Protection of cultural heritage 24 (2025)
DOI: 10.35784/odk.7731

RENEGOTIATING THE ROLE OF THE EXPERT: THE FARO CONVENTION, HISTORIC CHURCHES AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN CONSERVATION

WALTER Nigel [1]

[1] Nigel Walter, Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, University of York
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1152-522X

ABSTRACT: The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention) was a significant development in conservation and heritage understanding. In 'recognising the need to put people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage' (Preamble), it questions the role of conventional heritage expertise. In effect, it suggests that this role should be renegotiated, for the benefit of both cultural heritage, and for society at large. Heritage professionals have yet to engage fully with the far-reaching implications of this.

Clearly there are very real dangers to both cultural heritage and society in ignoring heritage expertise; but what often goes unrecognised are the equal and opposite dangers of ignoring the interests of those communities that form around historic buildings and in turn are formed by them. Heritage expertise, typically clothed in the language of the 'scientific', is often deployed to make ownership claims over the heritage in question, and to oppose judicious change; yet, if anyone can be said to 'own' these buildings, it is the core community that still animates them.

This paper considers the relationship between experts and non-professionals through an examination of examples of English Parish churches that have undergone change. A concern for these churches, and the issues of ownership and preservation, were essential ingredients in the birth of modern conservation in the UK through William Morris's 1877 Manifesto for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. These buildings remain contested, yet the governance system for change provides opportunity for dialogue between heritage experts and stakeholders. Presenting some key examples of attempted change, this paper examines the permissions system for church buildings in England and the implications for the relationship between experts and communities.

KEY WORDS: Faro Convention, Ecclesiastical Exemption, Church of England, Faculty Jurisdiction

In its Preamble, the Faro Convention 'recognis[es] the need to put people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage...'[1] While for some this may appear to be a statement of the obvious, for others this is a revolutionary statement, with significant implications for heritage professionals who, arguably, are themselves accustomed to being at the centre of cultural heritage.

As heritage experts, we see ourselves as speaking on behalf of historic buildings, particularly when those buildings are faced with threats from hungry developers or indeed from governments prioritising infrastructure or community development over heritage. Often we are the building's only advocate, and the stories of buildings lost or indeed battles won are many. While that self-description may be true in places, it is also the case that we are not the only ones with a legitimate interest in these buildings; recognising the legitimacy of the views of non-professionals represents a cultural change with which heritage professionals still need to grapple.

This paper considers the relation between the innovations of the Faro Convention and the practice of conservation in the UK, with particular reference to the care of historic church buildings, and how change to them is dealt with.

1. Context: The Development of UK Conservation

Amongst comparable nations, the UK is characterised by having a relatively stable and secure culture of historic building care. It also has a large number of buildings under statutory protection – approximately 500,000 listed buildings overall, of which 373,000 are in England – but very little in the way of direct state support for these buildings.

From the outset, and prior to any legislative control, conservation in the UK has been characterised by the involvement of non-professional activists, from which a network of small, non-governmental organisations has developed, now collectively known as the amenity societies. The first of these was the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), which came into being in response to William Morris's clarion call in his manifesto published in 1877[2].

Morris helped form SPAB to counter what he saw as the destruction of medieval church buildings through their restoration at the hands of contemporary architects. Perhaps unsurprisingly for the time, Morris's manifesto shows scant regard for the worshipping community on whom the cost of repair of these buildings, and thus the responsibility for their survival, squarely rests. Rather than allowing the building to adjust to current needs (as these buildings have persistently done through their history), he suggests that:

> *…if [the building] has become inconvenient for its present use, to raise another building rather than alter or enlarge the old one; in fine to treat our ancient buildings as monuments of a bygone art, created by bygone manners, that modern art cannot meddle with without destroying*[3].

---

1 Council of Europe, 'Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society', 2005, https://rm.coe.int/1680083746.

