
ICOMOS International Committee on Wood

ICOMOS International Wood Committee (IWC) is pleased to have this opportunity to express its gratitude to the organizers of the 10th General Assembly of ICOMOS, and also to the President of ICOMOS, Dr. Roland Silva, for initiating this series of publications under the umbrella of the international scientific committees of ICOMOS. The IWC has strongly supported this initiative, but has not actively participated in the writing. The Committee left the better part of the task of preparing the publication on timber buildings to our colleagues in Sri Lanka. This comes as a result of the Committee's policy. It was, as a matter of fact, Dr. Silva himself who inspired this policy.

In his report to the Advisory Committee of ICOMOS in Paris in May 1991, Dr. Silva encouraged the international committees of ICOMOS to organize their meetings and symposia outside Europe and North America. IWC immediately grasped the significance of this proposal and acknowledged that the preservation community in less developed countries (LDC) and experts in the industrialized countries would benefit from expanded contact and dialogue. As a result, IWC organized, successfully we dare say, its international symposium and meeting in Nepal in November 1992.

At the meeting in Nepal the Committee rejected the idea to publish a series of handbooks on the preservation of timber buildings because the Committee members realized that such handbooks, in order to be serviceable, should be published at the regional or national level: the species of wood used in timber buildings differ widely; the rate of decay of the wood is also very different from one region to another. Accordingly, the methods applied for preserving timber buildings must be compatible with the actual conditions in the region or country. This is all the more so, as IWC argues that strict adherence to Article 10 of the Venice Charter is necessary in the preservation of timber buildings. This means that *whenever possible traditional methods of repair should be used.*

Traditional methods of repair presuppose: 1. availability of timber of the same species and grading as the historic timber; 2. forest owners or loggers, familiar with traditional seasoning techniques; 3. craftsmen, in particular, carpenters who are familiar with the handling of traditional tools; and 4. availability of traditional tools. In addition, the conservation architect, and preferably also the carpenters, should have thorough knowledge of traditional design methods and construction techniques. It is an accepted fact that it is extremely difficult to fulfil all these conditions, or even just a few of them.

The concern for lack of appropriate timber for restoration purposes led the Committee in its meeting in Nepal in 1992 to decide that one of its main goals should be to stimulate the development of *Historic Forest Reserves*. This would have the Wood Committee contribute to international ecological programs and at the same time encourage the possibility of having trees from which appropriate timber could be obtained, on a selective basis, for the restoration of historic buildings.

The Committee realized that almost no research has been made on a global scale concerning traditional repair methods for timber buildings. Therefore, it was decided that one of the foremost tasks of the Committee should be to compile case studies of repair of timber buildings from all regions. This book, covering problems related to the preservation of timber buildings in Sri Lanka, should be regarded as the first step in this process. Therefore, ICOMOS International Wood Committee is grateful that our colleagues in Sri Lanka agreed to our proposal to give us an in-depth insight into their particular preservation problems.

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