



THE KENNET & AVON CANAL TRUST

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Conservation Policy

In line with their duties under company and charity law, and in accordance with the guidance issued by the Charity Commission, the Trustees of The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust ('KACT') have adopted the following policy for Conservation. The policy applies to all KACT activities.

Introduction

The canal which the Trust restored, eventually reopening in 1990, is a valuable asset of substantial historical and cultural value. Its appeal today lies not only in the engineering achievement of its construction but also in the effects of the passage of time which have mellowed its many structures. When we repair, alter or conserve the buildings we own or lease, we should always bear in mind our responsibility to preserve the special qualities and patina, flora and fauna that have contributed to this atmosphere. This policy aims to provide guidance on how to approach this.

A Conservation Template for the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust

The historical basis for a suggested 'conservation template' is explained at Annex A, following broadly the tenets of William Morris's 1877 Manifesto, which for the Trust are:

1. Ensure we understand the history and significance before we start work.
2. Assess what is the *minimum* that needs to be done to return the object or building to a sound state.
3. When repairing or restoring, utilise the optimal conservation standards available, utilising well-documented research on reversible techniques.
4. Where erosion or decay have passed the point of viable retention, obtain the best match for the material, if necessary using salvaged materials suppliers.
5. Accept that deformation (lack of verticality, loss of right angles) may not in practice affect stability and if feasible to retain, may better reflect its history.
6. Where loss of a section is unavoidable and has not been well recorded, it is better to be clear that the replacement is new work (Morris recommended a date stone, to avoid confusing future historians).

7. Do not be tempted to add embellishments for which there is no evidence of previous existence.
8. Always aim to assist ageing materials to continue in their life in their original position using conservation techniques, rather than replacing them.

What this means in practice in our daily work

- A. Always consult others, including the Trust's own Heritage Trustee, before proposing work to an original part of the canal's fabric. Check whether any consents may be needed either from CRT or the Local Authority. See Annex B for the statutory basis for protection of historic structures.
- B. Ensure the item's background is understood before making suggestions for any repair or alteration work, including its function, history and materials.
- C. Aim to carry out repairs in such a way that they are, as far as possible, invisible but return the item to a sound structural state.
- D. Seek advice, if required, on the source of matching materials and whether the type of work is within the level of skill Trust volunteers can provide. If not, consult the Trust's Heritage Trustee on suitable local firms for the work.
- E. Remember that many materials currently in frequent use are damaging to historic fabric. For example Portland cement should never be used on any of the Trust's historic structures, where stonework or brickwork are to be repaired. Cement mortars are only suitable for constructing concrete block structures, or in rare cases, very dense engineering brick walls.
- F. Timber used on canal structures, other than oak used in lock gates, will generally have originally been a north American redwood, so repairing or replacing it should use a similar quality redwood to ensure long life.
- G. Similar requirements will apply to the sources of roofing materials, glazing, external render and rainwater goods: in general terms - if in doubt, ASK !

ANNEX A

The historical basis for a conservation approach

Background

Constructed in the last decades of the 18th Century and completed in 1810, the Kennet and Avon Canal is a truly 'Georgian' canal, something reflected in a number of its most notable engineering structures. As a freight transport route it would have initially appeared harsh and utilitarian, but the passage of time has endowed it with a quite different character. Signs of heavy wear, the patina of age and encroachment of



nature, have all endeared it to a new generation; qualities so well depicted in books such as Eric de Maré's 1950 'The Canals of England' (see left). Just as the Trust fought to preserve the canal in the 20th century, so it must ensure that this special character can endure into the future. The Trust acts as a guardian of an 87 mile 'heritage asset' and wildlife reserve. Many structures are already listed and both Crofton and Claverton Pumps are in addition noted for their contribution to industrial archaeology. Repairs to historic structures are rarely straightforward and some guidance is necessary in ensuring that they are carried out in a manner that preserves their defining character.

Why should we conserve our canal?

'Conservation' might be described as balancing the preservation of the structures and ecology making up the canal with the need to make thoughtful interventions from time to time to ensure they retain their vitality. These structures are scarce and if they are lost, they are lost for ever. Most are skillfully crafted in very durable materials which are often scarce or costly to replace. We should also remember that they embody energy and are usually inherently sustainable, using techniques that have evolved over centuries. Using local materials was a natural choice (minimising transport costs) which has by default ensured the canal's structures blend with their surroundings. We should respect this.

The bridges, locks, aqueducts, wharves and canalside buildings represent the endeavours of the people who created them, from John Rennie down to the army of 'navvies' who toiled to dig the channel. Not only are they a source of identity, but a tangible link between the past, present and future: they are an unique inheritance and being creative in our stewardship will ensure this legacy is passed on to future generations.

