

Conference Session



An International Affair IfA Buildings Archaeology Group

Catherine Cavanagh

As buildings archaeology progresses in its methods and applications, so too does its world - wide appeal. Last year's Buildings Archaeology Group (BAG) newsletter included projects in Hong Kong, Afghanistan and Malawi. This year's conference session continued BAG's exploration of the global.

Papers covered a mix of policy and practice in Albania, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Portugal, yet common themes emerged and were expanded on in lively discussion sessions chaired by **Michael Rhodes**, who has experience of working in Hong Kong. Comparing practice in different countries, the result of different twentieth century regimes (from communism to dictatorship) shone a light on approaches in the UK.

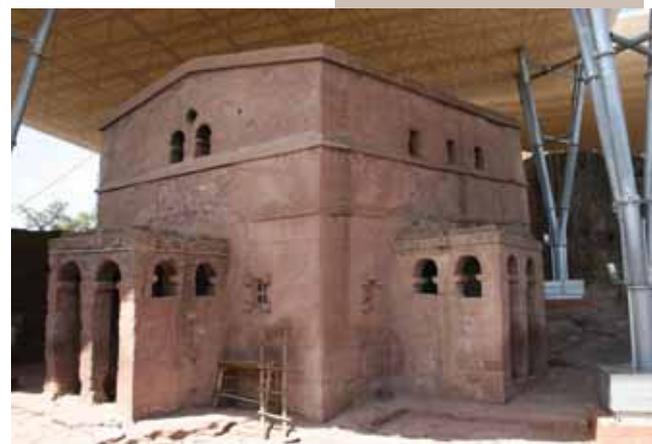
Policy and politics

World Heritage Sites (WHS) were the subject of four of the papers - Angkor, Brasilia, Butrint and Lalibela. However, UNESCO WHS status, for all its kudos, does not guarantee statutory protection in individual countries. Conservation work at Lalibela is funded by the World Bank and European Union, but the site has no effective management plan and coordination of permissions is tricky, as it effectively comes under the protection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church while permits for archaeological work are controlled by the Antiquities Authority.

Even in England and Wales, protection cannot be assumed; WHS are identified in the draft Heritage Bill, which is on hold, and are intended to be defined as Heritage Assets alongside the other designation categories. Since the conference, the government department for Communities and Local Government has published a Planning Circular on the *Protection of World Heritage in England*, accompanied by *Guidance for the Protection and Management of World Heritage Sites in England* from English Heritage.

But WHS inscription has the potential to influence local procedures. If the condition to have national legislation and a buffer zone in place is not met,

The church of Beta Maryam was conserved in the 1960s and has recently received protective roofing. It is part of the site of Lalibela, one of the most famous and most visited tourist attractions in sub-Saharan Africa, which has 11 rock-carved churches thought to date to the 13th century. © Niall Finneran



inscribed sites are immediately put on the danger list. Angkor, not rediscovered until the nineteenth century, became a WHS and was put on the WHS in Danger list at the same time; it took about twelve years for it to lose its danger status due to the civil war.

Brian Ayers noted that Albanian policy and practice are more closely intertwined than in the UK, although the system is more bureaucratic and relies on a high level of private funding. Fortunately, Butrint did not become the nuclear base that Khrushchev considered it suitable for when he visited, but perhaps we could learn from Albanian construction police who have the power to bulldoze illegal development?

Brazil is at the forefront of conservation but with three tiers of government that can list buildings, heritage legislation is complex. In fact, it even restricted Oscar Neimeyer, the centenarian architect of Brasilia, from altering his previous designs in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo. Advantages over the system in England for example, are that movable fittings and collections can be designated and that setting is a material consideration. Brazil was among the first countries to realise the value of their modernist heritage through designation. It also had clear listing criteria from the start, while England has only recently defined these.

International links

The presentations may have inspired holiday plans among the audience, but tourism is a threat as well as an opportunity for international links and funding.

buildings archaeology

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Buildings archaeology

Lília Basílio speaks in the Buildings Archaeology Group session. © Sarah Cole Photography

Lalibela now has an airport, reducing what was a three-day journey until the 1960s but increasing the impact of tourism. In Angkor, visitor numbers have grown from 40,000 to 2 million in 2008; yet this interest means that the WHS is jointly coordinated by France, Japan, and UNESCO. Cambodia's competent heritage authority, APSARA, is in part the result of multi-national technical and political collaboration.

