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Is Appearance and Appeal Important? Unit 2 Learning Handbook

COTAC Insight 1



COTAC Insight 1: The Need to Appreciate the Built Heritage

Unit 2 Learning Handbook: Is Appearance and Appeal Important?

Council on Training in Architectural Conservation (COTAC)

COTAC originated in 1959 in response to the need for training resources for practitioners in the repair and conservation of historic churches. Since its inception the Charity has consistently worked to lift standards across the UK's conservation, repair and maintenance (CRM) sector. This has involved working in partnership with national agencies, professional and standard setting bodies, educational establishments and vocational training interests. Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of the information in this Learning Handbook, COTAC and its researchers specifically exclude any liability for errors, omissions or otherwise arising from its content. The Unit images are primarily sourced from both authors personal collections. A few historic and archival resources incorporated as fair-use educational material are acknowledged where their source has been readily identified.

Insight 1 Unit 2 Learning Handbook: Is Appearance and Appeal Important?

A range of traditional and locally available materials have been used historically to create the structures that exist today. A much greater variety of materials became available with the coming of the canals and railways. Until ca.1919, buildings were, in the main, constructed from this variety of wide-ranging material supplies. These materials contribute to many different distinctive colours and textures affecting how buildings looked.

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This COTAC Insight 1 Unit 2 Learning Handbook was researched and written as a joint exercise by Barry J. Bridgwood and Ingval Maxwell in support of COTAC's stated Educational Aims and Objectives.

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COTAC Insight 1: The Need to Appreciate the Built Heritage

Unit 2 Learning Handbook: Is Appearance and Appeal Important?

Link 1: Understanding Conservation Unit 2: Aesthetic Qualities and Values

The philosophy of aesthetics may, by its nature, be subjective or objective; but what influences determine how we see one historical asset as being more beautiful and more appealing than another? This Insight Unit 2 might usefully be read in conjunction with www.understandingconservation.org Unit 2.



Unit 2: Aesthetic Qualities and Values.

Unit 2 of www.understandingconservation.org focuses on informing the practical and pragmatic substance of conservation work by integrating a detailed consideration across 5 of the 14 ICOMOS Education and Training Guidelines. It aims to ask what, why and how is a place or object important enough to have a greater understanding of what makes it so.

Link 2: Unit 2 Image Set Thumbnails. (The full Image Set is incorporated as part of Unit 6)



Insight 1 Unit 2 is supported by an Images Set which illustrates a variety of locations across the UK. All of them need to be looked after in the correct manner because, to not do so, would undermine their value and worth to the country, their community, the national tourist industry, and individual visitors. But all of them highlight the need for a better appreciation of what makes them look important so they can be given appropriate care to safeguard them for the future. The full Image Set is incorporated as part of **Unit 6: Seeing What You Are Looking At** (Image Set © Ingval Maxwell)

Unit 2: Thumbnail Image Set: Brief Captions (See Full Captions in Unit 6.2)

- 1 Norwich Cathedral: Is appearance and appeal important
- 2 Skara Brae: Walls and furniture built from stone without mortar
- 3 Brough of Birsay: Archaeological remains offer a window into the past
- 4 Kings Knot, Stirling Castle: Archaeological remains of a formal garden
- 5 Crail: Picturesque setting of a previous busy harbour
- 6 New Lanark: So valuable it is now a World Heritage Site
- 7 Preston Mill: Distinctive in colour and materials used
- 8 Wanlockhead: A working domestic sized community mining lead
- 9 Ulster Folk Museum: Important rural buildings rebuilt to inform about history
- 10 Tretower, Abergavenny: Masonry Rural building still in-situ
- 11 Walderton, Weald and Downland: Timber framed buildings to inform about history
- 12 Penpont: A Turnpike crossroads setting from the 19th century
- 13 Ashburton: Building along a hillside road adds to the appearance
- 14 Aberdeen Footdee: A unified community settlement remaining valid for modern use
- 15 Kendal: Buildings of different dates adds to the attraction
- 16 Elm Hill Norwich: Different parts of the country use local building materials
- 17 Totnes: Different parts of the country have used their own local building materials
- 18 Londonderry: Protected by defensive walls
- 19 Durham: Building up a sense of place before reaching the Cathedral
- 20 Barnard Castle: A central meeting place
- 21 Oxford: A seat of learning with buildings of status
- 22 Tynemouth: Open spaces add to a sense of wellbeing
- 23 York Gatehouse: Originally designed to control who gets in by controlling entry
- 24 Barbican: Modern-day living in elevated streets

