2 To confirm by Ordinary Resolution the increase in the annual subscription to The Institute recommended by the Council, to be with effect from 1 July 2001 as follows:

- Associates: £30.00
- Fellows: £45.00
- Institutional Members: £60.00

3 To elect a President

4 To elect a Treasurer

5 To elect five Ordinary Members of the Council

6 To re-appoint Jacob Cavenagh and Skeet as Auditors to The Institute and to authorize the Council to fix their remuneration for the ensuing year

7 To transact any ordinary business of The Institute

1 December 2000
Registered Office
6 Buckingham Street
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By Order of the Council
D R L Bomford
Secretary-General

Notes

All members – Associates, Fellows, Honorary Fellows and Institutional Members – are entitled to attend the meeting but only Fellows and Honorary Fellows promoted from Fellowship are entitled to vote. A Fellow or Honorary Fellow promoted from Fellowship who cannot be personally present at the meeting can either:

- appoint any other Fellow or Honorary Fellow promoted from Fellowship as a representative (known as a proxy). This appointment can be made in any normal way, as long as it is in writing and deposited with the Secretary-General at the IIC Office at least 48 hours before the time fixed for the meeting; or
- record a vote in advance on some or all of the matters put forward for discussion at the meeting. This must be done by delivering written instructions to the Secretary-General at the IIC Office at least 48 hours before the time fixed for the meeting.

Forbes Prize Lecture

The Forbes Prize Lecture was delivered on Tuesday 10 October at the start of the IIC Congress in Melbourne by Sarah Stanforth, advisor on paintings conservation and environmental control to The National Trust, London, and a Vice-President of IIC. What follows is a transcript of the Lecture, slightly revised for publication.

Conservation: Significance, Relevance and Sustainability

I am starting a new trend: I am the first Forbes Lecturer to be younger than IIC. This will give you a terminus ante quem for my date of birth. 2000 is a year of great significance for IIC, as it was incorporated 50 years ago on 27 April 1950. It is the year in which IIC enters its middle age, or perhaps, like Miss Jean Brodie, its prime.

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium it is inevitable that our thoughts, Janus-like, reflect on the past and the future. For a time, I had a working title for this lecture of 'IIC: Past, Present and Future'. Although I have not ended up with this, the theme is very much in what I will say, since I have looked at the issues confronting the conservation profession and I have also thought about IIC's role.

The history of IIC

I can be so precise about the date of the incorporation of IIC because I have read a draft of A Short History of IIC compiled by Hero Boothroyd Brooks. This publication will be sent to all members of IIC with the next issue of Studies in Conservation. Although there had been a number of activities that heralded the development of the conservation profession, among them the Rome conference of 1930 – or, to give it its proper title, The International Conference for the Study of Scientific Methods of the Examination and Preservation of Works of Art – and the publication of Technical Studies in the Field of the Fine Arts from 1932 to 1942, it was the post Second World War years that saw the founding of several international conservation organizations:

- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation) in 1945
- ICOM (International Council of Museums) in 1946
- IIC in 1950
- ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property) in 1956
- ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in 1965

We can speculate that it was the destruction of so many historic buildings and so much cultural heritage brought about by two World Wars that awakened a general awareness of the need to protect our heritage, formalized in the UNESCO Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

The first aim of IIC was to establish a conservation profession. In the words of one of the founding members, Ian Rawlins, writing to another, George Stout, in 1945:

...one should make sure at the very outset that there is a truly philosophic basis so that 'conservators' shall not only be good practitioners, but scholars as well, knowing not only what they do, but why they do it, and prepared to discuss fundamental questions effectively with their opposite numbers in aesthetics, art history and so forth.

In a document written in preparation for a meeting at the Fogg Art Museum in November 1947, to discuss the creation of an institute for the conservation of cultural holdings, conservation was defined as follows:

Any action taken to the end of determining the nature or properties of materials in any kind of cultural heritage or in their housing, handling, or treatment. Any action taken to the end of understanding and controlling agencies of deterioration, and any action taken to the end of bettering the condition of such holdings.
I must pause at this point to say something about the full name of IIC. It is, as you know, The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, and this name was deliberately chosen to distinguish the type of conservation in which we are involved. In the 1940s, as now, 'International Institute for Conservation' could be mistaken for an organization involved in nature conservation. The International Institute for the Conservation of Objects of Art and Archaeology was chosen as the name in 1947, and changed to International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects in 1949. The present name was adopted in 1959, so that it was clear that the institute included objects outside museums, as well as the conservation of buildings and so on. The only reason that I go into this deviation about the name is that I will use the term 'conservation' as shorthand, but, unless I say otherwise, I mean the areas of conservation — that is, of historic and artistic works — that members of IIC are involved with.