2 Morris, W. (2018). *The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Manifesto*, https://www.spab.org.uk/about-us/spab-manifesto

3 Ibidem.

Of note here is the treatment of historic buildings as works of art, a theme which undergirds much nineteenth- and twentieth-century conservation thinking; it is foundational, for example, to Cesare Brandi's influential *Theory of Restoration*[4].

The novelist Thomas Hardy was another staunch supporter of SPAB. In his 1906 essay, 'Memories of Church Restoration', Hardy described church buildings as irreconcilably contested: 'To the incumbent the church is a workshop; to the antiquary it is a relic. To the parish it is a utility; to the outsider a luxury. How to unite these incompatibles?'[5] (In contemporary terms we could transpose these roles to 'priest/minister', 'expert', 'community' and 'tourist/visitor'.) A page later he reformulates Morris's prescription: 'If the ruinous church could be enclosed in a crystal palace [...] and a new church be built alongside for services [...] the method would be an ideal one'[6].

SPAB continues to play an active and valued role in British conservation; I would argue that it does this despite, rather than because of, its genealogy. The idea that it would be preferable to eject the local community from their parish church and to create a modern building alongside shows both a complete lack of regard for the views of that worshipping community, and a failure to grasp that it is only those historic buildings that remain in use that will survive in the long term. Indeed, it is precisely because the people of the parish have been able to change these buildings that they are so interesting and multi-layered, and that they have survived at all. The preservationist approach to conservation remains influential for some, but displays a complete indifference to the pivotal relationship between the community responsible for the historic building and the fabric of the building itself. The hardline preservationist approach can thus be destructive of the very heritage we all seek to conserve.

While SPAB started as a form of community activism, it has developed into an established (and rightly well-respected) voice of heritage expertise. There are now in total six national amenity societies with expert knowledge of historic buildings, and with the statutory right to comment on listed building consent applications, within both the secular and ecclesiastical systems. Of these six, four are concerned with specific eras: SPAB (to 1700), the Georgian Group (1700–1837), the Victorian Society (1837–1914), and the Twentieth Century Society (1914 onwards). The other two societies are Historic Buildings and Places, and the Council for British Archaeology. Then of course there is Historic England, the government's adviser on the historic environment, and an important consultee for more highly listed buildings. The conservation landscape thus contains multiple different expert voices; and these different bodies do not always see eye to eye.

The one form of expertise which goes conspicuously unacknowledged is the community expertise of the local congregation who (if they are doing their job) know the specific circumstances of their location better than any of the other voices. According to Laurajane Smith in her address to the 2024 ICOMOS General Assembly, the lack of recognition of this form of local expertise is inherent in the conventional material-focused understanding of heritage:

---

4 Brandi, C. (1963/2005). Theory of Restoration. In: Basile, G. (ed.), Rockwell, C. (trans.), *Theory of Restoration*. Firenze: Nardini Editore, pp. 43–170.

5 Hardy, T. (1906/1967). Memories of Church Restoration. In: Orel, H. (ed). *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings. Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences.* London and Melbourne: Macmillan, p. 204.

6 Ibidem. p. 205.

> *[The definition of heritage as] finite and non-renewable […] excludes both the links of heritage to the present and ultimately to people. In the emphasis on materiality people are forgotten or relegated to audiences of expert practice and interpretation*[7].

In stark contrast to Smith's description, in which the experts are the main protagonists and communities are reduced to the status of bystanders, the Faro Convention argues that communities should be brought from the periphery into a privileged position at the centre of conservation processes. The Convention does not at all argue for dispensing with expertise, but it does imply a radical rethinking of the purposes to which expertise is deployed.

2. Churches in UK Conservation

One unusual aspect of the British system is that consent for change to listed church buildings is dealt with under a separate system known as the Ecclesiastical Exemption. This term refers to an umbrella arrangement which allows specific denominations to develop and run their own systems of listed building control. The law in England requires that each system be as rigorous as the secular system, for example requiring the same consultation with Historic England and the six national amenity societies as the secular system requires.