2.1 Introduction

Aesthetic qualities and values are how we assess the worth and basic beauty of things.

This value process can be both personal to the individual as well as common to most people. Design is very much a 'today' thing but, of course, fashion and tastes change with time and what was appealing in the past might not be today. We must avoid, when dealing with the Heritage, imposing our 'today' views on something that has great value in our understanding of the past. Good design and the aesthetic appeal of an object cover a vast range of subjects in everyday life: whether this is within commercial design, graphics, automotive design, fashion, art, or architecture. Good design influences how we see and value an object or place. A beautiful landscape will appeal to our emotional response as might a beautiful piece of art or a well-proportioned and detailed building. This aesthetic [*emotional*] appeal also helps us to identify with a place, setting or landscape – our response is to value what we see and where we see it, sometimes without really understanding why we like it!



Various subjects where design is important

The purpose of this Unit is to alert you to the things that you might like and how to better understand why we should protect them. We have chosen a range of examples that have different and multiple layers of **Worth** and explore how you might want to think about them.

Aesthetic value or **Worth** might be described as those factors that have a focus on design, designer, construction method, architectural style, proportion, craftsmanship, decoration and which relate to buildings, artefacts, and structures of all kinds.

2.2 Visual Worth

The basic beauty of things. (Some text and images are purposely repeated from Insight 1 Unit 1)

When looking at something how you might appreciate its **Worth** simply means how you like the quality and appearance of it. This can be personal, balanced or challenging.

You will have an opinion about how it looks and why it might feel good to be near. But this can be challenging too, depending upon what you see and how you like it; thus, individual opinions can vary allowing each of us to consider it differently – the personal view!



Roman sculpture



A coal mine pit head winding gear



Mosaic floor

By comparison with the Roman Sculpture, the central photograph of a coal mine might be considered ugly because of its haphazard collection of disjointed buildings and structures. But, like most things '**beauty is in the eye of the beholder**' – the ever-present opinion. Despite your views and opinion about the coal mine, it has **Worth** as a piece of industry located in the landscape where its appearance is not the main reason for its creation or existence.

It is, therefore, important to recognise what is special, why it is special and then plan how to protect those things that make the object or building important to us: Its basic appearance is fundamental to appreciating what makes it important. This might include the original building or those things that have been added to it or removed from it in the past – and so how it has evolved. A critical viewing of what is in front of us is the basic tool that we can all use to decide what is important and should not be lost or damaged by what we do to it. For example, the original Michelangelo statue of David was a complete nude image of the male body. The Victorians might have decided that certain parts of it offended public morality so these 'certain parts' should be covered by adding a fig leaf to any publicly displayed copy of the statue! Such change, whilst not being original, could be imposed by Victorian moral attitudes and are therefore, a record/reflection of, and authentic of their opinions. Whilst being a

'defacement' of the copied Michelangelo stature it does offer a record of Victorian attitudes. So, a question that might be asked is should the fig leaf be removed to return the copy to the original's state, or do we leave it in place because it is a record of Victorian values. Would the removal of the fig leaf damage the copied statute – basic questions but rather important?

An Etruscan vase discovered in many pieces by archaeologists, might be pieced together using modern adhesives and, where pieces were missing from the whole, the gaps might be infilled using a modern clay mix: ***This so that we today might understand how it looked originally. The modern clay being left undecorated to ensure that when viewing it now, we are not deceived into thinking it was discovered whole and undamaged.*** We can, however, benefit from this repair process in full knowledge that whilst it is not a true appearance we are not deceived by its repairs: But can see how it looked like an original whole.