Right from the start of IIC, the 'development of programs for the exchange and dissemination of technical and professional information' was regarded as a key activity. The first Newsletter appeared in May 1952, and the first edition of Studies in Conservation was published soon after. IIC Abstracts, the forerunner of AATA, started in the mid 1950s with Stephen Rees Jones, the father of our present Treasurer, as editor. In 1961 the first IIC conference was held in Rome with the subject of 'Recent Advances in Conservation'. Conferences have been held every two or three years since then and this one is the eighteenth, with a subject that deliberately follows the first conference: 'Tradition and Innovation: Advances in Conservation'. Other proposed activities were:

- specific projects of investigation in the field of conservation
- encouragement of training
- maintenance of standards in conservation
- provision of services, if required, for supervision or direct conduct of any activities of conservation

Significance

On the more philosophical side, what did conservation mean to those early members of our profession? One of the earliest conservation charters, the Athens Charter of 1931, defined the basic principles for preservation and restoration of ancient buildings. The Venice Charter, written in 1964, defines a framework implying maintenance on a permanent basis and proposes an appropriate and socially useful purpose for historic buildings [1]. It is particularly appropriate here in Australia to mention the 1979 Burra Charter [2]. In this document, Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance and may, according to circumstances, include preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation and will commonly be a combination of more than one of these.

Place means site, area, building or other work, group of buildings or other works together with pertinent contents and surroundings.

Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations.

At this point I want to make a short discussion to give one more quote from the Burra Charter, which is particularly relevant for the theme of our Congress this week: 'Traditional techniques and materials are preserved for the conservation of significant fabric. In some circumstances modern techniques and materials which offer substantial conservation benefits may be appropriate.' It will be interesting to hear how speakers view this recommendation.

Is it possible to have a definition of conservation that applies to all heritage, whether it be movable or immovable, natural or man-made? This issue is of great importance in the organization for which I work, since the National Trust is the custodian of a wide range of natural and cultural environments, including coast, countryside, woodlands, parks and gardens, as well as historic houses and the collections of artifacts that they house. The National Trust is the leading non-governmental environmental and conservation organization in the United Kingdom and we have sought to adopt a holistic approach to conservation. We have drawn extensively on the Burra Charter in developing our own conservation principles. These are that conservation seeks to secure the transfer of maximum significance from past to future for the benefit of all people everywhere, and that conservation involves managing change in the natural, built and cultural environment through negotiation. The writing of a statement of significance is the first step in developing a conservation plan, and involves wide consultation with many stakeholders, including communities who live in or use the environment under consideration.

In a recent speech, the British Prime Minister described the United Kingdom as a 'young country'. Apart from being symptomatic of a serious disregard for the relevance of heritage, about which I will say more later, this also shows a worrying disrespect for history. Great steps have been made in Australia with reconciliation with the indigenous people and we have witnessed a moving example of that today [in the opening speeches], as well as the symbolic gesture of inviting Cathy Freeman to light the flame at the opening ceremony for the Olympic Games three weeks ago. Statements of significance should be written in consultation with all members of the community and, in considering sacred places, religious artifacts and indigenous collections, the involvement of indigenous people has been crucial in reaching solutions for their conservation. In many cases this includes the return of objects formerly housed in museums.

It is interesting to look at our field of conservation and to realize how conservators in different disciplines have very different ideas about significance. This has an enormous and, I think, underestimated impact on how they carry out their work. Two closely related fields of conservation may have very different approaches, even in a single country. For example, easel and wall painting conservation. The significance of an easel painting is considered to be the artistic act of creation. In the UK, most easel paintings conservators believe that although later accretions, often the work of restorers, have historical value, they frequently obscure the primary aesthetic value. The later accretions are usually removed to recover as closely as is possible the original appearance of the painting when it left the artist's easel, allowing for the changes that time has wrought to the paint film and the surface layers. Conservators of mediaeval wall paintings have a more passive approach which concentrates on analysis and preservation of the current condition. This approach is often determined by resources and the very poor state in which we now find most
mediaeval paintings. Medical analogies are often used in conservation, and these different approaches can be compared – unkindly, I think – with wall paintings as patients receiving terminal care and easel paintings undergoing plastic surgery. This is a flippant comparison, but it draws attention to the difficulties that other professionals find in dealing with conservators. This apparent inconsistency of approach can confuse, for example, architects who are working with wall paintings and easel paintings conservators in a church or cathedral.

