palace  
Photo credit: The Greenwich Foundation



# William Morris and Arts & Crafts style

## **Helen Elletson, curator, the William Morris Society**

William Morris was born in 1834 in Walthamstow, at that time a largely rural area on London's fringe. Helen described how his eccentric and idyllic childhood there influenced the later course of his life. Destined for a career in the Church, but turning instead to architecture after meeting Rosetti and Burne-Jones at university in Oxford, Morris realised at the age of 27 that his talent, in fact, lay in pattern design. Evolving very definite views on what constituted good interior design, Morris collaborated with architect Philip Webb, whom he had met as a fellow trainee in the Oxford offices of GE Street, on a new home for himself and his wife Jane – Red House in Bexleyheath – where these ideas were brought to life. Described by Rosetti as 'more a poem than a house', this building and its interior decoration can be said to mark the beginning of the Arts & Crafts movement. It was filled not with the mass produced, poor quality products of the industrial revolution, but with handmade furnishings created by Morris and his friends. The National Trust acquired the house in 2003 and is gradually uncovering and conserving what remains of Morris and Webb's work.

Completion of Red House prompted the foundation of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co (later Morris & Company) with the aim of making tasteful but affordable furnishings available to all. These included stained glass windows for churches, hand painted tiles, traditional furniture (e.g. the iconic Sussex chair with its dark stained wood and rush seat), and fabrics and papers with the distinctive floral patterns now so strongly associated with Morris. Trellis was the first of over 150 designs, inspired by the roses in the garden at Red House, Another well-known example is Willow, echoing the riverside at Morris's Oxfordshire home, Kelmscott Manor. Not only did Morris begin to lecture on design, he also explored the potential of traditional materials and methods in his own work. He collaborated on plant dyes with Thomas Wardle of Leek and experimented with traditional tapestry and carpet weaving, and with Indian block printing techniques. By the nature of its making, Morris & Company's work was never widely affordable as Morris, being a Socialist, had intended. But his work and principles influenced what Helen termed a 'design revolution', creating a distinctive aesthetic that developed into what became known as the Arts & Crafts tradition in architecture and interiors, and which has proved enduringly popular. Plain white walls provide a backdrop to coloured and patterned textiles and ceramics, with simple, elegant but sturdy furniture. In architecture, use of local materials and distinctive vernacular building techniques and forms root houses in their region and integrate them with their surroundings. Helen recommended

Baillie Scott's Blackwell in Cumbria and Philip Webb's Standen in Sussex as exemplars of the Arts & Crafts' holistic approach to architecture and interior design. Design was, however, just one of the many facets of William Morris' extraordinary life and talent. He died in 1896, aged 62, his doctor reportedly stating that he had done the work of ten men in one lifetime and that the cause of his death was simply 'being William Morris' – the man who implored us to have in our house nothing that we do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful, and who changed what people consider to be good taste.



*William Morris and Arts & Crafts style*  
Photo: Morris chair and wallpaper  
Photo credit: William Morris Society

# Historic surfaces: plasters, paints and papers

**Rosie Shaw, historic interiors consultant and architectural paint researcher**

**Phillipa McDonnell, historic interiors consultant**

Rosie explained the role of architectural paint research (APR) in understanding the history of a building and its use over time. The APR technique has much in common with archaeology in that the researcher is analysing the arrangement of historical layers to trace and date decorative schemes, identify paint types and pigments, understand any failures in painted surfaces, and aid decision making about conservation or redecoration treatments. She then gave an overview of the kinds of traditional paint commonly found in old buildings, and their use and qualities, from basic traditional limewash for internal and external use, to more recent types of paint. These encompassed water-based distempers coloured with lead and bound with animal glues, and later with oil; to traditional oil paints based on linseed oil and lead white; later alkyd resin paints and modern emulsions – acrylic, vinyl or latex paint. Rosie discussed the restrictions on the use of some traditional paint formulations today, e.g. lead and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) being controlled by licence, and the factors to be taken into account when planning a conservation or redecoration project.