Dick Moore's response to threatened bus shelters was a personal one: along with many visitors to rural Azerbaijan, he was entranced by the mosaic designs of the post-World War II bus shelters, but this was tempered by local negativity towards the outmoded iconography of the former Soviet Union. Despite the existence of a nationwide historic environment record, legislation is necessary to ensure this aspect of the country's past is not lost but, without local support, funding for protection or recording are unlikely. This highlights the issue of different cultural values, and possible conflicts between local and international heritage, political ideology and public art, drawing parallels with murals in Belfast and Sardinia. We ignore intangible values at our peril, and the priority in Butrint is to work with local communities and partners to ensure a sustainable future that embraces tourism.

Inspired by the Coimbra project, **Lília Basílio** and her colleagues have taught themselves to analyse buildings and are spreading the word. Dryas

Arqueologia, although a commercial company, has a strong improving ethos. It has created a database of materials used in construction, and provides training for colleagues in other organisations – our own Peter Hinton having been invited to speak at one of its conferences. It is fortunate that Dryas Arqueologia is taking the initiative as, despite five universities providing archaeology courses in Portugal, none do buildings archaeology nor are there any restoration-focused architectural courses.

Part of leaving a legacy is using local craftsmen, working with young archaeologists, and providing training. At Butrint, this process has come full circle with Albanians now training American archaeologists. The speakers agreed that working with students is useful and engenders reciprocal benefits. International teams are learning from one another's approaches to conservation in Angkor, and an Ethiopian research student in Winchester is training to be recognised as a church archaeologist. **Geraint Franklin** was fortunate to spend two months on secondment with the state heritage agency IPHAN, and in October 2009 he is leading a tour of Brazil for the Twentieth Century Society.

Conservation

Many of the risks to the historic environment were identified as natural, such as rising water levels or earth tremors in Butrint, and pervasive vegetation there and at Angkor. While in Azerbaijan, road improvements, changing ideology and neglect impact on street furniture. Designation and development control are key issues in Brazil and Portugal.

On-site conservation in Albania has been informed by targeted research and supported by developments in public policy, procedure and practice. The work has been undertaken against a backdrop of exceptionally rapid change in the country presenting considerable challenges.

What of the philosophy of conservation? Lalibela's churches were originally hidden, reached by underground passages, but the need to preserve them has changed their setting: they are now viewed as they were never designed to be, and the protective roof has a striking visual impact. In Angkor, conservation teams from different countries work alongside each other, as much as they can given the 400km² scale of the site; alongside Cambodian experts, countries as diverse as Japan, France, India, Poland, China, Germany, Italy and the USA are represented. **Alexandra Coxen** highlighted the





contrasting philosophical approaches of these countries, such as on whether to conserve, replace or re-carve statuary faking a damaged appearance. Despite different techniques and attitudes to conservation, collaboration has proved beneficial for the country and its conservation policies.

Buildings archaeology

In contrast to conservation, the role of archaeology is to record and understand, an approach which has been criticised as enabling the loss of assets that have been documented. At Coimbra and elsewhere, the developer can use recording to improve public attitudes towards demolition and Dryas capitalised on this, asking the council to sponsor information panels on the site, a short course and exhibition – perhaps we in the UK should be more ambitious?

When archaeological recording is unlikely to happen, for example of the bus shelters in Azerbaijan, what is the solution – guerrilla recording and posting images online? Previous study of Lalibela has been largely limited to the field of art and architectural history, heavily descriptive but with little thought to the analysis of the building techniques and construction history of the excavations themselves. **Niall Finneran** highlighted how buildings archaeology can add more detail to the story of this Ethiopian site.

Not only is analysis of buildings rare in Africa, in Portugal its inclusion in archaeological projects remains marginal, mainly restricted to a few academic teams and concentrated on ecclesiastical buildings – publication is rare. It has yet to pervade Portuguese contract archaeology, where 80% of archaeological work is developer-funded, and to some extent the same could be said of the UK.