A parallel in architectural conservation would be between William Morris, who founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, with John Ruskin giving intellectual inspiration, and Victorian architects such as Sir George Gilbert Scott and, in France, Viollet-le-Duc. In his Seven Lamps of Architecture Ruskin wrote about historic buildings.

We have no right whatever to touch them. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all generations of mankind who are to follow us [3]

Contrast that to Viollet-le-Duc (who ‘completed’ Carcassone):

To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair or rebuild it, it is to reinstate it in a condition of completeness which could never have existed at any given time [4]

But it is not just differences of attitude, it is also cultural differences, that bring in another element which is to do with the use of the building. This issue was explored in the 1994 Nara Conference on authenticity with the aim, to quote the Chairman of ICOMOS Norway, Knut Larsen:

to move forward the international preservation doctrine from a Eurocentric approach to a post-modern position characterised by recognition of cultural relativism [5]

Authentication is not an easy concept, particularly as we should note that original and authentic materials are not necessarily the same. All original fabric is authentic but not all authentic material is original. In Japan it is recognized practice to reconstruct areas of damaged or deteriorated fabric, and sometimes whole buildings, using modern methods and materials, which in their opinion results in no loss of cultural significance.

These issues are not black and white, but I think that conservators need to have a very clear idea of the significance of an object before planning its conservation. We must accept that the significance of an object may change with time, depending on historical events and cultural attitudes. This sounds difficult, particularly if we are saying that what is regarded as significant now may not be so in 50 years time. The pragmatic way of dealing with this has been to exercise the precautionary principle by undertaking minimum intervention, making treatments reversible, and trying to preserve everything for who knows what will be regarded as significant in the future. However, this is not a realistic position, as we do not have enough resources and must be selective. We have not explored this avenue of thought sufficiently in the conservation of historic and artistic works and we should now consider whether we can adopt a charter such as the Burra Charter to guide our work, or whether we need to develop a new charter. If so, this charter should be designed to provide clear policy, principles, standards and guidelines for the profession.

Current state of conservation

The second part of my talk is to do with relevance and just how relevant is conservation now in the world. What is the current state of conservation?

David Grattan, the Chair of ICOM-CC, surveyed members in 1999 to provide an overview of the conservation profession. Although the response only represented a very small sample of those involved in artifact conservation, there were some interesting results. There has been some concern that conservation is in crisis, with an international net loss of conservation activity. The sample was too small to quantify this, but there is evidence for the balance shifting between conservators employed in institutions and those working in the private sector; in some countries there are fewer jobs, but in others there are more. The survey showed that professional accreditation is in its early days, with just under 50% of ICOM-CC members having professional recognition. The survey also asked about the level of training and found a fairly even distribution between self training, apprenticeship, and a number of levels of academic training.

At a meeting of 12 British conservators held at West Dean College in November 1998, the three outstanding issues facing the profession were agreed to be standards, training and accreditation [6]. The three are closely related, with professional standards being tested by accreditation, which is achieved by appropriate training.

In an article in an issue of the Getty Conservation Institute newsletter published at the turn of the millennium and intended as a portrait of the profession, Sharon Cather pointed out the links that need to be made between the profession and the educational establishments providing conservation training, to ensure competency:

The profession should be rigorous in defining the competencies required and in ensuring they are met [7]

We should also recognize that training must continue throughout a conservator’s career. We must ensure that continuing professional development is available for all conservators.

There are now a number of national schemes for professional accreditation. Many of these are reminiscent of the early days of the medical profession, and one only has to think of that august body, the Royal College of Surgeons of England, which started off as the Worshipful Company of Barber Surgeons, to realize the importance of developing a respected accreditation scheme. Think about the regard in which hairdressers are held nowadays, compared with surgeons! As we are at the early stages, we have the opportunity to develop these schemes on an international basis, recognizing the mobility of conservators. Organizations such as IIC, ICOM-CC and ICCROM should be key players. Let’s be surgeons rather than barbers?