Phillipa set out the development of wallpaper design and manufacture in the western world from the 16th-century rag-based papers made to imitate tapestry hangings, to the expensive but popular bold painted patterns of the 18th century; the imported French trompe l'oeil patterns and authentic Chinese papers of the early 19th century; and the mass produced printed papers of the later 19th century before William Morris and his contemporaries influenced a return to flat and more delicate patterns. Fashions in wall covering materials fluctuated widely over the 20th century, though wallpaper is currently enjoying another revival. As with paint research, examining and understanding historic wallpapers can help tell the story of a building and its occupants. Phillipa recommended that if historic papers are found, they should be photographed and recorded, and loose fragments safely stored. Conservators can advise on options such as in situ conservation or other forms of preservation, such as framing or replication, where appropriate. She concluded with a case study showing how investigation, appreciation and conservation of layers of wallpaper had contributed to the understanding and presentation to visitors of Yr Ysgwrn in Snowdonia, the home of the Welsh poet Hedd Wynn who was killed in the First World War.

# Fire protection for historic homes

## **Charles Harris, national fire adviser, Historic England**

Charles began by noting a number of recent high-profile instances of fire in historic buildings (e.g. Glasgow School of Art, Clendon Park, Wythenshawe Hall, Nottingham Railway Station) and that Historic England estimates that one building of regional importance (Grade II listed) is lost to fire every six weeks. He is concerned that no statistics for fires in historic buildings are gathered nationally, and that regional fire and rescue services do not necessarily identify or keep details of heritage buildings in their area to help them plan their response to fires in such buildings. Charles explained that fires need fuel, oxygen and a heat source to begin. They spread through radiation, convection or conduction. He outlined the prevention measures building owners can put in place. These included not overloading electrical services, being careful about storage of flammable materials, closing doors at night, and fitting fire alarms and carbon monoxide sensors, which are tested and maintained regularly. He went on to look at risk factors associated with the materials and construction of old buildings, e.g. large and unpartitioned spaces that do not lend themselves to fire separation; and their fittings, such as tapestry hangings and wooden panelling. However, traditional building materials and construction such as lath and plaster and timber framing with daub infill panels can be fire safe and give good fire protection if well maintained. Charles stressed the importance of taking care when planning and carrying out building work and being aware of features such as roof voids and hidden ducts that are vulnerable and could help a fire to spread. Aside from arson, the most common causes of fire in old buildings are hot works or contractor errors, faults in building services (mechanical and electrical engineering) and chimney fires.

Charles also discussed ways of upgrading old buildings to protect them from fire, including 'passive' measures (i.e. things in place in the building) such as fire proofing doors and fitting automatic closers, and introducing compartmentation where possible to impede the spread of fire; and 'active' measures (i.e. things that come into effect in the event of a fire) such as fire detection and warning systems, and fire suppression systems such as sprinklers, fire curtains and smoke extraction systems. He noted that some detection and suppression measures are not particularly compatible with historic buildings and debated their advantages and disadvantages with regard to their potential impact on historic fabric and special character. For example, upgrading walls, floors and ceilings can disturb historic fabric and be detrimental to decorative finishes and features; installing lobbies or subdivisions can harm the spatial quality and



architectural integrity of a space, and fire-proof elements are often not suited to historic interiors. However, there are good examples of sensitive and imaginative solutions that can improve resistance to fire without damaging a building's character. Interventions should be based on understanding: of the building and of the level and type of risk.



*Fire protection for historic homes*  
Photo: Clandon Park fire  
Photo credit: National Trust

# New design for old homes: extension and adaptation

## **Roger Hunt, co-author of New Design for Old Buildings (RIBA / SPAB 2017)**

Roger considered new design specifically for domestic buildings, focusing on extension and adaptation projects, large and small. He argued strongly that most old buildings have been altered and added to over time, and that contemporary interventions should be seen as the next stage in a long life. Whilst respecting what already exists, they should be honestly 'of today' rather than seeking to recreate or copy a 'historical' style. Judicious use of scale, rhythm, form, proportions and materials can all create harmony between old and new. Contemporary additions could be bold and challenging, but still sympathetic: Roger cited Gas Works Cottage in Gloucestershire where the new work referenced the agricultural setting and semi-industrial history of the site, and the bold materials used were structurally effective and both aesthetically and functionally compatible. Exciting architectural effects can be achieved, but clients and their advisers should not forget about practical aspects such as junctions, levels, rainwater handling, the life expectancy of materials, and enabling the future maintenance of all parts of the building.