An Art Deco cinema building then and now © Sam Lockett

By comparing the two images of the same building above, one original (left) and one (right) after conversion to an alternative use, we can identify what has changed. In the original there was no high building to its left; in the modern view its visual interaction is totally different as it is now dominated by a later multi- storey neighbour. The original could be viewed from all sides as an independent structure with its upright 'wing tower' feature silhouetted against the sky emphasising its 'dynamic' Art Deco style. The question to pose therefore is: How has its aesthetic value or **Visual Worth** been affected by later developments?

The effects of, possibly, ill-considered adjacent development within an historic setting will be discussed later in this Insight 1 Series of Units.

2.3 Architectural and Aesthetic Evaluation

Looking and seeing how buildings look and change over time.

What damages heritage buildings are inappropriate changes or inappropriate repairs that do not take account of what is important about an original design: Such bad work will destroy or reduce the aesthetic appeal not only of the building but also its associated setting. Poorly considered change of use from an original purpose will, in some cases, create avoidable

damage to the building and its setting. The right image below shows replacement plastic windows and doors and general facade clutter in a row of historic terraced housing, creating visually damaging change – the original style would have used wooden sash windows and wooden doors with repeated detailing and styling, maintaining shadow lines and surface textures, has been lost by the introduction of altered and varying proportion, bland flat plastic windows and doors.

The adjacent left image (despite inappropriate plastic window replacements to first floor) has retained most of its design integrity with its original bay windows and metal garden railings. The local Mill workers social status is/was reflected in the different styling across this same street. Lower status workers housing on the right does not have the same visual impact as the bay windowed houses on the left: These bay window houses probably accommodating overseers and middle managers, reinforcing the status differences across the same but integrated street: Perhaps ***reflected today in differing market values of the two types of houses in the same street: an indication of how aesthetic appeal affects value or Worth.***



Terraced housing in a Mill town - Leek, Staffordshire



The cottage on the left might not have lost its vernacular appeal had its owner (or the builders who did the work) been aware of good conservation principles and an understanding of design and use of materials. The one on the right is allowing nature to encroach



Poor stone 'strap' re-pointing, plastic windows and doors, rainwater goods and modern roof tiles have completely detracted from the original aesthetic of this small, village vernacular, stone-built house above left. The cottage in the image above right, however, has not lost its integrity with all original materials retained and conserved. The village (right) is protected

within a Conservation Area, thus preserving the original context, and setting; but on the left, the cottage and its village does not have the protection offered by Conservation Area status.

The following image shows how good conservation principles have managed to maintain the vernacular design integrity and use of materials with wooden sash windows and timber panel doors retained instead of plastic. Its design rhythm or repeated pattern has been retained. The plastic rainwater goods: TV aerials and suspended cabling rather detract however!



A row of terraced houses, Downham Market, Norfolk built of carstone and brick

Attractive and well-proportioned design is not limited to grand buildings, ***humble vernacular structures have, over time, established their own aesthetic Worth as well as historic value.***

The following images demonstrate some 14th-15th and 18th- 19thC buildings which help to illustrate historic vernacular value as well as aesthetic appeal.



Congleton, a box timber box framed building



Marton, Cheshire timber frame church



Quarry Bank Mill Cheshire, workers' housing

Illustrated above, the 18thC sash windows in the building in the left image are not original as the structure is probably 15th or 16thC. They were, however, authentic of a time in history when, in the late 17th and 18th/19thC, the adoption of sash windows became fashionable. These later windows whilst not original are an authentic detail of their time. The central image of a timber frame church in Cheshire is original in that very little of it has changed or altered from when it was first built in the 14thC.

