Editorial

This issue is devoted to aspects of the decorative arts in building, and comes at a particularly appropriate time. Within only the last four or five years there has been a convergence of formerly divergent disciplines and interests into this area. The techniques of sampling and analysing paint samples, which were initially concentrated on external surfaces, are now regularly used on interiors. Practitioners have developed considerable skills in the restoration and replication of decorative painting and stencil work. The replication of wallpaper is now done in Australia as well as overseas, and replicated floorcloths are available from the United States. The public interest in and appreciation of historic interiors has been excited by well-illustrated books; and by the approach they have taken - that of assuming that good Victorian decoration will be appreciated in its own right and not dismissed mindlessly with terms like 'bad taste' and 'clutter', which were all too common but a little while ago.

What may be less readily evident, though it is no less important, is that the field has become an active area of study for historians of art and architecture, as some of the contributions in this issue demonstrate. Moreover the full benefit is yet to be reaped of the important collections which have now been identified or acquired by public institutions. The Wunderlich material in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, is one of these. The privately owned Price Collection of wallpapers in Victoria is another. Most recently of all there has been a proposal for the establishment in Melbourne of a repository for the decorative arts. It has the support of all those active in the field, the material to be housed there has been identified; and there has been offered for the purpose the 'Villa Alba' in Kew, a building which is itself a fascinating exhibit of the most virtuoso work of Paterson Brothers, one of Australia's leading firms of nineteenth century decorators. If this proposal proceeds, it will be a further demonstration of the convergence of interests in this field, as too is this issue of Historic Environment.