Of these systems, by far the most developed is the Church of England's 'Faculty System'. Within the Church of England, there are some 16,000 church buildings. These divide roughly equally between the three grades of listing and unlisted buildings – there are 4,300 grade I, 4,300 grade II*, 3,700 grade II, and 3,400 unlisted. It is also the case that almost half of all grade I listed buildings in England are churches, indicating their profile and importance within the historic built environment.

Decision-making within this Faculty System happens at the level of each of the 41 dioceses, each of which must appoint a Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) of experts. This DAC advises the diocesan Chancellor, who is a senior lawyer or judge expert in ecclesiastical law and who decides the application. The legislation governing the system is the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction & Care of Churches Measure 2018, the equivalent of an Act of Parliament. This Measure sets out a 'General duty to have regard to church's purpose':

> *A person carrying out functions of care and conservation under this Measure [...] must have due regard to the role of a church as a local centre of worship and mission*[8].

It is notable that the legislation thus requires heritage experts to have regard to concerns that lie outside any conventional conservation remit, that is, pastoral and theological questions of how the church building and community function in terms of worship and mission. While in

---

[7] Smith, L. (2024). The Venice Charter at Sixty: Old and New Challenges. In: ICOMOS 2024 Scientific Symposium, Ouro Preto, Brazil, 2024. *Revisiting the Venice Charter: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, pp. 1–15, https://www.academia.edu/126326145/The_Venice_Charter_at_Sixty_Old_and_new_challenges.

[8] General Synod of the Church of England (2018). *Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018*. Pub. L. No. 3, para. 35, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2018/3/pdfs/ukcm_20180003_en.pdf

practice this duty is often ignored, it nevertheless provides a powerful indication that the system puts people and human values at the centre of a rich and nuanced concept of cultural heritage. In this way it can be argued that the Faculty System aligns closely with the priorities of the Faro Convention Preamble, as quoted in the introduction above.

Fig. 1. St Alkmund, Duffield, 2019; the screen to the left was moved from the chancel arch on the right. Photo: author

Part of the beauty of the Faculty System for researchers is that decisions in more contested cases are recorded in legal judgments, which are freely available online[9]. Of particular note is the 2012 appeal judgment in the case of the medieval church of St Alkmund, Duffield, in Derbyshire, which concerned the moving (for liturgical reasons) of a nineteenth-century carved screen from the chancel arch to an adjacent arch within the church (Fig. 1). Having initially been refused, permission was granted in this appeal judgment, which also set out an explicit process for chancellors to follow, in the form of a set of five questions. The final step in this process involves the chancellor asking whether 'any resulting public benefit [would] outweigh the harm' to the architectural and historical significance[10]. The judgment goes on to clarify that the term 'public benefit' explicitly includes

[9] Ecclesiastical Law Association, 'Judgments Index', accessed 9 May 2025, https://www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/index.php/judgements/judgments-a-z.

[10] Court of Arches (2012). *Re St Alkmund Duffield [2012] Fam 158*, para. 87, www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/judgments/reordering/duffieldstalkmund2012appeal.pdf.

> *liturgical freedom, pastoral well-being, opportunities for mission, and putting the church to viable uses that are consistent with its role as a place of worship and mission*[11].

Once again, 'people and human values' are given a central role in the Faculty System, suggesting a profound consonance between the Faculty System and the Faro Convention.

3. Alternative Views of Heritage

Churches that remain open are examples of 'living buildings' – that is, buildings that are still in use, particularly for the purposes for which they were first created. Historic England's sectoral guidance *New Work in Historic Places of Worship* opens with the following:

> *[Historic England] believes that this country's historic places of worship should retain their role as living buildings at the heart of their communities. We want to help congregations accommodate changes that are needed to achieve this, in ways which will sustain and enhance the special qualities of their buildings*[12].

