New buildings in historic areas

I. Conservation: the missing ethic

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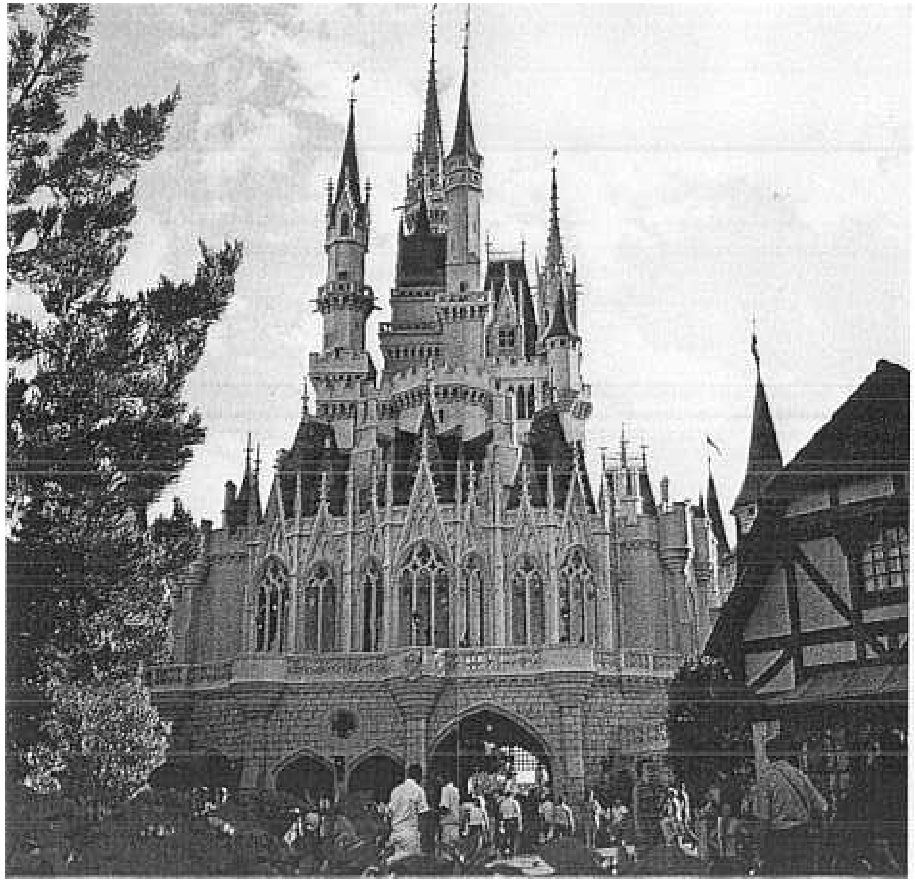

FIG. 1. Disneyland, USA. Conservation is in as much danger from itself as it is from the old enemies of speculation, inhuman planning and insensitive architecture. This inner danger lies in the often total absence of any understanding of a conservation ethic. The old is increasingly dressed up to look new and the new decked out to look old. It is the road to Disneyland where the only ethic is the facadism of tourism.

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The conservation of historic towns is now a widely accepted and acclaimed phenomenon of the twentieth century. It is important because historic artefacts command and deserve respect. It encourages our cultural roots to be expressed; it helps develop a sense of local identity, and it provides a readily accessible demonstration of our past. It is good for tourists, and tourists are supposedly good for us. In any case, most people think that the past is better than the present. In times of social stress it holds them secure against the future. Conservation is required to do so much for such a variety of reasons that its actual meaning is clouded and obscured, and the ethics of conservation are not widely enough understood or accepted; as a result historic towns are being eroded, not as in the past by redevelopment or neglect but by trivialization.

Conservation faces the increasing danger that, because we fail to understand its real meaning, because it is so all-embracing and so deeply desired, it is becoming a means of escape to protect us from our own times. It is becoming a road to Disneyland doomed to lack even the vitality of that extraordinary place (*Fig. 1*).

This is a real danger because conservation is seen only as a means towards preservation, and even that with increasing falsehood. Buildings are considered as mere facades in the street. Preservation of historic buildings, in Europe at least, is a well understood technique. Conservation, however, implies a technique that enables change to be expressed, indeed requires it to be so. The idea of the protected area is coming to mean an area where change, in the form of new buildings, is either prohibited altogether or, if accepted, is required to be dressed in the outlandish clothes of the fake or replica, or the depressing uniform of the bland and the faceless. The purpose here is therefore to re-assert that conservation not only means saving old buildings, but also constructing recognizably modern ones in order to enhance the old and not, by reproduction, to devalue it. This is not to say that an old town is open house to the vulgar, uncaring abuse that has destroyed too many historic places in the past. But it is to ask that conservation should involve a discipline for change which allows the architecture of the twentieth century to play a part in the historic townscape. To deny this is to ignore the essential continuity of change that is the mark of the historic town. In order to achieve this re-assessment of the meaning of conservation, it is essential that public opinion should be alerted to the problem as this, and its expression through participation, is a cornerstone of town planning practice.

The professions—architectural historians, architects and town planners, should also be prepared to debate more fully a precise philosophy of conservation that could be distilled into a conservation ethic that needs to reassert that the historic town is a real living place, not a skin-deep stage set (*Figs 2* and *3*).

Participation—a means of objection

In the United Kingdom the legislation that provides for the identification and protection of individual buildings of architectural and historic importance, and for the protection of areas, is part of general town planning legislation. The use and adaptation of historic buildings is largely determined by planning policies and decisions which attempt to create the right physical, economic and social environment to maintain buildings and sustain the areas. For example, safeguarding historic areas, controlling change, and keeping excess traffic out, all depend on planning policies and their implementation through planning administrations backed by the democratic process. To a greater or lesser extent similar situations exist in most European countries and in many countries outside Europe; conservation planning is a growing reality and the pattern of attitudes and policies is developing in a remarkably similar way to that in the United Kingdom.

The success or failure of the conservation of the architectural heritage is therefore inextricably bound up with town planning concepts, practice and procedures. But town planning itself increasingly attempts to involve the public in decision-making through public participation. This is seldom effective where large-scale change is required to improve the conditions under which people live; but in existing settlements participation is, perhaps not unexpectedly, proving to be beneficial to conservation because people the world over react against change and fear it. Understandably so when one looks at most towns and cities which have undergone redevelopment during the post-war period.

The speed and scale of twentieth-century change affects us all. C. P. Snow, commenting on the visibility of change, pointed out that . . . 'Until this century, social change was so slow that it would pass unnoticed in one person's lifetime.'[1] Louis Auchincloss wrote:

> 'The horror of living in New York is living in a city without a history . . . All eight of my great-grandparents lived in the city and only one of the houses they lived in is still standing. That's what I mean by the vanishing past.'[2]

Architecture has in the past provided a visible sense of permanence and a tangible stability. That sense of permanence is fast disappearing, not only from our surroundings, but from contemporary society as a whole. There is a longing for stability, hence an antipathy to change expressed in the desire to keep everything around us as it was. These feelings are understandable, but are they not in conflict with the real aspirations and meaning of conservation?

In 1969 the report *People and Planning*[3] gave Government encouragement to participate and Local Authorities were given guidelines on the approach to be adopted.

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[1] Snow, C.P., *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, New York 1959.

[2] Auchincloss, L., *New York Times*, 17 March 1966.

[3] Published by HMSO, London 1969, and popularly known as the Skeffington Report.

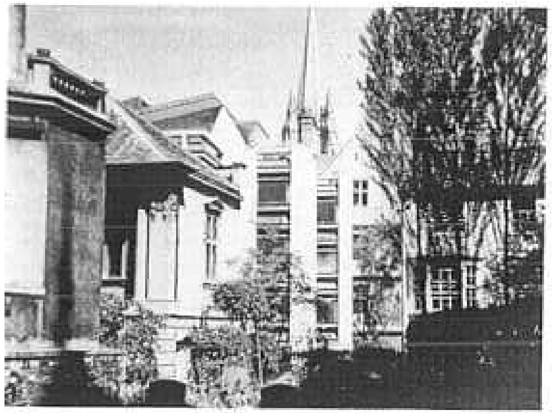

FIG. 2. Brasenose College, Oxford, UK. Powell and Moya, 1964. A new building that is of its own time; enhancing the old—not devaluing it by reproduction. The creative art of infilling has diminished since the early days of conservation policies.

> We understand participation to be the act of sharing in the formulation of policies and proposals . . . there will be full participation only where the public are able to take an active part throughout the plan making process.

The report coincided with a growing dissatisfaction with comprehensive redevelopment; the inhuman devastation it was causing and the loss of traditional urban character and lifestyle; and at the end there was a chapter entitled 'Education'. In retrospect it seems almost wholly concerned with developing an understanding of procedure and administration so that the public could know how to approach local government structure effectively. It gave little guidance on how to develop an understanding of concepts. However, since that time something more has been done to encourage planning education.