Relevance

During this summer – in the northern hemisphere, that is – I was first of all amused and then concerned to read a quote from the British Minister for the Environment, Michael Meacher, who said at a meeting of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: ‘Don’t use words like conservation if you want to be taken seriously. It is too close to Conservatism.’ Conservation is very poorly understood by the population in general and, what is worse, by our political masters. In the UK, heritage is
not seen as an issue in which there are any votes and therefore it does not register on the political agenda. We need to increase our efforts to push conservation into people’s awareness and therefore onto the political agenda. We all sit quietly sitting in our ivory tower, or down our conservation silos, and not enter into the political arena. We need to become lobbyists and to further increase the public profile of conservation.

Many conservators are making considerable efforts to increase public awareness. At the ICOM-CC Triennial Meeting held in Lyon in 1999, a plenary session on increasing public involvement in conservation was held. Later this week we will see the presentation of the fourth IIC Keck Award. Many conservators have found interesting and original ways of interpreting conservation to the public. The last winner of the Keck Award, the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, have a permanent exhibition about conservation and invite visitors to meet conservators over a video link, as well as organizing studio tours.

As a more day-to-day activity, technical studies by conservators can contribute meaning and intent to objects, which, when well presented, deepens the public interest. An excellent example of this can be seen currently at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, where there is an exhibition called ‘Seeing Red: The Art and Science of Infra-Red Analysis’. Londoners could not fail to notice the cladding around the scaffolding during the conservation by English Heritage of Decimus Burton’s Wellington Arch topped with the bronze Quadriga and Angel of Peace during the summer of 1999, which confronted drivers at all four points of the compass with the 10-metre-high legend, ‘English Heritage — no one does more for England’s Heritage’. It was a fantastic bit of public relations.

I have just returned from our annual National Trust historic buildings conference, held in Devon, where we saw a summerhouse made of cob (a mixture of straw, mud and water) that had been built as a millennium project in the garden of a cob-and-thatch cottage that is open to the public, but still lived in, in the village of Broadclyst. We were invited to comment on its relevance and authenticity. Our conclusion was that initiatives like this keep historic buildings — in this case a very modest vernacular one — alive. They greatly increase public interest, particularly as the local community, including the village school, had played a large part in the making of the summerhouse. I believe that building new buildings — or, for that matter, making new objects — using traditional methods and materials is as much a conservation act as preserving old ones. The craft skills are kept alive.

Sustainability

One of the keys to the future, and not just for conservation, is sustainability. The Brundtland definition of sustainable development [8], which is ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, is reflected in the aim of the conservation of cultural heritage, which is to pass on maximum significance to future generations. There are three strands of sustainability which I want to explore. The first, about which I shall say little, since Helen Lloyd will discuss this in our paper [9], is the sustainability of tourism, or that old conservation conundrum of visitors destroying what they come to see. At the ICOM General Assembly held in Melbourne in 1998, the Conservation Committee looked at the question from the other direction in a session on ‘Tourism will not be sustained unless cultural heritage is maintained’. Many organizations are grappling with the dilemma of conservation and access.

The second, deeper question is whether the conservation of cultural heritage can ever be sustainable. Another definition of sustainability is to limit environmental impact by not using up non-renewable resources. Cultural significance is, in effect, a non-renewable resource. The role of conservation is to manage change. Preventive conservation measures slow down the rate of deterioration, but a point is reached at which so much change has occurred that the significance of an artifact is lost. The fading of dyes and the breaking of textile fibres in a tapestry exposed to light are examples of this. All that we can do is to debate what is an acceptable rate of change, but this must be a shared responsibility. Conservators must break out of their role as, among other things, the ‘light police’ and join multidisciplinary teams whose members are jointly responsible for conservation management.

The third aspect of conservation and sustainability is to evaluate the environmental impact of the actions of conservators. Many museums have moved away from energy- and material-intensive methods of control to more passive means of maintaining the environment. Several of the leading experts on passive climate control in the tropics work in Australia and will be presenting a paper this week [10]. Preventive conservation measures have been becoming more ‘green’ for many-years. The use of non-chemical methods of pest control and integrated pest management marks this sea-change.

We are much less advanced in considering the wider environment in remedial treatments. One of few prophets of this message is Tim Padfield. At the 1992 Dahlem conference, in a working group discussing appropriate strategies to evaluate change and to sustain cultural heritage, Tim spoke eloquently about the desirability of choosing physical conservation treatments in preference to chemical ones. In the words of the group report (written less eloquently by me):

Some members of our group felt that we should be sceptical about chemical treatments, because we are at quite a primitive stage in understanding such treatments and that physical methods of structural stabilisation should be preferred wherever possible. The issue was debated and there was some disagreement [11].