The idea of some buildings being 'living' is not new. Louis Cloquet proposed the division of monuments into living and dead in the nineteenth century, and this idea features in the recommendations of the 1904 Madrid International Congress of Architects[13]; Canon Raymond Lemaire (uncle to Raymond M Lemaire, one of the principal authors of the Venice Charter) accepted a similar division[14]. But this distinction was explicitly excluded from the Venice Charter as 'no longer relevant'[15], and the idea went underground until its more recent revival, particularly in the work of ICCROM[16].

English parish churches can be described as living buildings in at least two interrelated ways: first, because their continuity of use has resulted in multiple episodes of change, such that change is in their nature; and, second, because fundamental to their continued use is a community of users (Ioannis Poulios refers to this as the 'core community')[17] which continues to animate it and who are essential to its life. It has long been recognised in the UK that it is simply not financially feasible for the state to take responsibility for the care of all but a tiny fraction of

---

11 Ibidem, para. 87.

12 Historic England (2012). *New Work in Historic Places of Worship*, 2nd ed. London: English Heritage, . http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/places-of-worship-2012.pdf.

13 Locke, W. J. (1904). Recommendations of the Madrid Conference. *The Architectural Journal, Being the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects XI*, pp. 343–346.

14 Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A History of Architectural Conservation.* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, p. 250.

15 Jokilehto, J. (1998). The Context of the Venice Charter (1964). *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 2(4), p. 230, https://doi.org/10.1179/135050398793138762

16 Stovel, H., Stanley-Price, N. & Killick, R. G. (eds.). (2005). *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage : Papers from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage: Conserving the Sacred,* ICCROM Conservation Studies 3. Rome: ICCROM; Wijesuriya, G. (2018). Living Heritage. In: *Sharing Conservation Decisions*, Heritage, A., Copithorne, J. (eds.). Rome: ICCROM, pp. 43–56, https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/sharing_conservation_decisions_2018_web.pdf

17 Poulios, I. (2014). *The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece*. London: Ubiquity Press, p. 116. https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/33207

the built heritage. But alongside the financial argument, there is also a heritage argument that communities are an integral part of the heritage that we as heritage professionals are seeking to conserve, as the Historic England quote above suggests. The heritage therefore lies not solely in the historic building in question, nor indeed solely in the community which animates it, but in the amalgam or nexus – literally, the binding together – of building and community. Unless the centrality of that relationship is properly understood by heritage professionals, their well-meaning interventions may do more harm than good.

The Faro Convention speaks of the promotion of 'cultural heritage protection as a central factor in the mutually supporting objectives of sustainable development, cultural diversity and contemporary creativity' (Article 4e). Whereas previous doctrinal documents tended to frame the value of historic building conservation as intrinsically worthwhile, this article defines its purpose *extrinsically*, within a broader set of three societal objectives. This is a radical shift with very significant consequences. To take one of these objectives as an example, very few heritage professionals or theoreticians would see conservation in terms of contemporary creativity. Experts might discern a form of creativity in the choice of an appropriate conservation treatment when faced with a given historic building defect, but that is a very limited form of creativity focused on the interests of experts rather than those of society, and not what is envisaged here. At issue are two contrasting understandings of cultural heritage. One sees cultural heritage as an inert collection of 'heritage assets' to be preserved in perpetuity; the other sees it as an unfolding story of creativity, marked by continuity between generations.

Fig. 2. St Mary's, Ely, before reordering, 2021. Photo: author

The parish church of St Mary's, Ely offers one example of contemporary change achieved through the Faculty System. The church contains fabric from the thirteenth century, and every century since. In the twentieth century, halls were built to the south to accommodate community activities, but otherwise the church itself remained largely as the nineteenth century had left it – fully pewed, and with a single pattern of use with all seats facing east (Fig. 2). The project involved the removal of much of the Victorian furniture, including the raised pew bases, and the installation of a new limecrete floor with stone finish and underfloor heating, powered by air source heat pumps. The result is the reassertion of a flexible space that is now used for flexible liturgical arrangements (Fig. 3), and for everything from business meetings to parents and toddlers groups. The building has gone from being used just one day a week to being used seven days a week, an excellent outcome for the long-term survival of this historic building of exceptional interest.