In England the Heritage Education Group (a product of European Architectural Heritage Year), has particularly tried to encourage school children and, to a lesser extent, those involved in adult education, to take an interest in conservation as a concept. A considerable amount of work is carried out in schools under the general title of environmental education; but looking at the work of many school children in this subject it is only too obvious that it is concerned solely with the past—understanding what makes up our history and what threatens it. Very seldom is any serious examination given to the prospect of change other than where it may be adapted to enhance the past. There is no evidence of any appreciation of the contribution of contemporary architecture—only a well-rehearsed repetition of the familiar arguments against it. This is no real grounding for participation. It is education in objection to change.

There is no reason why education in participation should not think about the past. Indeed, it is always salutary. But must it not also accept the inescapable validity of the present, discovering how the present can make its contribution to the history of our towns and cities in a positive way?

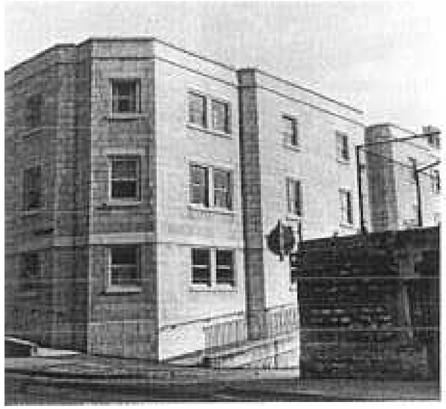

FIG. 3. Recent new building in Bath, UK. The blandness of architectural mediocrity. The suppression of architecture in an attempt to infill in an eighteenth-century city.

Real participation has proved exceedingly difficult to encourage and sustain, possibly because town planning is mainly concerned with the future. While people living in an area will readily comment on an immediate threat—the proximity of industry, or the new housing that will overlook their gardens—the options for dealing with the wider corporate and philosophical issues lack immediacy because the concepts are too broad to concern those affected. Equally the concepts and ethics of conservation do not seem to matter if an historic building is threatened; all that matters is that it should be saved no matter what effect the 'saving' has on the meaning and integrity of the building.

Participation (some would say objection) is at its most effective when special interest groups are involved; they all exist to apply pressure on their members' behalf, favouring one course or another through the facilities offered by local authorities or through central government hearings. This is not participation in the sense that it was supposed to encourage the community to become involved; in the main it has simply proved to be a widening of the facilities offered to pressure groups and, in particular, the amenity societies and preservation organisations. The 1969 report referred to earlier foresaw this difficulty.

> The arguments for giving special rights to bodies whose interest is especially concerned with the environment and physical planning are, at first sight, attractive. . . . Much as we admire the work of such groups, we think that it would be wrong to give statutory recognition to any organisation which represents only one of the multiplicity of interests affected by a plan . . . no one group should be in a privileged position.

The local civic societies vary considerably in quality. Most only erupt into activity if an historic building is threatened or a new building is proposed. There are some notable exceptions, but few follow up their environmental interests with any study or development of the philosophy behind their views. Most exist only to resist change. Some scorn professional advice.[4]

Clearly a great deal of different opinion exists about professional roles and much of it stimulates conflict between the attitudes of professionals and those who participate. Where antagonism develops, it becomes extremely difficult to debate, let alone to get agreement on, an appropriate ethic for conservation that gives guidance on attitudes towards change.

New buildings in conflict

It is important to attempt to understand why there is such antipathy to modern buildings by the general public and why that antipathy is so strong where those buildings propose to change an existing street scene. It has to be admitted that the majority of buildings (and only a very small number are actually designed by architects) are not only very ordinary but also positively unpleasant in that they lack any vestige of quality. Often they have been inadequately detailed and constructed of poor material. Many buildings are worse than just unpleasant; they are positively ugly and in many cases appear to have been deliberately designed in that way. These bad buildings overshadow the relatively few that are well designed, those that exhibit flair and imagination as well as care in detailing[5] (*Fig. 4*).

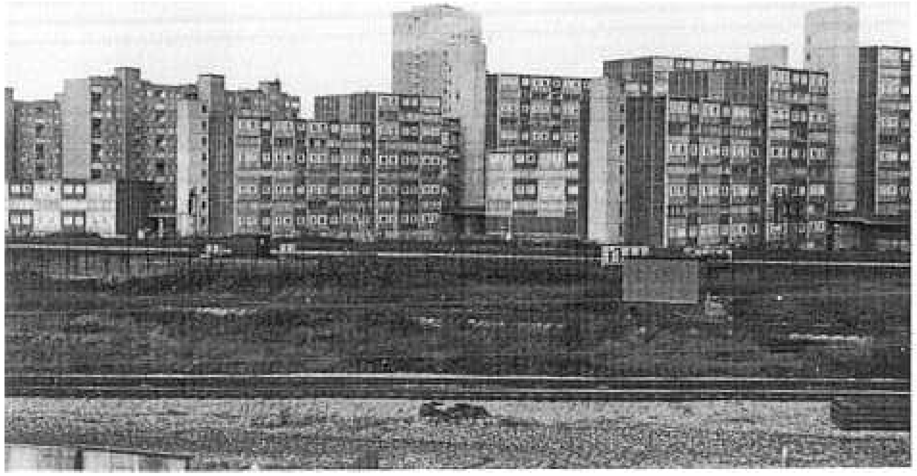

Fig. 4. New buildings in conflict. Too many new buildings are inhuman in scale and aggressively ugly; hence the understandable resort to ever-widening targets for conservation. The old is preferable to the new. Battersea, London, UK.

It is often argued that people do not like modern buildings because they have never seen any, and to a large extent this must be true. To those who live in historic towns and whose main interest is in historic buildings it is not surprising if they have not gone out of their way to find contemporary architecture. Their taste is moulded by the older buildings by which they are surrounded. Where twentieth-century buildings have already been introduced, many of them have weathered and worn so badly that they are only fit for demolition, even after twenty or thirty years.

Many buildings appear to intrude because they are too large in scale for their surroundings. A supermarket, an office block, and a multi-storey car park can seldom be assimilated into the scale of an old city. No amount of architectural game-playing can ameliorate that intrusion; nor can it overcome the tragedy of families in high-rise apartments. To the problem of size must also be added the one of alien and changing ownership. Acceptance of an architectural expression cannot be divorced from the acceptance of function. The growth of nationally and internationally financed companies which displace small local enterprises and the local loyalties that go with them has disrupted local life. That disruption is intimately associated in the public mind with the resulting architecture. Many modern buildings have introduced relatively untried new materials into streets that were built of locally obtained materials by local craftsmen. New, artificial materials remove the constraints and limitations of the structural spans and the size of openings, conditioned by natural materials. Not only has the texture and colour of buildings changed, but size and space are no longer constrained by the human dimension of stone, brick and timber.

The degree of change and the speed with which these changes occur is also a problem in that the number of new buildings constructed in relation to those old ones that remain is a critical factor. There seems to be a capacity for change, over a period of time, beyond which visual disorientation and conflict develop.

One other fundamental element exists which affects public acceptance of contemporary architecture. Jürgen Joedicke pointed out that the nineteenth century:

> was an epoch without a building style of its own. Self-confident reliance on the architectural forms of the past concealed an inner uncertainty. The past had

[4] Lord Raglan, Chairman of the Bath Society, has proposed that the professional advice available to the Planning Authority on important new buildings should be limited to providing only technical information, leaving the assessment of that information to be made by local people, presumably through the medium of the civic societies, because they know best.

[5] Various award schemes are operated which exhibit quite clearly that modern buildings of a very high standard can be achieved. Most of those that win awards, however, stand as isolated buildings away from the context of an existing urban environment.

> become a storehouse for hasty resurrections of every style, for the pseudo-Gothic and the neo-romantic; for 'renaissances of the renaissance' and resuscitations of baroque and rococo, to be plundered without restraint and often enough without any comprehension for the circumstances which had given rise to these particular forms . . . Even the ordinary middle-class home could not escape the carnival of styles and masqueraded in clothes borrowed from the renaissance villas of the Florentine, Roman and Venetian nobility . . .[6]

Popular taste has never really recovered from that experience. Architectural and furnishing style is considered as an infinitely adaptable and adoptable panacea. This is in stark conflict with the abstract forms and simplified expression derived from the new structural opportunities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Again, Jürgen Joedicke said:

> In the struggle between the creative work of the artist and the theories of the engineer which distinguishes modern architecture, is reflected the problem of reconciling human aims to technical requirements, a problem characteristic of our entire age . . .[7]

The conservation lobby

In one major respect the pressure groups, despite charges of wielding too great a power, have almost always represented a widely-held view that while social and economic life should continue to prosper, the appearance of towns should somehow remain the same. Architecturally the *status quo* is vociferously defended from all quarters, but now the emphasis has changed. Not only is the past preferred, but where change is by some mischance permitted it must take on the appearance of the past.