The image to the right is of workers' accommodation within a 18th/19thC purpose-built textile village community [Quarry Bank] centred on its own large textile Mill. The latter buildings record, through careful conservation, a story of the philanthropic ideals of some industrialists whose focus was not only the production of textiles but also the health and welfare of their workers, all living within a self-sufficient community. Rather an '*engineered*' community it might be said where workers were '*tied*' as tenants to their village and its mill. They may also have been paid in 'tokens' instead of money, thus ensuring that they were forced to use the local shop – owned and stocked by the Mill owner!



Quarry Bank village shop and Co-op store

But ***visible facades of buildings and their surroundings are not the only parts of the built environment that need recognition***: sometimes the ***underlying structure*** is equally important as the public face of buildings. The ***skeleton or frame*** might be hidden from view or not easily recognised but has equal importance to the history of construction methods and needs recognition and protection from harm. By way of examples: the first use of ***wrought iron*** bridge construction for the Ironbridge to span the gorge at Coalbrookdale, Shropshire or the ***use of wrought iron lattice girders in the late 19thC allowing vast roof spans of railway terminals like St Pancras Station*** below, or the prefabricated cast iron structure of a building like the Ca d'Oro Building in Glasgow.



St. Pancras Station, London



The Ironbridge, Shropshire © Ramboll



Sir John Betjeman statue
at St. Pancras



Ca d'Oro Building, Glasgow

These 19thC developments in iron construction methods even extended to very large, prefabricated glasshouse structures like The Crystal Palace in London, built for the Great Exhibition in 1851 [*destroyed by fire in early 20thC*], or Kibble Palace and the People's Palace both in Glasgow (a recognised centre of metal constructional developments).



Crystal Palace



Kibble Palace

All these rapid 19thC constructional developments allowed some fundamental change to how buildings and structures were built and looked – their aesthetic!

Compare the style of early buildings on previous pages with the ones above – to gain an understanding of the rapid and fundamental change to how buildings looked during and post the 19thC Industrial Revolution! 19thC transport developments also offer an insight into how the UK's Industrial Revolution had an impact on landscape and area development.

Transport system developments in the early and mid 19thC was enormous with the expansion of a canal network during the late 18thC and early 19thC and a superseding railway network from the mid 19thC, both had a major impact on landscape.



Canal architecture, Staffordshire



Bridge architecture, Scotland



Railway architecture, West Lothian



The Forth Bridges: the rail-bridge opened in 1890 and the road-bridge in 1964 (above) which was augmented in 2017 by the new Queensferry Crossing (right): *An interesting 'pageant' of history and change to the pattern of structural design and aesthetics across one century.*



2.4 Understanding the Value of an Area as a Whole

Heritage assets, including buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes – play an essential role in establishing a **sense of place**. Local character and distinctiveness are very much established by what has previously been built and offers a record of how an area has changed and satisfied local requirements, whether that is through local industry, farming or everyday issues like housing and recreation [*Municipal Parks and Gardens*].



Quarry Bank textile mill and village



New Lanark workers accommodation



Fishermen's Huts, Suffolk

As far as the built environment is concerned, it is not just the building itself that we need to protect: It is also about how we see it and value it set within its location or landscape – its setting and context.



Oxford and Eaglesham: The importance of group setting and context, including enclosing walls, street ephemera, trees, and planting



King's Lynn Customs House and Quay

Perhaps ***one of the best sources for information about how an area has developed, over time are historic maps. The Ordnance Survey archive*** is a comprehensive source for such information as early maps can be compared with later ones to gain an understanding of how change has affected an area, as might locally available historic photograph and document archives such as those held within local Records Offices and libraries. Google Earth images can also be very useful in making comparisons between old images and current situations. Similarly, early aerial photography provides good comparison information compared against current Google Earth images.



Meir Aerodrome 1950, Stoke-on-Trent



Site of former Meir Aerodrome, 2020 © Google Earth

Also important at the turn of the 19th century was the invention of the internal combustion engine and its associated increase in personal transport – the motor car. With new road construction radically altering countryside and townscapes; narrow pedestrian alleyways gave way to surfaced wider roads and pavements with directional signs, garages, petrol pumps etc.



