

Studio B Architects

Welcome to Studio B's second newsletter.

For many people Australia's heritage buildings are an essential imprint of Western society's short time on this island nation. Compared to Europe, our heritage buildings are few and far between, and all the more precious for it. However, many heritage property owners consider them to be a liability and a brake on their core business. How can this be addressed?

Heritage in Context

In many cases the problems are inflexibility and under use. Solutions include:

- Adaptation to changing needs
- Redeployment to new uses
- Enabling multiple use
- Maintenance and restoration
- Unlocking usefulness by adding a new building
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Adaptation To Changing Needs

At the Heritage listed Moorland Railway Station on the Upfield line in Melbourne, the nearby timber structure footbridge dated from 1901 but had been altered and repaired over the years. The side panelling had become potentially unsafe and a decision was taken to replace the bridge. Owners of such infrastructure face new challenges today like deterring people from climbing along the outside of the bridge, vandalism and graffiti.



The replacement footbridge by Studio B at Moorland Railway Station will be a contemporary design based on diagonally braced girder principles.

The new bridge has been designed to address this issues with a contemporary piece of architecture that complements the State listed station buildings. The side balustrades follow the diagonally braced girder principle of the original bridge, but incorporate Corten and stainless steel.

Redeployment To New Uses

With society's ever present need to provide more housing for its citizens, many heritage buildings are being adapted to apartments. These have included warehouses, offices, industrial buildings, churches, agricultural buildings; in fact almost every building type imaginable. The most successful of these tend to be where the original building character is retained in the

conversion. Architectural skill is particularly important in order to understand and retain key features.

For instance, where a large open volume has been the essential character of the building such as a shearing shed, a church or a warehouse, any scheme to create apartments should maintain an element of this open volume. It is not simply a matter of retaining the outside appearance.

Enabling Multiple Use

Many European cathedrals no longer incorporate fixed pews but have installed flexible seating. This has enabled a wide variety of activities, all of them consistent with the local understanding of the life of the church, to take place within a beautiful heritage space. In addition to worship services with different seating configurations, these have included concerts, conferences, drama and dance productions, talks and debates in addition to the normal weddings, funerals, Mass and other Christian calendar events.

This might appear to be relatively straightforward, but many buildings do not have a level floor and significant refurbishment work is required. Whilst the floor is being rebuilt other upgrading should be considered including the heating system and the electrical/data cabling. It may be impossible to install these in other ways in the future.

There is significant cost in carrying out this and other adaptation work, but it is generally much less than constructing a new building to carry out all of these functions. The cost of this work needs to be seen in comparison to providing new premises for these additional activities.



Maintenance And Restoration

Most heritage buildings were constructed using labour-intensive craft skills, some of which are not as widely available now as they used to be. However they can be sourced and it is still true that, "a stitch in time saves 9".



Tell-tale signs of gutter problems above with preventative overflow pop below



Anecdotally 80% of serious building defects in the UK are caused by water damage resulting from inadequate maintenance. Whilst the figure may be lower here, it is still a major issue and every building should have a program for clearance of gutters from

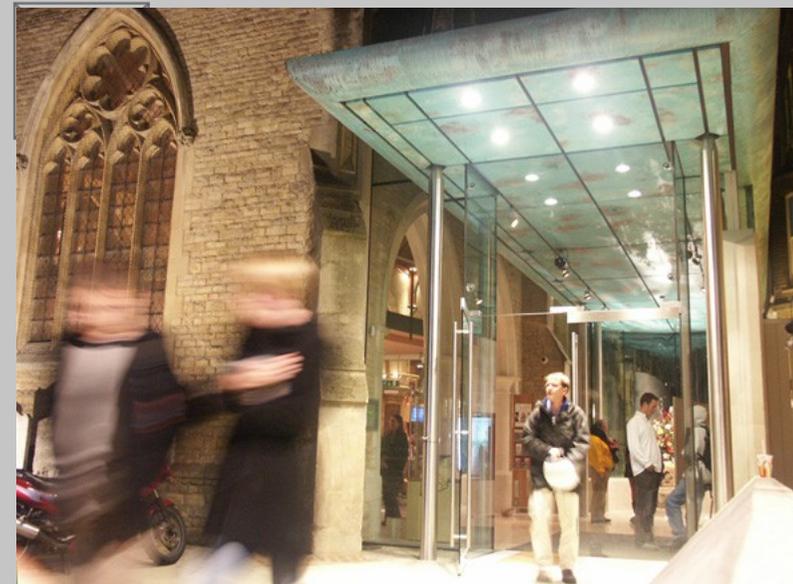
debris and leaves. "Out of sight and out of mind", is the problem with roof guttering and down pipes. Without regular inspection a problem is not detected until it has caused other problems to the building fabric. There are other steps that can be taken to reduce the risk.

All buildings need maintenance; heritage buildings are no different, they have just survived longer in most cases. Simply providing overflow "pops" that highlight a blockage elsewhere, will draw the attention to the need to clear it before it leads to more costly work. Guttering and downpipe capacity on some heritage buildings needs improvement.

Unlocking Usefulness By Adding A New Building

Creating a new Entry to St Aldates church in Oxford on the opposite corner of the building, opened up the building afresh to the main city street. The building has examples of several architectural periods and elements were discovered dating from 950AD.

The new entry building sits between the Gothic Revival gables and the late Victorian Neo-Classical coffee shop building. The roof identifies an obvious entry point for the church building and speaks of the contemporary relevance of the activities within.



New entrance building to inner-city church built with glass, copper and stainless steel, but new archways in the side wall of the original side chapel follow the arched profile of the adjacent arches to the chancel

Heritage buildings can be made into a valuable and useful asset for their owner. They require regular maintenance and occasional re-investment to make them serve the changing needs of contemporary society. This needs to be done sensitively, but the finished building can be very special indeed.

Next month: Christmas edition.

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