The local amenity societies and preservation trusts spearhead that public reaction and they have powerful national and international bodies to turn to for support. In Great Britain the list of national societies concerned with conservation is formidable—the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Save Britain's Heritage and the Thirties Society, all speak up in support of the preservation of specific periods or special cases and apply pressure on behalf of their causes. In Europe the Council of Europe and Europa Nostra and world-wide, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, apply similar muscle. Both the USA and Australia have well-established, increasingly respected National Trusts, and in New Zealand the Historic Places Trust has growing influence. Who speaks up for the present? Who speaks up for the architecture of today other than a small minority of architects?

One thing must be said; there is no doubt whatsoever that without the presence of these groups conservation would not have been so well organized; nor would the legislation be as effective as it is; nor would the attitudes and behaviour of Local and Central Government be so closely monitored.

In Great Britain, local authorities are advised to set up local Conservation Area Advisory Committees which further assist that monitoring process and are a classic example of participation by organised groups. The development of policies and the scrutiny of proposals for new buildings and other forms of change are their main concern.[8]

The need for a conservation ethic

The means to influence decisions, particularly those which affect the siting and design of new buildings, is therefore well established. Such influence, however, is only acceptable if it is based upon some generally understood philosophical and ethical approach rather than the pure emotion which motivates so much pressure for conservation. When the desire to preserve everything is so strong, that influence, without an ethical base, can put conservation at risk as a long-term proposition. Before considering how a conservation ethic affects new buildings, it is worth examining briefly the arguments affecting the ethics of conservation as they come to bear on historic buildings as individual elements. Any approach to dealing with new buildings in a historic area must have parallels with the way in which individual historic buildings are adapted and repaired.

Any ethical approach to conservation must first ensure that the way in which buildings are conserved—their adaptation, their standards of repair and the techniques used—maintain the historic quality of the building. Its integrity as architecture must be retained and also its very age must be clear. Even today too many buildings are destroyed in over-enthusiastic restoration. In one of John Ruskin's most quoted chapters he proclaimed:

> Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end. You may make a model of a building as you may of a corpse, and your model may have the shell of the old walls within it as your cast might have the skeleton, with what advantage I neither see nor care: but the old building is destroyed and that more totally and mercilessly than if it had sunk into a heap of dust, or melted into a mass of clay . . .[9]

Because of the pressure of public opinion, conservation must often not only be done, but must also be seen to be done to satisfy public demand, commercial success or subscribers' vanity. Sometimes the lack of professional expertise is also to blame for the loss of the building's historic quality. If the building loses the cultural and aesthetic value which is inherent in its historic meaning, then its conservation is simply the means of procuring the elements of a street facade (*Figs 5, 6* and *7*).

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[6] Joedicke, J., *A History of Modern Architecture*, London 1959, 9.

[7] *ibid.*

[8] A government circular of 1977 sets out advice about their constitution:

'The Committee should reflect a cross-section of local opinion. Nominations to serve on such committees could be sought from such bodies as the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Town Planning Institute and any others which the authority think appropriate, and from county or other local archaeological, historical and civic and amenity societies. Where a conservation area is in a residential neighbourhood, consideration should be given to inviting a resident or residents to serve on the advisory committee. Where a conservation area contains a shopping and commercial centre, it may be appropriate to invite representatives of the local Chamber of Trade or Chamber of Commerce or Street Association to serve . . .

[9] Ruskin, J., *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, London 1849, 180.

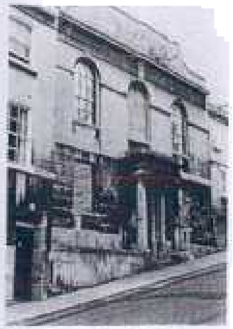


Fig. 5. Chapel, Thomas Street, Bath, UK, 1978. Only the facade remains.

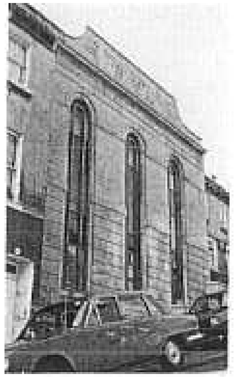


Fig. 6a. Chapel, Thomas Street, Bath, UK, 1980. Converted to residential use to save the facade. Is this conservation?

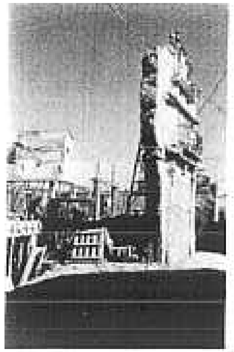


Fig. 6b. Conservation in Ejica, Spain. A fragment of facade propped up for incorporation into a new building. Is this conservation?

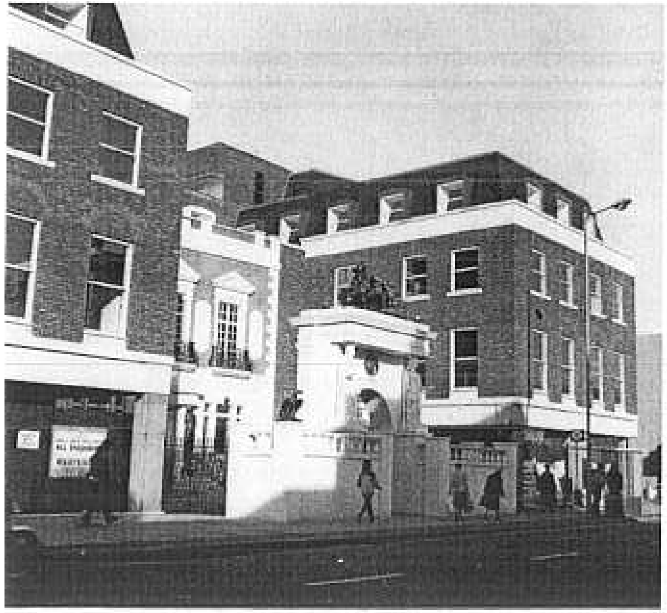


Fig. 7. The Pheasantry, King's Road, Chelsea, London, UK. The old facade propped up, the new bland and mediocre so as not to offend. This is, unfortunately, the growing trend in conservation.

The awareness of the need for an ethic goes back a long way. William Morris established a general thesis in the manifesto to launch the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877. The Charter of Venice also attempted to set out much the same thesis eighty-seven years later. These essential disciplines will be discussed in more detail in Part II; but in essence the approach advocated adds up to a course of actions aimed at retaining the substance and spirit of the building, allowing the building to speak as documentary evidence of its history. Both the SPAB Manifesto and the Charter of Venice lead to the clear conclusion that changes necessary for conservation reasons should be apparent and distinct. The Venice Charter is quite specific. New work should 'bear a contemporary stamp'. What is surprising is that, while this approach is understood and paid lip service to by many of those with responsibilities for historic buildings, it is so little understood by the public at large or by the amenity societies. Equally, it is surprising that so little has been written or debated in the past concerning the development of an ethic to give guidance on new buildings which affect historic areas. In just the same way as the substance and spirit of the building and its sense of age must be maintained, so the new building must in some way, although bearing a contemporary stamp, maintain the substance and spirit of the historic area. Just as plainly new stonework on an ancient building is affected by the context of the existing stonework in which it is placed, so, on a wider scale, the new building must be affected in some way by the context of its surroundings yet also remain obviously new.

Most historic areas illustrate clearly the lack of any ethical approach to the design of new buildings. Where new buildings are constructed, they are often so emasculated by public discussion or so mishandled by unskilled professions, so trampled on by committees, that the architectural result of most new building work in historic areas is little more than banal mediocrity. A new skill must be learnt that allows and even encourages change within the unique discipline of the local townscape.

One enormous difficulty stands in the way of establishing a theory of conservation based on philosophical principles. There is no doubt that the treatment of new buildings in historic areas in an attempt to force them into anonymity, coincides with a basic desire of public opinion; and, as has been shown, public opinion (at any rate in the UK) is a key element in planning and given legislative backing by government. But it must be remembered that the amenity societies and pressure groups which exert such power and influence usually grew out of legitimate protest. They came about from some general public desire that old areas should be retained and that change should not be allowed to intrude into them. The pressure groups are strongly related to the wishes of the general public, although there may be no democratic link between the two.

