

## Building Bridges Seminar

The proper performance and authenticity of old buildings of traditional construction are threatened on many fronts. This threat to their structure is also a threat to our traditional town and landscapes.

Old buildings need to breathe, or else they fail. The cultural value of an old building rests upon the retention of the maximum of historic fabric and authenticity compatible with structural integrity and public safety.

Inappropriate skill-sets, whether from craftsmen or professionals; many of the building regulations designed for new buildings, and around the assumptions of modern building technology; inappropriate and damaging materials conspire with ignorance and ill-considered laws to threaten the long-term survival of much of the cultural heritage about us.

The majority of professionals and tradesmen working in the building industry have little training or appropriate experience in dealing with traditional, as opposed to modern, buildings; local authority planners are often more concerned about appearance than performance and as little aware of the needs of old buildings to perform as their builders intended as the vast majority of professionals and craftsmen with whom they liaise to make decisions that will effect the health and survival of these buildings.

Populist government initiatives to counter the threat of global warming, such as HIPS and, now, a commitment to insulate 7 million existing homes, mean that the performance and historic fabric of old buildings will be compromised at the very least and destroyed at worst. Few will use breathable insulation materials.

For too many engineers, 7,000 years of building practice and experience means nothing if a component's performance cannot be measured or calculated on a table, so that perfectly sound materials are removed in favour of modern, 'provable' materials such as concrete or steel which will not in all likelihood last as long as the traditional materials they replace.