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Conservation of cultural property - Main general terms and definitions

I.S. EN 15898:2011

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English Version

Conservation of cultural property - Main general terms and definitions

Conservation des biens culturels - Principaux termes
généraux

Erhaltung des kulturellen Erbes - Allgemeine Begriffe

This European Standard was approved by CEN on 20 August 2011.

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Contents	Page
Foreword.....	3
Introduction	4
1 Scope	7
2 Normative references	7
3 Terms and definitions	7
3.1 Cultural heritage terms	7
3.2 Condition terms	8
3.3 Conservation terms	10
3.4 Preventive conservation terms	11
3.5 Remedial conservation and restoration terms	12
3.6 Planning and documentation terms.....	14
Bibliography	16
Index (English)	21
Index (French)	22
Index (German).....	23

Foreword

This document (EN 15898:2011) has been prepared by Technical Committee CEN/TC 346 “Conservation of cultural property”, the secretariat of which is held by UNI.

This European Standard shall be given the status of a national standard, either by publication of an identical text or by endorsement, at the latest by April 2012, and conflicting national standards shall be withdrawn at the latest by April 2012.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. CEN [and/or CENELEC] shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

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Introduction

General Observations

This standard is part of a series of standards being developed by CEN/TC 346. It provides terms and their definitions for a set of general concepts which are widely used by those working in the field of conservation of tangible cultural heritage. Its purpose is to bring greater understanding and encourage collaboration amongst those who have responsibility for or an interest in cultural heritage. The need for such agreement and clarification in the use of conservation words - to avoid confusion, to ensure that what one person means by a word corresponds with what another person understands - has become increasingly recognised in recent years ¹⁾. The definition of the terms here will also help to ensure consistent use of words and concepts within the other CEN/TC 346 conservation standards which define only those terms specific to each individual standard.

The focus of all the CEN/TC 346 standards is on the tangible cultural heritage. However, every cultural thing has intangible aspects. Conservation of the tangible, when properly carried out, respects the intangible.

The tangible cultural heritage comprises both immovable items (e.g. buildings, structures) and movable items (e.g. archival documents, works of art) ²⁾. Those working in these two broad areas have tended to use some conservation words in subtly different ways, and to use words in one field which are not used in the other. This attempt to unify terminology may require occasional compromise. This is a reflection of current usage with the possibility that not every definition will sit equally well within each sphere of activity.

The terms presented here have been selected by professionals working with the movable and built heritage. Even though landscapes, parks and gardens are also part of our human-made cultural heritage, this terminology does not yet wholly relate to them, nor to buried archaeological sites. Conservation of the digital heritage is likewise not embraced by this terminology, for which work is being undertaken in other frameworks and standards committees.

Development of this Standard

This standard is the result of four years of consultation, within the CEN framework, amongst experts from the European conservation community. Individuals appointed by national standards bodies, together with their colleagues at national level, have helped to refine shared understanding and to improve these definitions.

The conventions used are those recommended in the documents *CEN/CENELEC Internal Regulations – Part 3*, ISO 704 and ISO 10241:1992 ³⁾. Only nouns are defined, not verbs or adjectives. Each definition aims to be a succinct summary of the concept as used across the field of conservation. Where it is necessary, some notes and examples are added. As far as possible each definition should be able to replace its term when inserted into a relevant sentence.

This standard has been adopted in the three official CEN languages (English, French and German) on the basis of a working document prepared in English. For some concepts there is no direct equivalent term between languages, so expanded phrasing is provided.

1) See Bibliography [35] and [36].

2) This distinction is sometimes only approximate: a wall painting may be fixed to a building one day, but may be transferred to an art gallery another day. Most buildings are immovable, but there are some museums to which buildings have been moved.

3) See Bibliography [59], [60] and [61].

A first CEN terminology standard in the field of conservation cannot be expected to resolve all issues and so is unlikely to meet with universal agreement. Like all standards, it will change in response to those using it and to changing practice, as well as the flux of language over the years.

Users are encouraged to suggest improvements to their national standards bodies. Comments will be compiled for use in the next edition, for which additional terms are already being collected.

References and sources

The reference for the meaning of common English words used in the definitions follows established usage⁴⁾. Many sources, listed in the Bibliography, have been valuable in guiding the development of the definitions, particularly charters and guidelines established by international professional bodies.

Since 1964, the Venice Charter, and later the Burra Charter, have guided reflection and development of the terms and practices used in conservation and restoration, especially of the built heritage and historic environment⁵⁾. The definitions of four terms presented here ('conservation', 'preventive conservation', 'remedial conservation', 'restoration') were developed in parallel with those of ICOM-CC [7] and so have considerable commonality, but they are not identical. Whereas the ICOM-CC terminology uses 'conservation' as the umbrella term, such is the strength of feeling about current practice in some European countries and organisations about the term 'conservation-restoration' that the latter is included as a synonym of 'conservation'. It should also be noted that the ICOM-CC definitions are used primarily in the field of movable heritage.

In certain European countries some of the terms defined by the present standard (e.g. 'cultural heritage', 'alteration', 'restoration') have an official or legal meaning which can vary amongst those countries. Most of the countries within the EU have endorsed in their national regulations the EU Directives relating to illicit trade and the export of cultural heritage. Some of those directives contain translations of some common terms and their meanings⁶⁾, which may differ from the definitions offered here. In this standard, "cultural heritage" has been chosen in preference to "cultural property", with its narrower connotations of ownership.

Conservation practice

The practice of conservation varies between countries and cultures around the world. The making of decisions in conservation is rarely straightforward⁷⁾. Many factors have to be taken into account, some of them identified in the condition survey, others determined by 'significance', others deriving from the context and current use or following from discoveries made during the work. This document cannot be seen as a substitute for the exercise of professional judgement in making decisions, often in collaboration with others, backed up by appropriate training, skills, qualifications and experience.

Laws and regulations in some CEN member countries may contain specific rules relating to professional qualifications and/or methods of control for interventions. Furthermore, various international and national organisations have been developing professional qualifications, standards and guidelines which increasingly help to identify those who are equipped to contribute to conservation decisions and to implement them.

In some countries the term 'restoration' may be taken to mean the whole conservation project, either to maintain some current state or to establish some former state.

4) See Bibliography [44].

5) See Bibliography [9] and [14].

6) Council Directive 93/7/EEC of 15 March 1993 on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member state.

Council Regulation (EC) No 116/2009 of 18 December 2008 on the export of cultural goods.

7) See Bibliography [30], Fig 3.5.

The structure of the document and how to use it

The arrangement of terms reflects the ways in which most heritage professionals approach the conservation of cultural heritage. At its root is consideration of what is to be conserved, its significance and its condition. Conservation terms then reflect underlying principles and are divided between categories identifying on the one hand preventive actions and on the other remedial and restoration interventions. Terms such as 'rehabilitation' and 'renovation' straddle the boundary of what is considered conservation, depending on their adherence to underlying principles, such as respect for evidence. Documentation of all stages of conservation is an essential part of the overall process of conservation planning.

Not everyone will find this structure immediately applicable, so an alphabetical index is provided (in the three languages) which readers may wish to consult first, especially if searching for a particular term. Given the unpredictable, often complex and multi-faceted nature of conservation practice, the groupings of terms should not be considered rigid, though it is hoped that many will find it helpful. In order to improve consistency and to help with cross-referencing, definitions written using terms which are defined elsewhere in the standard are distinguished by being printed in **bold** type.

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