There is therefore a conflict between the seemingly inevitable outcome of participation and the development and implementation of a proper

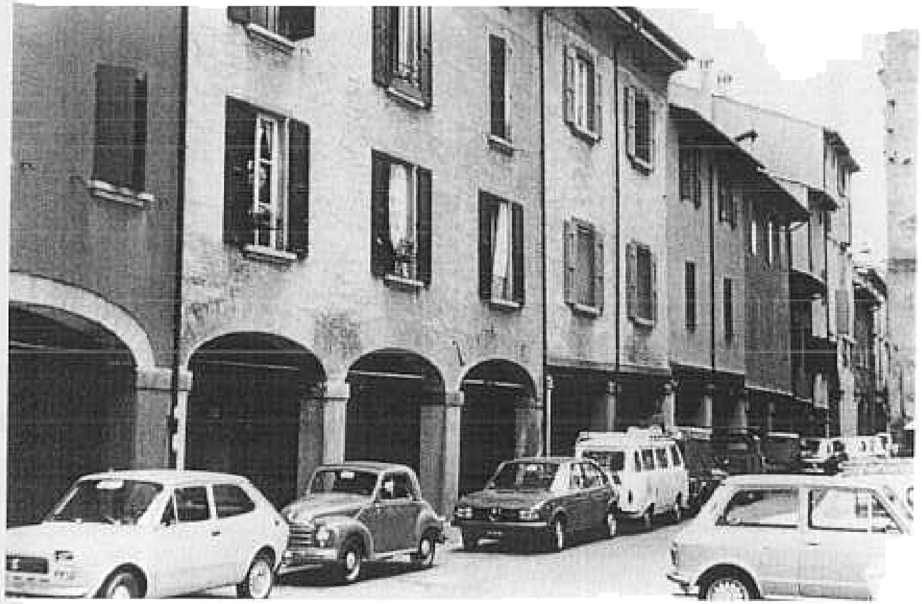


FIG. 8. Bologna, Italy—the new buildings indistinguishable from the old.

conservation ethic based on historical evidence rather than emotion. One over-riding principle needs to be established. The conservation of an historic town has a longer-term significance as a contribution towards the quality of life in towns than as an immediate response to a contemporary generation of public opinion that has been moulded by twenty years of inhuman and often vulgar development. Conservation is much more for future generations than the present one. Education is the key to future development of an ethical approach. In the meantime the professionals concerned ought to give a lead (*Figs 8, 9* and *10*).

Professional responsibility

If participation is to be based on a broader understanding of the ethics of conservation, it will be normal to look for the educators amongst those whose professional advice is normally concerned with architecture and planning. One might look to those professions to have greater influence and to give a lead, affected as they are by the impact of public participation. Professional advice to local authorities is almost always set alongside the views of the public, and professional advice is not always heeded. It would be difficult to argue that this is always wrong.

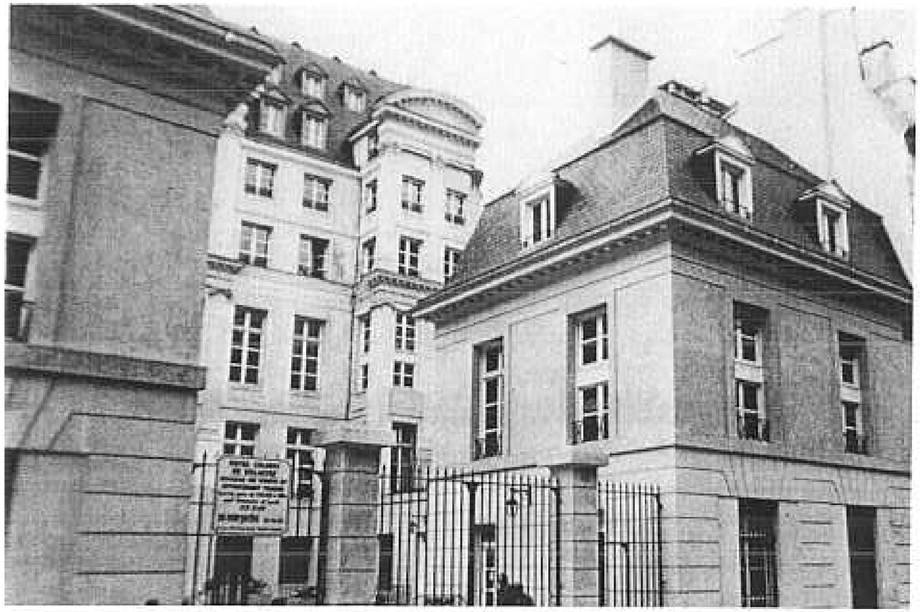


FIG. 9. Hotel Colbert de Villacerf, Rue de Turenne, Paris, France. The main building rebuilt as a facsimile: the pavilions are new and invented.

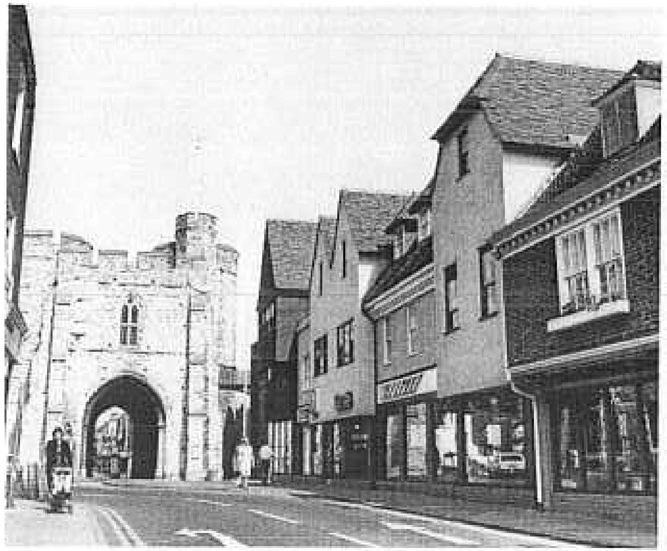


FIG. 10. Canterbury, England. A car showroom designed as a group of buildings.

The professions are suffering a loss of confidence—to a large extent rightly so. Too many architects are paying the price for failing to speak out against the environmental disasters of the fifties and sixties. Too many joined in the developers' scramble for profit without discrimination, and too many still do so. Too many architects entered the profession with no visual interest and some without even an awareness of its importance. They had little understanding or sympathy for the Modern Movement of which they would have claimed to be part, and this largely resulted in the fall from grace of that movement. Anyone with experience of seeing planning applications coming into a planning department month by month will have ample experience and evidence of the low standard of architectural submissions.

Too many planners were actively encouraging the notion of large-scale comprehensive redevelopment and high-rise living. There are, of course, sympathetic members of both professions who have the feel of historic towns and are aware of the need to work within the constraints of the existing town; but all, because of the mistakes of their colleagues, now suffer the distrust of the public.

The professional difficulties are exacerbated by fruitless arguments between planners and architects. Each blames the other for the failure of modern architecture to produce buildings of high quality that are appreciated by the public. Planners, having the difficult task of persuading elected representatives, insist that they have a role to play in controlling the appearance of development, particularly where new buildings are seen in relation to existing ones. They can also forcibly argue that they have a role to play in collating and presenting the views of the public to elected representatives.

Architects argue that only they are trained in aesthetic matters and that they should be able to design without interference from untrained planners and, as a consequence, without the interference of the public point of view. In England the Department of the Environment vacillates in its advice. Having encouraged participation and the expression of a public point of view, the Secretary of State in a speech in September 1978 to the Royal Town Planning Institute said:

> Far too many of those involved in the system, whether the Planning Officer or the amateur on the Planning Committee, have tried to impose *their* standards quite unnecessarily on what individuals want to do . . . . . . Democracy as a system of Government I will defend against all comers but as an arbiter of taste or as a judge of aesthetic or artistic standards it falls far short of a far less controlled system of individual, corporate or institutional patronage and initiative . . .

The reality is that on the one hand, all the interested groups attempt to impose their own standards and are encouraged to do so through the medium of participation. On the other hand, where development has been allowed virtually free scope without the aesthetic involvement of the planning authority, visual chaos results.

Through all these difficulties, through the conflicts between professions and the problem of public opinion with no philosophy of conservation, conservation remains a palliative. This trend and its emotional response are reflected and sustained by the legislation that is enacted in most countries; over the last thirty years there has been a general tendency to tighten legislation, and this action has had the effect of restricting the scope for change.