The overall tenet of the session, across five continents, was a welcome to interdisciplinary and

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Decorated, reinforced concrete bus shelters are a distinctive and ubiquitous feature of roadsides throughout the countries of the former USSR. The themes of these mosaics in Azerbaijan reflect local folklore, customs or industries and often include soviet-era symbolism. © Dick Moore

collaborative working. It suggested a positive future for buildings archaeology but that more training and greater recognition of its importance is required.

This summary is based on my interpretation of the following papers and related discussion. Further details of the papers and our newsletters are available from the BAG pages of the IfA website.

Coimbra, Portugal *Lília Basílio, Dryas Arqueologia*
Butrint, Albania *Brian Ayers, The Butrint Foundation*
Lalibela, Ethiopia *Dr Niall Finneran, University of Winchester*
Azerbaijan *Dick Moore, Network Archaeology*
Angkor *Alexandra Coxen, English Heritage and ICOMOS Cambodia.*
Brazil *Geraint Franklin, English Heritage*

Catherine Cavanagh with a debt to those at the session
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Butrint is an Archaic Greek, Roman, Late Antique, Byzantine and Venetian site in southern Albania opposite Corfu. For the last 15 years, the Butrint Foundation has been working with Albanian colleagues and authorities to protect, conserve and present the site and its environs. © Butrint Foundation



Devon Manor Houses and Landscapes

Robert Waterhouse, of Devon Buildings Group, led a coach party of conference delegates, sharing his in-depth knowledge of south Devon’s many surviving historic buildings and beautiful landscape. En route, Robert commented on the historical development of the landscape from its earliest field systems and Iron Age hillforts, right through to the site of Slapton Sands which was used by the US military during World War II to practice for the Normandy invasions.

Our first stop was Dartmouth, one of England’s most important medieval seaports, where we visited the defensive site of Bayard’s Cove, a fort built in 1534 to command the estuary at its narrowest point. We were also treated to a tour of Dartmouth’s surviving sixteenth to seventeenth century merchants’ houses, including the Grade I listed Butterwalk, now part of Dartmouth Museum, with its highly decorative timber-framed arcade built in 1635-40 and a rare viewing of the highly ornate plasterwork with mystical Biblical scenes. Sadly we only had time to take in the exteriors of the many historic pubs like The Cherub (c1380) in Higher Street.

Robert’s knowledge and local contacts proved invaluable and we were kindly allowed privileged access to access Keynedon Barton, where he traced the development of the complex from a large fourteenth to seventeenth century courtyard mansion with a sixteenth century deer park and banqueting house to the present courtyard farm.

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Conference Tours

John Mullis and David Divers

Continuing the tradition of the last few conferences, IfA’s Buildings Archaeology Group organised tours with local experts.

Torre Abbey

Michael Rhodes, Head of Museum Services at Torbay Council, guided us around Torre Abbey. Founded in 1196, it is the largest surviving medieval monastery in Devon and Cornwall, and Torquay’s oldest building. The buildings have had many roles - as an abbey, a family home, art gallery, attraction and venue for the IfA conference drinks reception. Torre Abbey has recently undergone an extensive £6.5 million restoration over three years. In addition to the conservation and repair of the historic fabric, the building was reorganised to improve interpretation and circulation of visitors, who now enter through the medieval undercroft into a new reception area which reflects the arrangement of the cloisters. Other interventions include stairs and a lift in an unmistakably modern style which assists with the reading of the historic fabric. The works also included below-ground archaeology and post-excavation analysis following community programme excavations in the 1980s.

The new challenge for the Abbey is attracting visitors, as its discrete location, set back from the seafront and just outside the town centre, means it is off the beaten track of many visitors to Torbay. However, initiatives such as the hosting of Antony Gormley’s *Field for the British Isles* in the medieval barn (until August 23) should help attract new audiences. Michael left us with a positive message about the recession as it was the loss of his job during the early 1990s that was the catalyst for his move to Torbay and his involvement with the Abbey.

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A tour of the recently-restored Torre Abbey. Photo: David Divers

conference tours

One of Dartmouth’s many timber framed houses. Photo: Kirsten Collins