Fig. 3. St Mary's, Ely, after reordering, 2023; communion was celebrated 'in the round'. Photo: Archangel Architects

Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, expertise can all too easily have the effect of excluding non-expert voices. As John Schofield suggests,

> *stakeholders other than authoritative, elected or appointed heritage experts often feel unconfident or unqualified to articulate views on the heritage they value, perhaps because they are not familiar with the professional language of heritage, or are wary of expressing personally held views in the context of rational or 'scientific' enquiry*[18].

[18] Schofield, A. J. (2014). Heritage Expertise and the Everyday : Citizens and Authority in the Twenty-First Century. In: *Who Needs Experts? : Counter-Mapping Cultural Heritage,* Schofield, A. J. (ed.). Farnham: Ashgate, p. 1.

In principle, the Faculty System makes space for these non-expert voices, and accords them due respect. This is very much evident in the Duffield Court of Arches judgment, both in the quoted interventions of parishioners, and more explicitly in this instruction to chancellors:

> *In so far as it may, the consistory court must strive in the exercise of its faculty jurisdiction to ensure that any decision it makes permits the proper reflection of the doctrinal beliefs of the priest and congregation*[19].

Elsewhere, I have discussed the marked contrast between the language used in this important case by the experts opposing the scheme and the non-expert applicants[20]. While the comments from the expert opponents are characterised by an assumed authority and the use of dramatic language to accentuate the perceived threat to the historic building from the proposals, the non-experts are far more tentative, measured, and balanced. This contrast of language demonstrates a conspicuous asymmetry between expert and community voices, but it is impressive how both have been closely attended to in the judgment.

Notwithstanding the care taken in the Duffield appeal, simply because of the legalised nature of the system, church communities often report finding the permissions process too difficult. Because it is church communities which themselves instigate change, this can present a significant barrier, particularly for smaller and more rural church communities who may lack professional experience and confidence among its members. My doctoral research involved qualitative interviews with representatives of five medieval church buildings who had attempted change, whether successfully or not[21]. One of the key findings was the correlation between success in delivering change to historic buildings with those church communities that included professional experience amongst their members. Interestingly, it wasn't heritage experience that was decisive, but rather it seemed to be that having professional skills of any kind enabled churches to engage with what is a highly professionalised permissions system.

Nevertheless, the Faculty System stands out for its ability to allow voices from the community to be given equal weight alongside those of the experts. In this, it is profoundly dialogical, and suggests that the Faculty System is far more closely aligned with the Faro Convention than is conservation as a whole.

4. Views Of Public Benefit

The 'House of Good' report produced by The National Churches Trust[22], a grant-giving charity which also campaigns for the church sector, offers another, complementary view of public

---

19 Court of Arches (2012). *Re St Alkmund Duffield [2012] Fam 158*. www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/judgments/reordering/duffieldstalkmund2012appeal.pdf

20 Walter, N. (2020). Case Study: St Alkmund, Duffield, and the Ecclesiastical Exemption. In: *Narrative Theory in Conservation: Change and Living Buildings.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, p. 121.

21 Walter, W. (2017). *To Live Is to Change: Tradition, Narrative and Community in the Conservation of Church Buildings.* PhD, University of York.

22 National Churches Trust (2025). *The House of Good - the Value of Churches to the UK Economy.* The House of Good. https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/

benefit. This research aimed to establish the social and economic value of church buildings for society across the UK. Adopting government methodology set out in the Treasury Green Book, a range of financial values were attributed. These included the direct economic value created by running, staffing and hiring out church buildings and the replacement cost of the services provided through them. However, these values were dwarfed by the well-being value of volunteering, church attendance and particularly of the social and community good created through church buildings. This last category looked at just four forms of activity either directly run or hosted by church communities through their buildings – youth groups, drug and alcohol support, mental health support and food banks. Taking all these factors together, the total value that churches contribute to the UK each year is estimated at £55 billion; that extraordinary figure equates to approximately 5% of overall government expenditure and is twice the amount spent on adult social care.

