

Managing to Conserve  
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The twentieth century has seen an explosion not only in the amount of construction undertaken but also in the different kinds and styles of buildings, the range of materials used, and means of production and use, concepts of flexibility and adaptability in building design. There has been a change in building patronage which allowed massive programmes of school and house building to emerge after Second World War.

Styles will come and go as fashion dictates, materials emerge, often in response to a need to save costs, and then decline in popularity as their drawbacks become apparent. Underlying these changes there is developing: that of a managed building process and a product managed by society through planning and building regulations control of increasing complexity and by the development of Rights of Light legislation at the end of the last century leading to full environmental impact studies at the end of the twentieth: managed also by architects through the selection of materials which do not weather in the conventional sense but offer the opportunity to maintain a building's original appearance and through the development of design philosophies ranging from "loose-fit" to "kit of parts" which have the common objective of allowing change: managed by building owners with ever increasingly sophisticated building services which are frequently the largest part of the building budget, offering a relatively short lift in building terms but allowing the building to positively managed and responsive to the environment which in turn has led to the development of a new breed of building controller, the Facilities.

Faced with this fundamental change can conservation, at least of the work of this modern era, remain unchanged? Confronted with buildings intended to be altered and having the means to do so, is one to rely on a description of the exterior as sufficient to ensure either that the right buildings are conserved or that those people who are responsible for their future have sufficient understanding of what is considered to be worthy of preservation.

Buildings like the Willis Faber headquarters (now Willis Carroon) in Ipswich, by Sir Norman Foster, built in 1975 and listed grade I, are in their first stages of economic life. Unlike the buildings designed by William Morris and other in the nineteenth century which had already changed and adapted, the imposition of conservation controls to a modern building can create a totally artificial development of that building which reflects not its evolution in its own right but as an object of historic interest. Just as museum conservation aims not to leave the marks of the museum's curatorship on the artefacts, so too most building conservation avoid leaving the dead hand of historicism on modern buildings.

Change is the life blood of shopping centres, a product of the fifties and sixties and one of the most significant modern building types architecturally and socially. A survey carried out in 1991 by Damond Lock Grabowski and Partners showed that refurbishment of a shopping centre involving radical change could be anticipated on average once in every ten years with some elements being changed on a two-to-five year cycle. Thus by the time many centres become eligible for listing the original concepts will have been completely destroyed, open centres enclosed and enclosed centres' interiors gutted even when, as with the Victoria Centre in Nottingham, they were described by a contemporary critic as 'the most impressive modern public interior in the country' (Lance Wright Architectural Review March 1973).

An approach to conservation that takes account of the need to allow buildings to live while respecting the need to protect those of particular historic or aesthetic value will be described in the next issue.