Bury-St-Edmunds, Suffolk, 1935 Art Deco ['Pillar of Salt'] directional sign listed for its unique aesthetic value; it is internally lit.



Early street side petrol pumps



A local garage



Roadway surfacing gang

2.5 Conservation Strategy [Purposely repeated from Unit 1]

Conservation means many things to different people but, for those working to safeguard the past, it also means looking after what we have already built, so that it can be used now [**sustainable re-use**] and by future generations whilst offering a record of how we lived in the past. Buildings can be changed and modified to suit needs, this can mean trying to adapt them without too much damage or loss of the information which they contain about our past and the people who made them. This requires them to be changed and developed with good guidance that can be adapted for each individual site, location, or project so that the work can be tackled in an appropriate and least damaging way. Conservation is about guiding change and re-use where buildings' **Worth** might otherwise be lost by demolition or inappropriate modifications. It is also about appreciating what might surround them and how others might value where they have been built – this is how a **place** [**context and setting**] is appreciated by its people and, sometimes, the wider world. These aspects are important and need to be considered when work is to be carried out. The following set of bullet points are repeated from Unit 1 to assist here: Remembering that Conservation practice adopts five recognised principles, these are:

1. **Minimum intervention** – only carrying out only work which is necessary to repair, maintain or change the use
2. **Minimum loss of authenticity** – only carrying out work that does not change too much of what is thought to be valuable
3. **Minimum loss of original fabric or material** – by not removing anything that is required to keep the building special along with its record, chronicle, or archive of history
4. **The ability to reverse any changes** – making sure that what might be added can be removed in the future without creating more damage to contained record
5. **The need to be clear and 'honest'** and show what is new work and, thus, avoid deceiving the viewer

Perhaps then some simple statements to help define conservation:

- *Conservation is not about resisting change; it is about allowing appropriate change.*
- *Conservation is about doing research to come to an appropriate way of carrying out change.*
- *Conservation is about keeping an 'open mind' about a building's value and how it can accommodate change or re-use.*
- *Conservation means looking after those buildings and structures that are important to us. This can be through management of repairs, appropriate re-use, sometimes preservation and, always, appropriate intervention without loss of the parts that make the building important to us. It is about those things that we, as a society, value and want to preserve or protect.*

2.6 Degrees of Intervention

It would be wrong to disregard parts of an historic structure simply because they are old or showing signs of decay or do not 'fit in' with the fashion of today. All historic buildings and structures have value in demonstrating how things once were. They reflect our history and development. ***So, in conservation, good repair and maintenance is preferable to removal and replacement.***



Good repair and maintenance is preferable to removal and replacement

But to ensure that our built heritage is retained for future generations we need to be able to re-use it to satisfy current requirements [*sustainable re-use*]. The art and skill of conservation is to be able to respect what is important about an old building whilst allowing it to be 'modified' with minimum loss of its historic value and integrity:

The following five points are as defined in ***Conservation Strategy*** and repeated here:

1. ***Minimum intervention***
2. ***Minimum loss of authenticity***
3. ***Minimum loss of original fabric or material***
4. ***The ability to reverse any changes***
5. ***The need to be clear and honest***

Old buildings can offer a useful, sustainable alternative to demolition when compared with new build. Their retention offers visual continuity to a local area and its people: This '***sense of place***' helps with local well-being' and community identity. What needs to be guarded against is poorly researched and poorly executed change that does not pay due regard to the value of an historic building or its location and setting. Once lost through inappropriate work or absence of timely maintenance, heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource that will be gone forever.



Perth



Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent



Buxton Derbyshire



Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent

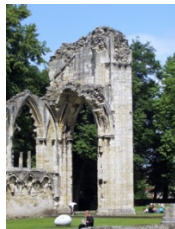
2.7 Appropriate Levels of Intervention

Even the smallest of changes, if not properly assessed can inflict serious and irreversible damage to an historic asset: So, when planning for any work associated with the Heritage, careful research, and investigation of impact of the proposed work must be made before any change is proposed or implemented.