The development of conservation legislation

In 1944 the United Kingdom made a start on preparing lists of historic buildings of architectural and historic importance; their compilation was undertaken by central Government. In the first instance buildings with intrinsic architectural merit formed the basis of the list but this was soon extended to include buildings of group value; that is to say, buildings which had less architectural or historic merit in themselves but which were an inseparable part of the setting of those with intrinsic merit or which, together, formed an important entity. Some buildings were

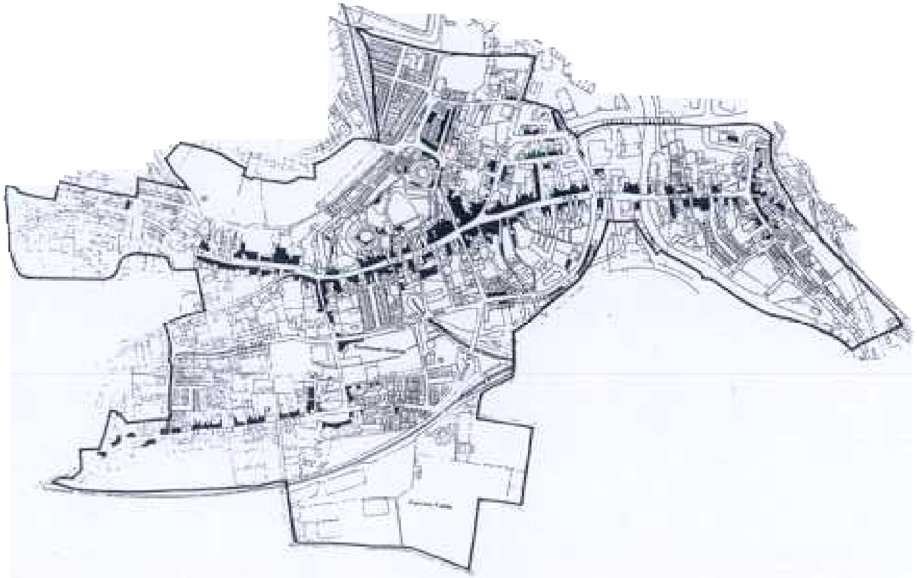
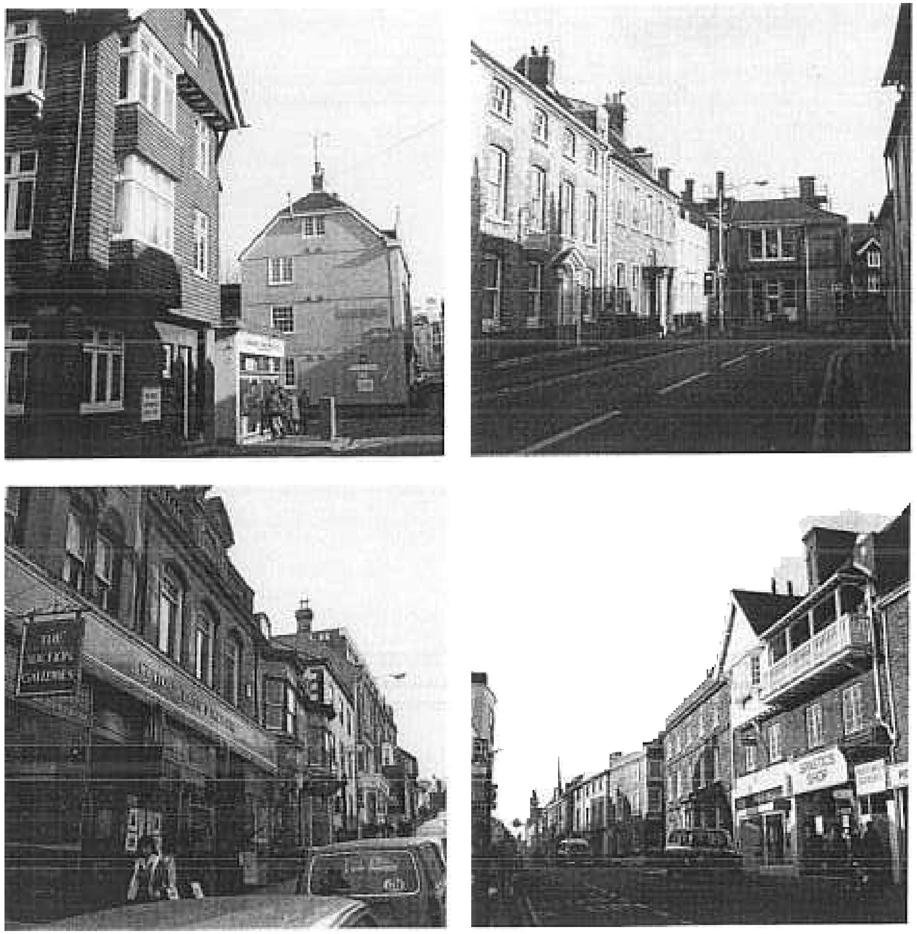


FIG. 11. Lewes, Sussex, UK. The plan shows the designated conservation area and the listed buildings marked in black. All the other buildings require consent for demolition.



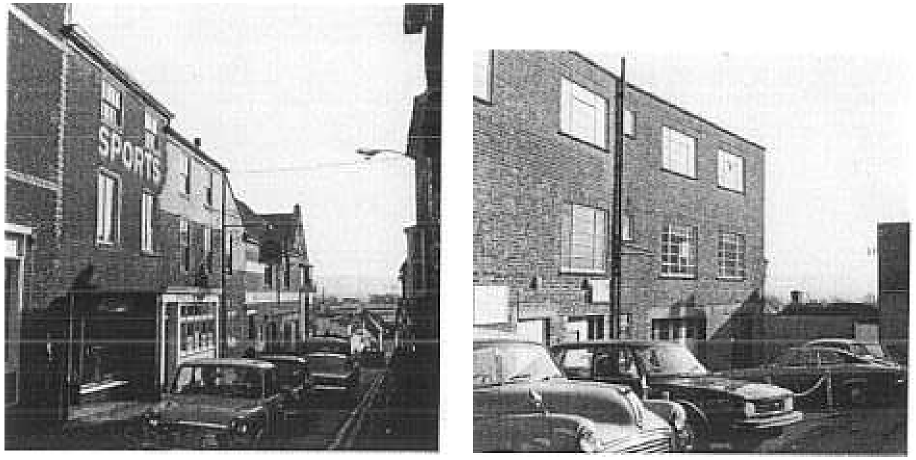


FIG. 12. (*Opposite and above*) Lewes, Sussex, UK. Some of the buildings in the High Street and the adjoining areas which although not listed require demolition consent. The case for demolition becomes harder to sustain as public opinion hardens; the opportunity for new buildings diminishes. The affect of the designation of the conservation area is to freeze the sense of history of the place.

graded but not given protection. Eventually that grade was abolished and the buildings were reassessed and given protection, so that both their demolition and their alteration required permission.[10]

In 1967 the Civic Amenities Act was passed, requiring local authorities to designate conservation areas with the main purpose of drawing attention to the whole townscape of the historic area and also more importantly to control change in a sympathetic way in relation to old buildings. This broader approach is mirrored in most European countries. The effect of designating these areas was, in addition to drawing attention to the importance of listed buildings (including those of group value), to indicate that the whole ensemble merited protection. The areas were virtually all drawn widely, and at the time this pre-supposed that an element of new development might be expected but that it should in some way be in sympathy with the historic qualities of the area.

The effect of the legislation for conservation areas is twofold. First, any new building or structure that (in the opinion of the local authority) affects the character of the area should be advertised so that public comment could be received. Secondly, by a later Act of Parliament, the demolition of any building or structure, quite apart from those that were protected by listing, requires permission from the local authority. In effect, all buildings that are proposed to be demolished are treated as if they are listed buildings. The only difference between a listed building and another building is that the former has to be referred to the Secretary of State for the Environment. As a result, every building can be protected—even the most ordinary one that inevitably has emotional significance for somebody.

None of this extension of protection is in itself objectionable: indeed most of us involved in the practical problems of managing conservation areas welcomed this broadening of control with enthusiasm. However, that enthusiasm may well prove to have been misplaced. The key lies in the judgment of what is an acceptable contemporary contribution to the character of a conservation area. At root this again raises the question of the meaning of conservation. The wide controls and powers are both desirable and essential; but their use and application requires a high quality of judgement if they are not, through their implementation, to aid and abet those who, through lack of a clear ethic, see conservation as only a means of sustaining their prejudice in favour of the *status quo* and those who see conservation as a superficial means of covering inevitable social and cultural change (*Figs 11* and *12*).

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[10] Currently the standards adopted for listing are as follows: Buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition and most buildings of 1700 to 1840 are listed. Between 1840 and 1914 only buildings of definite quality and character are listed, apart from those that form part of a group, and selection includes the principal works of the principal architects. A start has been made on listing buildings of 1914 to 1939. Despite listing becoming remarkably extensive, the legislation has been still further extended—largely in response to public opinion and the pressure of local and national bodies.

Historic towns as documents of change

The Charter of Venice, insisting upon a contemporary stamp to new buildings, runs counter to the growing practice of conservation in that it presupposes contemporary changes will take place in historic areas and that those changes should be apparent. This concept is challenged by public opinion. The statement of the Charter of Venice needs explanation, since it lies in the very nature of a town or city, the way in which its character developed, and the way in which we see it today.