In other words, physical treatments are more likely to be reversible. I know of few people who have tried to come to terms with thermodynamics and conservation, but one of those who has is the Head of Conservation at the National Trust. In a paper presented at the 1997 conference on ‘Reversibility’ at the British Museum, Nigel Seeley demonstrated, using the laws of thermodynamics, ‘that no real process, whether natural or the result of human agency, is truly reversible, even in theory’ [12]. The reason for this is found in the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that the entropy of the universe tends towards a maximum (the First Law states that the amount of energy remains constant during transformation).

In the case of physical and chemical changes, it is helpful to think of entropy in terms of disorderliness or chaos. Chemical changes increase disorder more than physical changes, and atoms become more mixed up. Physical changes in the conservation process should be preferred, not only to enhance reversibility but also to reduce environmental impact. High energy use and a large increase in entropy are undesirable.
Many of us are finding in our working lives that we have moved from the care of individual objects to the care of collections, and from that to the care of the buildings that house them. Those who work, like I do, for organizations with a wide portfolio of responsibilities are also becoming involved in the care of sites and cultural landscapes. As we all become aware of the environmental problems that confront the planet, we also realize that our responsibilities must include the care of the wider environment. We would do well to adopt that old motto of the ecological movement: ‘think globally, act locally’.

Information technology

It is impossible to talk about a vision of conservation in the twenty-first century without considering the impact of IT. It was thought that virtual visits to museums and sites might reduce the pressure of increasing visitor numbers. In fact, the opportunities to increase public awareness through the internet are having the opposite effect, by generating enthusiasm to see the real thing! I was interested to read in the V&A Conservation Journal the proposal that:

When collaborative and Internet technologies develop in the future, the conservation of an object could be debated by remote conservators using video conferencing, and conservation techniques ‘tested’ on 3D rendered models before physical treatment [13]

This is not as farfetched as it sounds. As long ago as the 1982 IIC Congress in Washington DC, the possibilities of the virtual cleaning of paintings by digital image processing was being discussed. I doubt if any of us is capable of predicting developments in IT during the next 50 years. After all, who in the first days of IIC would have imagined the World Wide Web, with communications between conservators so greatly facilitated through e-mail and networks such as Conservation On-Line [14].

Electronic publishing is bound to increase, possibly to the extent that it will replace paper publishing. We have already seen the benefits of publishing preprint papers on the Internet for the ‘Preventive Conservation’ and ‘Textile Conservation’ working groups at ICOM-CC in Lyon in 1999. This made much more time for discussions between working group members at the meeting. The publication of newsletters works very well on the web, since it greatly cuts down production time and, among other things, allows job advertisements to reach their target audience in a shorter time. Conservation manuals with lists of manufacturers and suppliers can be kept up to date. I can imagine the time when users will have high-quality fast printers which will allow the downloading and printing out of journals such as Studies in Conservation, with access to a closed website allowed via a password issued with membership. Or paper may become redundant and be replaced by notepad computers with large enough memories to store books and the ability to maintain constant communication with the World Wide Web via inbuilt cell-phones.

IIC in 50 years time

So, to summarize, what are the issues that the conservation profession needs to confront in the first half of the twenty-first century? Some of them are the same as those that exercised our founders:

- providing efficient methods for the dissemination of information about conservation, taking advantage of new developments in IT
- maintaining professional standards, by developing an international accreditation scheme (or, as I put it, becoming surgeons rather than barbers)
- maintaining high standards of training, recognized internationally, which are designed to meet the criteria of the accreditation scheme

New challenges include:

- the need for a charter for the conservation of historic and artistic works
- increasing public and political awareness of conservation
- ensuring that all conservation actions are as sustainable as possible

Although it would take some repositioning of IIC, I believe that all of these represent an extension of the interests of our founders, and it would be entirely consistent with the aims and objectives of IIC if we were to take an international lead, along with the other principal conservation organizations, in developing a coherent framework for the conservation profession in the twenty-first century.

References

1 The ICOMOS website (www.icomos.org) is a useful source of reference for most of these charters.
3 John Ruskin, Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849); see also SPAB Manifesto (1877).