Clearly, research such as this cannot hope to give a complete picture of the value of church buildings, historic or otherwise. But it does not need to; it offers a compelling insight into the public benefit that churches deliver. And it represents a form of value that goes completely unrecognised within conventional heritage processes and discourse. It is only because of a document such as the Faro Convention, with its emphasis on the value of heritage for society, that the relevance and impact of such research for this form of heritage can be recognised.

Research such as the 'House of Good' provides a more complete and well-rounded understanding of the value of heritage (in this case church heritage) to society than heritage protection can access through its normal processes. Because it pays attention to the people, this research sees value where conventional heritage processes do not, and thus provides the perfect illustration of the concerns of the Faro Convention. But this suggests a broader question with far-reaching implications: could it be that conventional heritage discourse, with its typically inward focus on the concerns of heritage professionals, is utterly inadequate in its assessment of the importance of built heritage? The very possibility of that question demonstrates the urgent need for heritage professionals to engage with the broader concerns and priorities of the culture if we are to avoid losing what remains of our credibility and influence, not least since research such as the 'House of Good' speaks to the government's priorities, and in its language.

5. Implications

For those holding to conceptions of conservation rooted in the nineteenth-century preservationist understanding, the Faro Convention is a radical document, and one that threatens to undermine much that is held dear. However, for those less indebted to modern conservation's roots in modernity, the Convention is very much compatible with an understanding of conservation as central to the continuation of a centuries-long cultural production that need not have stopped, and that historic buildings can therefore legitimately be the site of *contemporary* cultural production and creativity. This is not such a radical idea – it only appears radical if we have forgotten how a medieval parish church, for example, was first created and has subsequently changed, with successive generations changing the building to suit current needs within the confines of an ongoing and intergenerational tradition. But accepting this idea would require

conservation to set aside its thoroughly modern understanding of time and of its own purpose and to engage with an earlier understanding, one in the context of which these buildings were first created and subsequently altered.

How historic buildings can change without destroying their significance is a key question, and one that I have attempted to answer through what I term the narrative approach to conservation[23]. This sees historic buildings as objects of a living tradition, that are best cared for and allowed to develop through an active and ongoing engagement with that living tradition. Specifically, it sees any attempt to weaken the link between the local community and their historic building as fundamentally destructive of heritage, for it is within that link between people and place that heritage lies. It is precisely in the nurturing of that bond between people and place that the role of the heritage professional should be focused. In that context, heritage professionals should respect the expertise of the local community, giving it at least equal weight within the dialogue over how to care for and change these buildings. For it is the health of that relationship between people and place, between the community and their building, that provides the best indicator of whether that building will survive in the long term.

The framing of public benefit is something of a litmus test; the attitude of many expert bodies consulted within the system is grudging acknowledgement at best. Public benefit is almost universally treated as something entirely outside of the heritage considerations, which are tightly drawn around conventional conservation concerns of authenticity and integrity. The idea that the significance of a historic building is dynamic and located in the nexus between people and place seems entirely foreign. Yet the logic of the Faro Convention is that these public benefits are not an afterthought but should be integral to the assessment of significance, demanding that significance itself is understood to be dynamic and generative in nature, rather than merely subtractive[24]. If that is accepted, then change need not inevitably be destructive of heritage value, but can be seen to be generative of new meanings, *enhancing* the significance of the heritage in question.

Clearly there are very real dangers in ignoring heritage expertise. And it is important to stress that the Convention does not call for the abandonment of conventional heritage expertise. For example, Article 9 is highly supportive of the role of heritage professionals, and there are several mentions of the importance of respecting 'the integrity of cultural heritage without compromising its inherent values' (Article 10c).