Roger believes that the most successful projects grow from an understanding of the old building – not just of its history, but of how it works and what the impact of interventions might be. He reminded the audience that traditionally-constructed buildings need to 'breathe' and that there is also a need to consider how brick, stone, lime plaster and timber floors might act together with new materials, in order to avoid the danger of unintended consequences. Introducing modern impermeable materials or over-insulating without considering ventilation may cause problems. Roger also suggested that conservation is an inherently sustainable activity that includes retaining, repairing and reusing historic features and good quality materials, but he warned of using architectural salvage out of context. Creative contemporary use of traditional materials and techniques helps to maintain supplies and sustain craft skills. Roger strongly recommended thinking holistically about a building when planning adaptations or extensions and tailoring a solution to that building's particular construction, situation, character and needs. Old buildings can be adapted and changed to meet contemporary needs, but projects that seek to impose a use or changes to which the building does not lend itself are unlikely to be successful. Owners should consider carefully what is feasible. Roger concluded with a reminder of the need to gain the necessary consents for new work, such as planning permission and Listed Building Consent, and to discuss building regulation requirements, and the scope for flexibility where listed buildings are concerned.



*New design for old homes: extension and adaptation*  
Photo: Terraced house extension – The Wapping House (Chris Dyson Architects – 2014)  
Photo credit: Chris Dyson Architects

## Definitions

**UNESCO:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, inaugurated 16 November 1945 and based in Paris. It exists “to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information”. It supports a number of programmes in education, science, human rights, information and communication, culture and the built and natural environment.

**World Heritage Site:** An area, site or structure designated by UNESCO as having special cultural, historical, physical, scientific or other significance such that it is of exceptional importance to the common culture and collective heritage of humanity. WHS are inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO, protected by international treaties and intended for practical conservation to protect them for posterity. As of July 2018, a total of 1,092 World Heritage sites (845 cultural, 209 natural, and 38 mixed) exist across the globe, with 31 of those sites lying in the UK.

# Reading

*The SPAB Approach: the conservation and care of old buildings* – Matthew Slocombe (2017) available on the SPAB website: [www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/spab-approach](http://www.spab.org.uk/campaigning/spab-approach)

*Control of Damp* – SPAB Technical Advice Note (2018) available to download from the SPAB website: [www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-advice-notes](http://www.spab.org.uk/advice/technical-advice-notes)

SPAB Energy Efficiency research findings: [www.spab.org.uk/advice/energy-efficiency-old-buildings](http://www.spab.org.uk/advice/energy-efficiency-old-buildings)

*The Old House Eco Handbook* – Marianne Suhr and Roger Hunt (2013) Frances Lincoln (ISBN 978 0 7112 3278 5)

*The Old House Handbook* – Roger Hunt and Marianne Suhr (2008) Frances Lincoln (ISBN 978 07112 27729)

*New Design for Old Buildings* – Roger Hunt and Iain Boyd, with foreword by Kevin McCloud (2017) SPAB / RIBA Publishing (ISBN 978-1-85946-612-4).

SPAB Briefing on *Disaster and Recovery* – [www.spab.org.uk/advice/spab-briefings](http://www.spab.org.uk/advice/spab-briefings)  
Part of a series that also covers Lime, Energy Efficiency, and Windows and Doors

SPAB advice on the need for old buildings to breathe: [www.spab.org.uk/advice/breathability-and-old-buildings](http://www.spab.org.uk/advice/breathability-and-old-buildings)