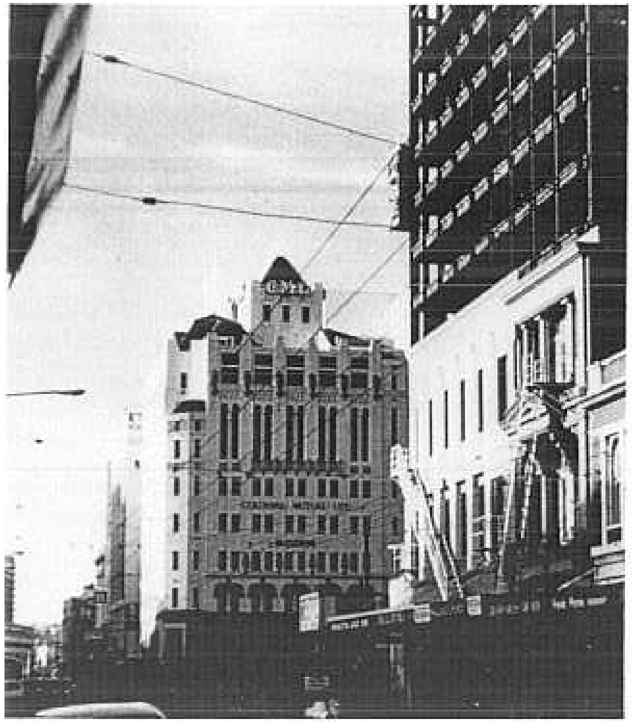

Fig. 13. All periods have a part to play in expressing the historic roots of our towns and cities. Some twentieth-century buildings are now being protected as of architectural value. How many buildings of the 1970s will be able to make their contribution to that historical process? The Colonial Mutual Life building, Wellington, New Zealand, regrettably to be demolished.

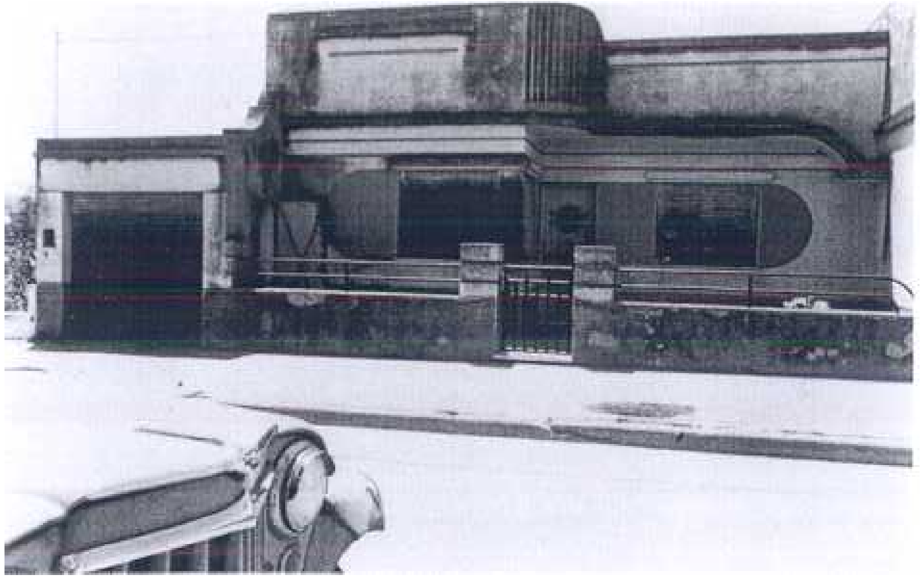

Fig. 14. Small town architecture, Argentina.

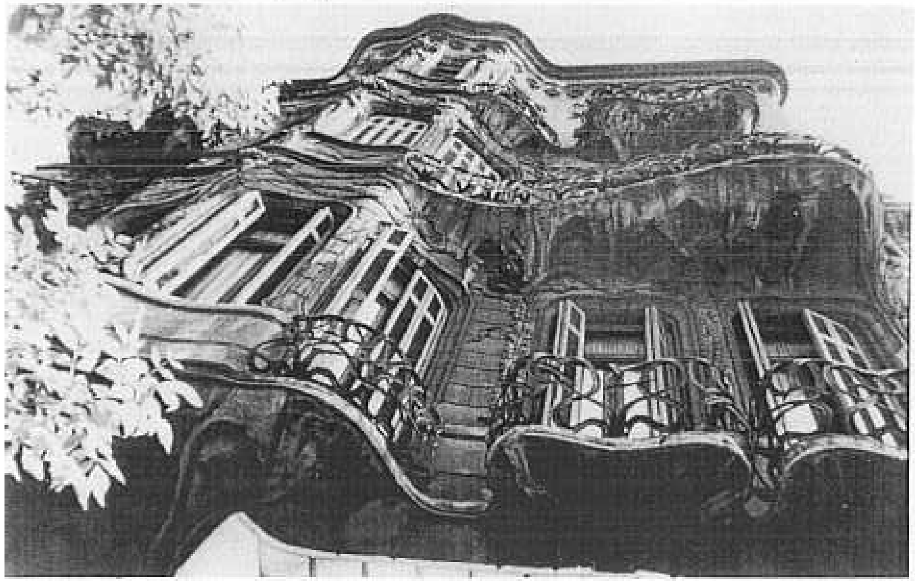

Fig. 15. Art Nouveau, Rivadavia 2031, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

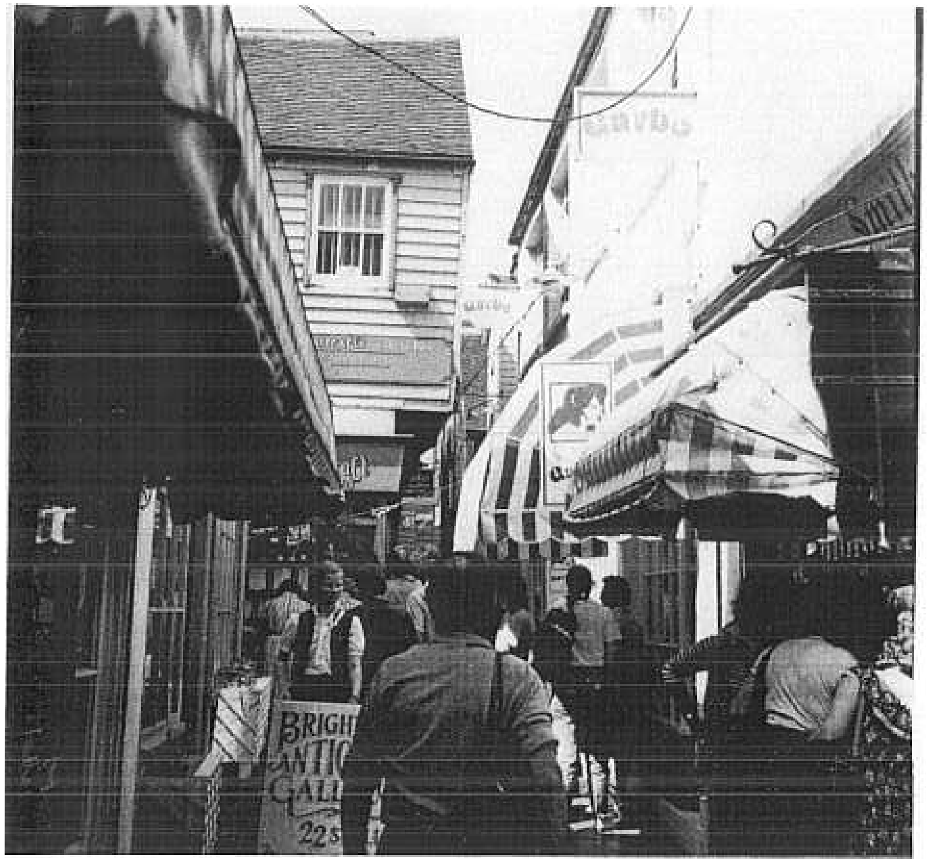

Fig. 16. (*Above and opposite*) The Lanes, Brighton, Sussex, UK. The oldest part of the town illustrates the changing approaches to new buildings and the despairing retreat into fraudulent historicism. (a) The existing Lanes; a mixture of architectural style and a sense of history.

Virtually all cities appear as they do because social, economic and cultural change has taken place and been reflected in their architecture and townscape. These changes were sometimes sporadic and sometimes wholesale in great surges of development or redevelopment. Changes due to fashion and style were often particularly dramatic and fast. The eighteenth-century fashion for refacing the medieval buildings of towns such as Stamford or York, and the implantation of a classical style, were only different in degree and motivation from the military-inspired changes that Haussmann inflicted on Paris between 1853 and 1869.

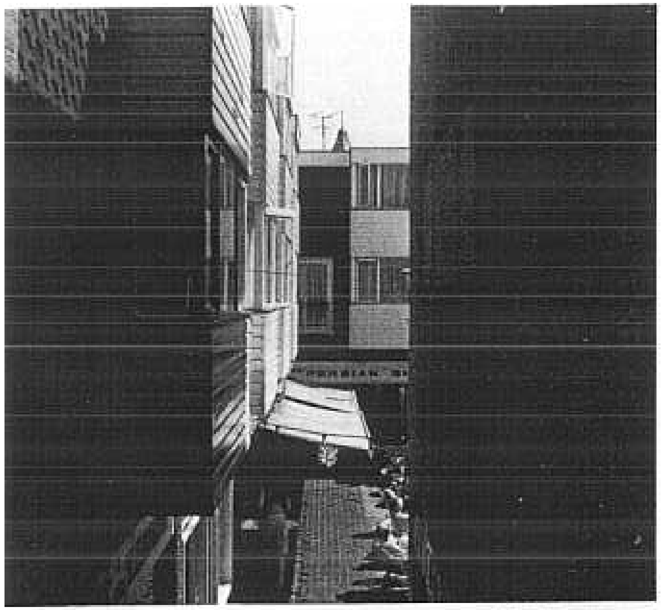

Fig. 16b. Development in the 60s maintains the spirit of the place yet achieves this with architecture that neither demeans itself nor devalues the older surroundings.