But what heritage experts often fail to appreciate is that there is an equal and opposite danger in ignoring the interests of those communities that form around historic buildings and in turn are formed by them. Again, this comes back to our understanding of the role and nature of

---

[23] Walter, N. (2020). *Narrative Theory in Conservation: Change and Living Buildings*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge; Walter, N. (2020). The Narrative Approach to Living Heritage. *Protection of Cultural Heritage* 10, pp. 126–38. https://doi.org/10.35784/odk.2443

[24] I make this distinction between subtractive and generative forms of significance in Walter, N. (2024). Narrative and the Legitimacy of Change to Historic Buildings. In *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Architectural Reconstruction*, Z. Somhegyi, L. Giombini (Eds.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003334200-11.

heritage. If built heritage is fundamentally a collection of art historical objects, then our task as heritage professionals is correctly defined as preservation, the minimisation of change; or, as the Preamble to the Venice Charter has it, 'It is our duty to hand [these buildings] on in the full richness of their authenticity'[25]. But if heritage is indeed located in the nexus between people and place, then a material-focused conservation that excludes the legitimate input of committed communities will destroy heritage. If we are to learn anything from the Faro Convention, it is the recognition that building owners and users can be experts in their own right, and that that expertise should undergird the conservation process as a whole.

What, then, of the wider implications of the Faro Convention for conservation? It is one thing to agree that all parties with an interest in the historic environment have expertise to offer, specifically including groups outside of conventional heritage roles. It is quite another thing to determine how these competing views should be prioritised, and which should prove decisive in conservation decision-making. The significant contribution of the UK's Ecclesiastical Exemption to this discussion is the respect it accords to the community view, and the community's explicit inclusion within the process of dialogue. The ultimate test within that system is the balancing of harm to the architectural and historical significance of a given church building against the public benefits of the proposed change.

6. Conclusion

The Faro Convention is challenging to conventional conservation precisely because it redefines the nature of heritage. Four years after its launch, Robert Palmer, Director of Culture at the Council of Europe, wrote the following:

> *Heritage is not simply about the past; it is vitally about the present and future. A heritage that is disjoined from ongoing life has limited value. Heritage involves continual creation and transformation. We can make heritage by adding new ideas to old ideas. Heritage is never merely something to be conserved or protected, but rather to be modified and enhanced. Heritage atrophies in the absence of public involvement and public support. This is why heritage processes must move beyond the preoccupations of the experts...*[26]

This insistence that to have value, heritage must be thoroughly engaged with ongoing life speaks powerfully to the definition argued for in this paper of heritage as the nexus of people and place. Palmer argues for a present and future orientation for heritage which implies change and enhancement, and that heritage processes must reflect a broader range of interests than are represented by the experts. It has been argued in this paper that the Ecclesiastical Exemption in the UK shares a similar understanding of heritage, and the central role communities should play in heritage processes.

---

[25] ICOMOS (1964). *International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*. Paris: ICOMOS.

[26] Palmer, R. (2009). Preface. In: *Heritage and Beyond*, by Council of Europe (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, p. 8.

The Faro Convention's call for 'greater synergy of competencies among all the public, institutional and private actors concerned'[27] can easily be read as a call for the education of the non-professional public. There is certainly the need for more education, but that, perhaps, is the easy part. More challenging by far for heritage professionals, and equally present in Article 1, is the requirement for a transformation in the self-understanding of what it means to be a heritage professional and the underlying purposes of our work. As professionals we should welcome such a reimagining; we owe it to the heritage, and to ourselves.

Acknowledgements

This paper was presented at the TheoPhilos conference on 'Dialogue between Conservation Experts and Other Stakeholders in Built Heritage Protection –20th Anniversary of The Faro Convention' in Florence (Italy), on March 13, 2025. My thanks to colleagues for their constructive comments. All photos by the author, except where noted.

The author's architectural practice, Archangel Architects, was responsible for the alterations to St Mary's, Ely.