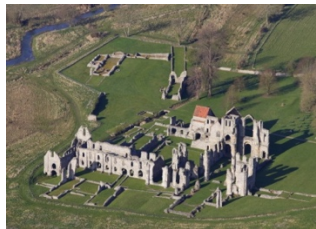
Even ruined structures have a value and record of history that need to be understood, protected, and recorded. It is the history of any society embedded, even in the smallest of ruins and remains, that is important to understanding history.



Delphi, Greece



York



Norfolk © Mike Page



Potteries, Stoke-on-Trent



Paphos, Cyprus



Dun Carloway Broch, Lewis

Where heritage cannot be protected, preserved, restored, or found an alternative use (and there is not an alternative to loss through demolition) then a programme of recording by survey, photographs or other methods becomes essential.

2.8 Conclusion

In this Study we have looked at how design and aesthetics contribute to the **Worth** of our built heritage. How it should be assessed and what factors influence how we see and use it. ***We have tried to look at how we must avoid our personal opinion imposing values or requirements that might be in danger of not recognising those things that are embedded in the design and aesthetics of an object:*** Thus, avoiding imposing constraints on it that might damage its **Worth** to a wider audience both now and in the future.

The built environment is made by human effort and talent, we can destroy it through war and conflict and by simply not recognising what is important and, through neglect, allowing it to waste away not recognising its importance to our history until too late. It is the sole purpose

of conservation work to help us to identify and value what is of **Worth** to our society and its history by protecting the record offered by built heritage; sometimes before we can recognise its true **Worth** ourselves.



Various locations where the value of Worth to society is high

Conservation helps us to see, look at and recognise the value and Worth of the historic record that is contained in built heritage.



Little Petra, Jordan: Appreciating and caring for the Worth of the historic record that we have inherited is an international concern

Unit 2 Questions (Answers are based directly on the wording contained in Unit 2)

What have we learned about the importance of appearance and appeal?

1. Using the definitions within the Contents of this document, define:
 - i. **Aesthetic qualities and values**
 - ii. **Visual Worth**
 - iii. **Architectural and aesthetic values**
2. In whose eye is beauty best viewed?
3. In respect of the Etruscan vase, shown on page 7, how was it pieced together and why?
4. Complete the following statement: ***What damages heritage buildings are...***
5. What might be affected by aesthetic appeal in different styles of houses across the same street? And what does this reflect?
6. What, in general terms, is protected and preserved by the imposition of a Conservation Area?
7. What have humble vernacular buildings established over time?
8. What, in addition to ***...visible facades of buildings and their surroundings...*** is equally important?
9. What material allowed the construction of The Ironbridge, Shropshire and St. Pancras Station arched roof
10. Where might you see a ***...‘pageant’ of history and change to the pattern of structural design and aesthetics across one century...***?
11. What plays an essential role in establishing a ***sense of place?***
12. Where might you find one of ***...the best sources for information about how an area has developed...?***
13. What, in conservation terms, is preferably to removal and replacement?
14. Complete the following: ***Conservation helps us to see...?***

Unit 2 Answers

1. Aesthetic qualities and values: *Is appearance and appeal important*
Visual Worth: *The basic beauty of things*
Architectural and aesthetic values: *looking and seeing how buildings look and change over time.*
2. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
3. With modern adhesives and clay: *so that we today might understand how it looked originally. The modern clay was left undecorated to ensure that when viewing it now, we are not deceived into thinking it was discovered whole and undamaged*
4. *... are inappropriate changes or inappropriate repairs that do not take account of what is important about an original design*
5. Reflecting: *...differing market values of the two types of houses in the same street: an indication of how aesthetic appeal affects value or Worth.*
6. Context and setting
7. *... their own aesthetic Worth as well as historic value*
8. Underlying structure, skeleton, or frame
9. Wrought iron
10. The Forth Bridges in Scotland
11. *Heritage assets, including buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes*
12. *The Ordnance Survey archive*
13. *good repair and maintenance*
14. *... look at and recognise the value and Worth of the historic record that is contained in built heritage.*