Evolution of an approach to conservation

An approach to building conservation is first well documented in the late 19th century with Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in France (Nôtre Dame, 1844) and George Gilbert Scott in England, recording restoring numerous churches from 1833-78. Both were criticised subsequently for destroying mediaeval work in order to add new portions in a ‘conjectural Gothic’ style, losing much of their historic character.

From the 1870s there was a sense of outrage, notably from William Morris (1834- 1896) who had long campaigned for respect for and revival of hand-made crafts. With other members of his Pre-Raphaelite group, he wrote his Manifesto in 1877, launching the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB).

The main tenets of this Manifesto might form an appropriate ‘template’ for the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust’s approach. Because our canals have taken on a character derived through the effects of time, they share much with our great cathedrals. Adapted for the Trust’s use, the principles might be set out as follows:

1. The conservation of a structure should begin by understanding it thoroughly; its history, purpose, materials, aesthetic qualities, use and condition. This is known as establishing its ‘significance’, which might appear purely in its fabric but may be manifest in its historical associations, design, use or setting. Our aim should be to ensure this ‘significance’ is passed on to future generations; minimising threats of deterioration, damage or thoughtless alteration.
2. Conservation should respect the environment, conserve resources, reduce waste and pollution and conserve energy in construction and maintenance. It should seek to use sustainable and renewable materials and care for local ecology, wildlife and habitats.
3. Although it may require careful intervention to prolong the life of a structure, it may instead require monitoring or “watchful inaction”. Often the need for repair will be unclear until sufficient time has passed since the discovery of an apparent problem.
4. Repairs should usually be carried out on a ‘like-for-like’ basis, with attention paid to the patina and character derived from its age. After all, it has been the mellowing and weathering of once harsh industrial structures on our waterways that has endeared them to a new generation of leisure users. Occasionally, different or innovative materials or techniques may be appropriate where a considered case has been put forward (steel long-life lock gates might be an example), but in general it is good practice to adopt proven rather than untested techniques, remembering that authenticity and aesthetics are important.
5. Heritage is a shared resource, so conservation work should be undertaken in consultation with those for whom a structure has a particular meaning and value; in our case this will often be the Canal & River Trust, as guardians of the canal.

It is worth bearing in mind that the Canal and River Trust has developed a similar set of

guidelines which can be found on its website under 'Caring for our heritage'. It has also appointed a Cultural Heritage Advisory Group made up of eight volunteer experts, from urban designers and architectural historians to academics, archaeologists and cultural heritage experts.

ANNEX B

The Legal Framework for Protection

1. Legal protection of ancient structures is surprisingly new. Although the Ancient Monuments Protection Act was passed in 1882, little changed until the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and even this was fairly 'toothless', with unprecedented destruction of historic buildings in the 1950s and 1960s. The reaction was the 1968 Planning Act and the 1967 Civic Amenities Act which introduced the concept of Conservation Areas (the absence of earlier legislation resulted in unlikely buildings, including our turf-sided locks, being designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments prior to 1967 !)
2. Since the 1950s Local Authorities have maintained lists of buildings of 'Architectural or Historical Interest'; so-called Listed Buildings. A small proportion is listed at Grade I (e.g Crofton), a larger number at Grade II*, and the majority at Grade II. Age and architectural quality are important but special historical associations are also taken into account (such as the dwelling of a distinguished author, scientist or composer).
3. The introduction of Conservation Areas in 1967 recognised the need to protect groups of buildings which create a special atmosphere, even if not individually listed (e.g a canal-side town like Shardlow on the Trent & Mersey Canal). More recently the idea of Non-designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs) has been used to prevent erosion of local character. Local Authorities produce Conservation Area Character Appraisals to help guide applicants on what constitutes local character.
4. Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) seek to set out the significance of a structure to identify its strengths, vulnerabilities and threats, and a framework for conservation into the future: many NLHF applications will require a CMP to have been written as a prerequisite for grant aid.
5. Today's principal legislation is The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was launched in 2012 to try to simplify earlier legislation and offer a more 'developer-friendly' atmosphere in planning. Revised in 2018, 2019 and 2021, a further revision is expected imminently. It introduced the concept of balancing degrees of 'harm' against the public benefits of development.
6. Local Authorities consult their Conservation Officers on Listed Building applications, and may further consult amenity bodies such as the Victorian Society or Georgian Group in the case of Grade I and Grade II* buildings, usually choosing the

amenity body appropriate for the age of the building.

7. As owners of listed buildings, the Trust needs to be aware that there are no 'outline Listed Building applications'; full detail has to be provided at the start and it is no longer possible to consult Conservation Officers informally to obtain an 'in principle' opinion. In order to obtain a view on the feasibility of an idea, a 'Pre-App Submission' needs to be made, accompanied by an appropriate fee, to provide some ability to assess whether a proposal is worth pursuing. Withdrawal of the Planning Policy Guidance notes further reduces access to guidelines, and Local Authorities' decision-making has become more dependent on Local Plan policies.

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