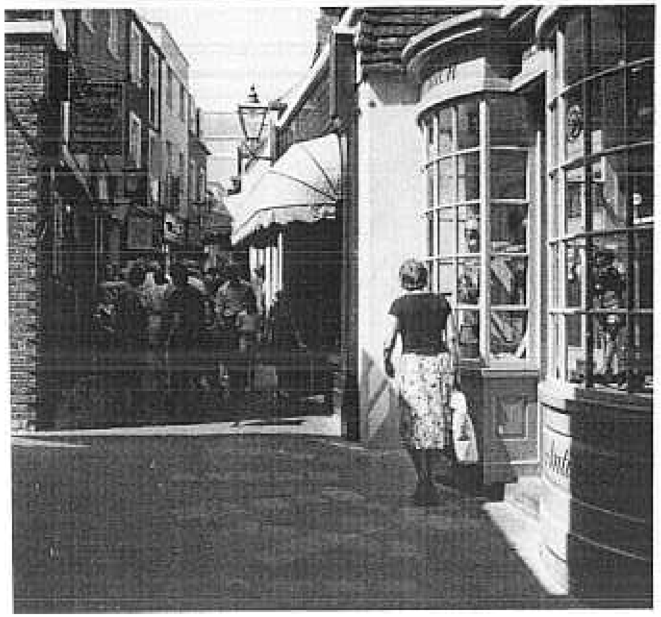

Fig. 16c. Development completed in 1980—extends the Lanes but succeeds only in creating a Disneyesque fake.

On the most cursory examination these changes are always apparent as one layer of history was placed upon another. Each layer has its own apparent identity; it was influenced by preceding layers and in turn influenced those that followed. It is this inherent story that appears in the make-up of each town that is both academically fascinating and equally enriching for those who casually visit a place or for those who live and work there. Historic towns are, in effect, the history of change because change has determined their character. The way in which conservation policies are applied will determine the way in which those towns appear to future generations. To assume that change can now somehow be halted without affecting the real worth of an historic town is clearly erroneous. Conservation must mean that the twentieth century makes its contribution clearly and unmistakably. That it must do this seems to me to be unassailable. That it must do it sympathetically but without pretence and without falsehood is self evident. (*Figs 13, 14* and *15*).

Perception and meaning

So much depends upon how we see, and wish to see, our towns and cities. Historians see them in one way, architects in another; the people living there see them differently from the tourists who go there. Our motivations create different expectations, therefore interpretations differ widely.

In one sense the choice of interpretation is starkly the choice between the museum and the living, changing town. André Malraux crystallized this problem of perception. 'A Romanesque crucifix was not regarded by its contemporaries as a work of sculpture. Nor Cimabue's Madonna as a picture. Even Pheidias' Pallas Athene was not primarily a statue.' He stressed that:

> museums bulked so large in the nineteenth century and are so much part of our lives today that we forget they have imposed on the spectator a wholly new attitude towards the work of art. For they have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions and to transform even portraits into 'pictures' . . . The effect of the museum was to suppress the model in almost every portrait (even that of a dream figure) and to divest works of art of their functions.[11]

If a picture can lose its function and its meaning in a museum, then the problem for the historic town is greater. The 'meaning'—the way we interpret the town around us—is even more vital as the town must be lived in rather than lived with. The tendency is to see our historic towns as 'pictures' somehow divorced from the reality of everyday life. This attitude, which affects us all, can only devalue the intensely valuable and irreplaceable. That devaluation can only be avoided by a more specific ethical approach.

Any new approach, therefore, centres around the solution of the problems described in the preceding pages. The solution breaks down into four distinct parts.

1. A redefinition of our ways of perceiving the historic town; of wresting that perception away from an emotional reaction against the twentieth century to a more positive and considered approach on a sound philosophical basis.
2. The development of that philosophical argument into a more widely accepted conservation ethic that outlines the constraints and opportunities for dealing with change in historic areas.
3. Demonstrating the practical application of that ethic.
4. Stimulating public awareness and debate and professional discussion.

The development of a conservation ethic is urgent. The economic recession of the present time creates a false sense of security as the pressures for speculative redevelopment are held in abeyance. Those pressures will, without doubt, reappear and conservationists will have to remain vigilant to see that historic buildings are not lost and the character of historic towns is not subjected to the same destructive forces of the fifties and sixties. They will be in a stronger position if they can show that what they campaign for is creative rather than emotionally repressive, encouraging the life and vitality of towns and cities rather than enveloping them in a cocoon of preservation fantasy (*Fig. 16*).

Resumen

El fin de la presente serie es dejar bien sentado que la conservación significa no sólo salvar edificios antiguos, sino construir edificios claramente modernos que hagan resaltar a los otros, en lugar de desvalorizarlos por medio de reproducciones.

Desgraciadamente, el concepto de zona protegida está adquiriendo el significado de zona en la cual el cambio representado por nuevos edificios está totalmente prohibido o, de ser aceptado, tiene que revestírsele de los extravagantes colores de la imitación o de la réplica, o del deprimente colorido de lo insípido e impersonal.

Existe una tendencia de ver nuestras ciudades históricas como 'cuadros' más bien divorciados de la realidad de la vida cotidiana. Tal actitud, que nos afecta a todos, sólo ruede desvalorizar lo que es intensamente valioso e irremplazable. Esta desvalorización sólo puede evitarse a través de un enfoque ético más preciso.

Prácticamente todas las ciudades son como son porque los cambios sociales, económicos y culturales han tenido efecto y han sido reflejados en su arquitectura y perspectiva general. Estos cambios han sido a veces esporádicos y a veces masivos por medio de una eclosión de desarrollo o de reformas.

El más superficial de los estudios muestra siempre estos cambios como una capa de historia superpuesta a otra. Cada capa posee su clara identidad, se vio influida por capas anteriores y, a su vez, influyó sobre las siguientes. La 'historia' inherente al perfil de toda ciudad es lo que resulta académicamente fascinante y enriquecedor tanto para los que efectúan una breve visita a un lugar como para los que viven y trabajan en él. Las ciudades históricas son, de hecho, la historia del cambio, pues es el cambio lo que ha determinado su carácter.

El modo de aplicar la política de la conservación determinará la apariencia de las ciudades históricas para las generaciones futuras. Suponer que puede detenerse ahora el cambio sin afectar el verdadero valor de una ciudad histórica resulta claramente erróneo. La conservación debe querer decir que el

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[11] Malraux, A., *The Voices of ilence*, St Albans 1974, 13.

siglo veinte aporta su contribución de manera clara e inequívoca. Que esto es lo que debe hacer, me parece incontrovertible. Que debe hacerlo amorosamente, pero sin fingimientos ni falsedad, es del todo evidente.

El éxito o el fracaso de la conservación del legado arquitectónico va unido de modo inextricable a la concepción, práctica y procedimientos de la planificación urbana. Pero la propia planificación trata cada vez más de incluir al público en la toma de decisiones mediante la participación pública. Dicha participación raramente resulta eficaz cuando se requieren cambios en gran escala para mejorar las condiciones de vida de la gente; pero en centros establecidos la participación resulta, como acaso era de esperar, en beneficio de la conservación porque en todos los lugares del mundo la gente reacciona en contra del cambio y siente temor de él. Esto se comprende al echar una mirada a la mayoría de las ciudades que requirieron nueva planificación en la época de posguerra. Sin embargo, el apoyo a la continuidad del status quo no puede ser un sustituto de una ética bien considerada. Existe un conflicto entre el resultado, al parecer inevitable, de la participación y del desarrollo e implementación de una ética de la conservación basada en la evidencia histórica, más bien que en el sentimiento. Un principio absoluto debe quedar bien sentado: la conservación de una ciudad histórica es, a largo plazo, una contribución a la calidad de la vida, más bien que la respuesta inmediata a una generación contemporánea de opinión pública que ha sido formada por veinte años de desarrollo inhumano y a menudo ordinario. La conservación es más para generaciones futuras que para la actual. La clave del futuro desarrollo de un enfoque ético se halla en la educación. Mientras, toca a los profesionales indicar el camino.

Los profesionales—historiadores de la arquitectura, arquitectos y planificadores urbanos—deben estar dispuestos para el debate sobre una exacta filosofía de la conservación que pueda cristalizar en una ética de la conservación. Esta ética tiene que dejar bien sentado que la ciudad histórica es un verdadero sitio vivo; no un decorado superficial.

