
Book reviews

Materials and Skills for Historic Building Conservation

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This publication takes the form of a number of academic papers written by Engineers, Materials Scientists, Specialist Practitioners, Surveyors, Architects and Academics working in the field of Building Conservation. The disciplines represented among the contributing authors include architecture, structural engineering, surveying, timber repairs, damp remediation, specialist materials consultancy, biology, and hands on conservation crafts. Each paper is based around a specific material or building component. With the possible exception of lead, all of the most common structural materials found within historic structures in the UK are included. All the papers provide detailed descriptions of the nature and characteristics of the subject material and many expand into causes of deterioration and suggest required remedial actions.

The book provides an insight into knowledge that is fundamental to anyone in a position to make decisions on intervention and repair within a historic building. Unlike the previous volume in this set, the disciplines and backgrounds of the contributing authors are quite diverse, which leads to different focuses and technical depths across the various papers. This variety of technical content may prove frustrating to the professional practitioner requiring to read about a specific issue, in a book where it is generally one paper for each material. From an academic perspective some of the papers being published without a list of references, was concerning, as was how current all the material was as one of the contributing authors passed away in 2003. Unlike the previous book in the set, this volume is more suitable for the novice reader, and most papers could be assimilated with just a basic depth of prior technical knowledge.

The publication is part of a series of books covering both philosophical and technical conservation methodology, as well as providing an overview of the history of how structures were built. As the third volume in this series which the reviewer has read, it too follows the stated aim of providing a snap shot of a number of individual conservation engineering-related topics. This book provides technical and informative material to a reasonable depth, but is still suitable for both the knowledgeable student of building conservation and the non-technician. As with previous books in the set there is a diversity brought by the different disciplines of the contributing authors. On the evidence of this volume and the previous ones, the series does appear to be developing in to a comprehensive overview of conservation practice.

To summarise, given the specialist nature of much of its content it does offer solid value at £45.00. It does meet its stated objective of providing a basic reference source for



its topic range, and does provide a good follow up to the previous philosophical and structural volumes. The reviewer would recommend this to the stated target audience. As a lecturer in Building Surveying and Conservation Practice, the reviewer would consider this volume of all the books in the set thus far for use as a core text for students, as it does give a valuable and concise insight into those traditional materials which make the maintenance, repair, alteration and conservation of historic buildings different to that of more modern structures.

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