The author is a trustee of the National Churches Trust.

[27] Council of Europe (2005). *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, art. 1. https://rm.coe.int/1680083746

Bibliography

Brandi, C. (1963/2005). Theory of Restoration, In: Basile, G. (ed.), Rockwell, C. (trans.), *Theory of Restoration*. Firenze: Nardini Editore, pp. 43–170.

Council of Europe (2005). *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*. https://rm.coe.int/1680083746

Court of Arches (2012). *Re St Alkmund Duffield [2012] Fam 158*. www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/judgments/reordering/duffieldstalkmund2012appeal.pdf

Ecclesiastical Law Association (2025). *Judgments Index*. Accessed 9 May 2025. https://www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/index.php/judgements/judgments-a-z

General Synod of the Church of England (2018). *Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018*. Pub. L. No. 3, para. 35, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2018/3/pdfs/ukcm_20180003_en.pdf

Hardy, T. (1906/1967). Memories of Church Restoration. In: Orel, H. (ed). *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings. Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences*. London and Melbourne: Macmillan.

Historic England (2012). *New Work in Historic Places of Worship*, 2nd ed. London: English Heritage, . http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/places-of-worship-2012.pdf

ICOMOS (1964). *International Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*. Paris: ICOMOS.

Jokilehto, J. (1999). *A History of Architectural Conservation*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Jokilehto, J. (1998). The Context of the Venice Charter (1964). *Conservtion and Management of Archaeological Sites* 2(4). https://doi.org/10.1179/135050398793138762

Locke, W. J. (1904). Recommendations of the Madrid Conference. *The Architectural Journal, Being the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects XI*, pp. 343–346.

Morris, W. (2018). *The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Manifesto*, https://www.spab.org.uk/about-us/spab-manifesto

National Churches Trust (2025). *The House of Good - the Value of Churches to the UK Economy.* The House of Good. https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/

Palmer, R. (2009). Preface. In: *Heritage and Beyond*, by Council of Europe. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Poulios, I. (2014). *The Past in the Present: A Living Heritage Approach - Meteora, Greece*. London: Ubiquity Press. https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/33207

Schofield, A. J. (2014). Heritage Expertise and the Everyday : Citizens and Authority in the Twenty-First Century. In: *Who Needs Experts? : Counter-Mapping Cultural Heritage,* Schofield, A. J. (ed.). Farnham: Ashgate.

Smith, L. (2024). The Venice Charter at Sixty: Old and New Challenges. In: ICOMOS 2024 Scientific Symposium, Ouro Preto, Brazil, 2024. *Revisiting the Venice Charter: Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, pp. 1–15, https://www.academia.edu/126326145/The_Venice_Charter_at_Sixty_Old_and_new_challenges

Stovel, H., Stanley-Price, N. & Killick, R. G. (eds.). (2005). *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage : Papers from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage: Conserving the Sacred,* ICCROM Conservation Studies 3. Rome: ICCROM.

Walter, W. (2017). *To Live Is to Change: Tradition, Narrative and Community in the Conservation of Church Buildings.* PhD, University of York.

Walter, N. (2020). Case Study: St Alkmund, Duffield, and the Ecclesiastical Exemption. In: *Narrative Theory in Conservation: Change and Living Buildings.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Walter, N. (2020). *Narrative Theory in Conservation: Change and Living Buildings.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Walter, N. (2020). The Narrative Approach to Living Heritage. *Protection of Cultural Heritage* 10, pp. 126–38. https://doi.org/10.35784/odk.2443

Walter, N. (2024). Narrative and the Legitimacy of Change to Historic Buildings. In *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Architectural Reconstruction*, Z. Somhegyi, L. Giombini (Eds.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003334200-11

Wijesuriya, G. (2018). Living Heritage. In: *Sharing Conservation Decisions*, Heritage, A., Copithorne, J. (eds.). Rome: ICCROM, pp. 43–56, https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/sharing_conservation_decisions_2018_web.pdf