La legislación sobre la conservación se ve ampliada continuamente para que incluya el control de nuevos edificios, así como la protección de los antiguos. Esta ampliación de la legislación no tiene en sí misma nada de reprochable; en realidad, la mayoría de los que tratamos con los problemas prácticos referentes a zonas de conservación acogimos con entusiasmo esta extensión de control. Sin embargo, dicho entusiasmo acaso resulte equivocado. La clave se halla en la decisión de lo que sea una contribución contemporánea aceptable al carácter de una zona de conservación. En el fondo, esto vuelve a plantear el problema del significado de la conservación. Amplios poderes y facultades resultan deseables y esenciales, pero su empleo y aplicación requieren un alto juicio crítico para que no redunden en beneficio de aquellos que, al carecer de una ética clara, sólo ven la conservación como medio de mantener sus prejuicios a favor del status quo, y de los que ven la conservación como medio superficial de cubrir cambios sociales y culturales inevitables.

Así pues, esta serie se propone estimular un cambio de actitud en nuestro enfoque de la conservación de las ciudades históricas. En primer lugar, intenta crear una nueva definición del modo en que percibimos la ciudad histórica, y apartar esta percepción de toda reacción emotiva contra el siglo veinte para formar una visión más positiva y de base netamente filosófica; en segundo lugar, desarrollar esta base filosófica para formar una ética de la conservación de aceptación general que defina las limitaciones y oportunidades de hacer frente a los cambios en zonas históricas; en tercer lugar, demostrar la aplicación práctica de dicha ética; y en cuarto, estimular la conciencia y el debate públicos, y la discusión a nivel profesional.

El desarrollo de una ética de la conservación es urgente. La actual recesión económica crea un falso sentimiento de seguridad, al frenar el impulso de planificaciones especulativas. Este impulso, sin duda alguna, surgirá de nuevo, y los interesados en la conservación deberán mantenerse alerta para que no se pierdan los edificios históricos y para que el carácter de las ciudades históricas no se vea sujeto a las mismas fuerzas destructivas de los años cincuenta y sesenta. Su posición quedará reforzada si pueden demonstrar que su campaña es de creación, más que de represión emotiva, y que alienta la pulsación vital de las ciudades, más bien que envolverlas en los velos de la fantasía conservadora.

Résumé

L'intention de cette série d'articles est d'insister encore une fois sur le fait que dans la conservation il ne s'agit pas seulement de sauvegarder les bâtiments anciens, mais aussi de construire d'autres, visiblement modernes, qui mettent en valeur les anciens, au lieu de les dévaloriser par des copies.

Malheureusement, l'expression 'secteur sauvegardé' a de plus en plus tendance à signifier un quartier où le changement, sous la forme de bâtiments nouveaux, est soit totalement interdit, soit accepté toutefois à condition qu'il se dissimule sous la guise du faux ou de la réplique, ou qu'il revête les habits mornes d'une architecture fade et sans caractère.

La tentation, c'est d'envisager nos villes historiques comme autant de 'tableaux' divorcés en quelque sorte de la réalité de la vie quotidienne. Voilà une attitude qui nous tente tous, mais qui en fin de compte ne peut que dévaloriser ce qui est extrêmement prêcieux et irremplaçable. Nous n'éviterons cette dévaluation qu'en lui opposant une éthique plus précise.

Dans l'ensemble, les villes doivent leur apparence aux changements sociaux, économiques et culturels de leur histoire, dont l'architecture et la composition urbaine sont les reflets. Ces changements se sont produits tantôt d'une façon irréguliere, tantôt de toutes parts avec le déferlement d'une grande vague de développement ou de reconstruction.

Il suffit d'un examen rapide pour remarquer les changements apportés par les couches superposées de l'histoire. Chaque couche a son propre caractère évident, ayant subi l'influence des couches précédentes et ayant porté son effet sur celles qui l'ont suivie. C'est ce 'récit' inhérent que nous raconte la composition de la ville qui fascine l'académique et qui enrichit ceux qui visitent un endroit aussi bien que ceux qui y habitent ou y travaillent. Les villes historiques sont en effet l'histoire même du changement, puisque c'est le changement qui leur a fourni leur propre caractère.

La façon dont on applique une politique de conservation va déterminer l'idée que se feront des villes historiques les générations à venir. Il est évidemment faux de s'imaginer que l'on puisse arrêter le changement d'une façon ou d'une autre sans porter coup à la valeur réelle d'une ville historique. La conservation exige que le vingtième siècle y contribue d'une façon claire et nette. Cela me semble incontestable. Que cet apport doive être sans simulation et sans fausseté, cela va de soi.

La réussite ou l'échec de la conservation du patrimoine architectural est lié inextricablement aux idées de l'urbanisme, à ses pratiques et à ses procédés. Mais les urbanistes essaient de plus en plus de faire participer le public aux décisions de planification. La participation ne réussit que rarement lorsqu'il s'agit de changements à grande échelle pour améliorer les conditions de vie. Mais dans les centres urbains établis de longue date la participation s'est montrée l'amie de la conservation, ce qui n'est guère étonnant, puisque dans le monde entier les gens réagissent contre le changement et la craignent. Réaction tout a fait compréhensible, lorsqu'on regarde la plupart des villes qui ont subi le développement depuis la deuxième guerre mondiale.

Vouloir conserver le statu quo ne suffit cependant pas; cela ne remplace pas une éthique bien réfléchie. Il y a donc conflit entre le résultat, en apparence inévitable, de la participation publique d'un côté, et de l'autre, le développement et l'application d'une véritable éthique de conservation qui se fonde sur l'évidence de l'histoire et non sur les réactions de l'émotion. Il est nécéssaire d'établir un principe premier. La signification, à long terme, de la conservation d'une ville historique est son apport à la qualité de vie urbaine, bien plus que son caractère de réponse immédiate à l'opinion publique contemporaine, formée comme elle l'est par une vingtaine d'années de développement inhumain et souvent vulgaire. La conservation est beaucoup plus pour les générations à venir que pour aujourd'hui. C'est l'éducation qui est la clé au développement futur d'une attitude éthique. En attendant, il incombe aux professions qui y travaillent de prendre les devants.

Les professionnels — historiens d'art, architectes et urbanistes—devraient être prêts à discuter d'une façon plus approfondie une philosophie précise de la conservation afin d'en distiller une éthique de la conservation. Cette éthique doit affirmer encore une fois que la ville historique est un endroit vivant, authentique, et non un décor de theatre, sans profondeur.

Les lois qui gouvernent la conservation s'étendent toujours et comprennent maintenant le contrôle de nouveaux bâtiments aussi bien que la protection des anciens. Cette extension des lois n'est aucunement répréhensible en soi: au contraire, la plupart de ceux qui s'occupent des problèmes pratiques de l'organisation des secteurs sauvegardés ont reçu avec enthousiame cet élargissement de contrôle. Il se peut, cependant, que cet enthousiasme se montre finalement mal placé. La clé, c'est la façon de juger ce qui est acceptable comme addition contemporaine au caractère d'un secteur sauvegardé—ce qui, finalement, soulève encore une fois la question du sens du mot 'conservation'. Ces contrôles et ces pouvoirs élargis sont à souhaiter, ils sont essentiels même, mais pour bien s'en servir il faut un jugement de la plus haute qualité. Autrement, ils ne serviront que pour aider ceux qui, n'ayant pas d'éthique raisonnée, voient dans la conservation simplement un moyen de maintenir leur propres préjugés en faveur du statu quo et ceux qui la considèrent comme une façon superficielle de cacher les inévitables changements socio-culturels.

Cette série, donc, cherche à stimuler un changement dans notre attitude vis-à-vis de la conservation des villes historiques. Elle vise d'abord à une nouvelle définition de la façon dont nous apercevons la ville historique; elle veut détourner cette perception de la voie de la réaction émotionnelle contre le vingtième siècle pour la conduire vers une approche plus positive, plus rationnelle, qui se fonde solidement sur une base philosophique. Deuxièmement, nous chercherons à développer cet argument philosophique

pour en déduire une éthique qui soit généralement plus acceptable et qui délimite les contraintes et les occasions qui se présentent lorsqu'on s'occupe des changements dans les secteurs historiques. Notre troisième but sera de montrer l'application pratique de cette éthique, et le quatrième, d'éveiller la conscience publique et la discussion parmi le public autant que parmi les professions.

Il est urgent de développer une éthique de la conservation. La récession économique actuelle encourage un sentiment trompeur de sécurité, en endiguant toutes les pressions qui favorisent le développement immobilier spéculatif. Il n'y a pas de doute: ces pressions vont revenir, et les partisans de la conservation auront à veiller pour empêcher la destruction des bâtiments historiques, et pour être sûrs que le caractère des villes historiques ne succombe pas aux mêmes forces de destruction que l'on a vues au cours des années 50 et 60. Leur défense sera d'autant plus sûre s'ils peuvent démontrer que leur campagne vise la création plutôt que la répression émotionnelle, qu'elle encourage la vitalité des cités et des villes historiques au lieu de les envelopper dans un cocon de préservation illusoire.