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The provisions for conserv-  
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in Britain

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**Symposium on the Safeguarding of the Historical Landscape, Part I: Theme I  
Agenda 1.**

**The Provisions for Conserving Historical Landscapes in Britain. by :  
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There is very little natural landscape left in Britain which has not been altered by man, but some people would consider that the few areas that do remain are the oldest and most important of Britain's historical landscapes. These areas are either parts of mountains unfavourable for agriculture or afforestation, or a few woodland areas which somehow have not been affected by man's operations over the centuries. In order to preserve these areas of natural landscape it is necessary to restrict access by people to a limit where the vegetation is able to recover quickly from any damage or to a degree where the wildlife is not disturbed.

The protection of natural landscapes is arranged in two ways. First the planning legislation can designate areas of outstanding natural beauty and areas of special landscape beauty and interest, and can apply more rigorous restrictions to new proposals for these areas. Also, some of these areas are within the National Parks and subject to the application of more rigorous restrictions. Second, but conservation interests are more likely to be safeguarded in the nature reserves which the Nature Conservancy Council can establish and manage, and prohibit public access.

There are also a few examples where the Forestry Commission has accepted responsibility for conserving some areas of natural landscape which lie within its land acquisition areas for afforestation. It has not been thought necessary to establish National Parks in Scotland because of the remoteness of many beautiful areas: these also contain areas of natural landscape.

The historical landscapes which resulted from the works of man have various possibilities for their protection. Some of these landscapes come within the understanding of Ancient Monuments and, if they have been declared so by the Ancient Monuments Secretariat of the Department of the Environment, no alteration to them can be made without permission. Some ancient monuments, like castles and Stonehenge, have been taken over by the Department of the Environment and are cared for and managed by it. Other monuments of lesser importance sometimes receive a grant for essential repairs.

Examples of ancient cultivation like the lynchet and open field systems often have to rely upon the goodwill of the landowner to prevent damage to them. Bearing in mind the case with which a landscape modified by man can return to a natural state if the maintenance or cultivation practices are not continued, it can be seen that it is easier to safeguard a building than the remains of an ancient technique of agriculture. Even with the pattern of the English agricultural revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, the future of this landscape is very doubtful because of the removal of the hedgerows to make larger fields and because the landowners rarely plant new trees to replace those reaching the end of their life. This matter has become even more serious with the devastation caused by Dutch Elm disease.

About 700 or 800 years ago, the powerful leaders of the population in various parts of England were able to establish legal rights over large areas of natural forest, primarily to preserve them for hunting wild animals and to protect them from tree felling for building and other purposes. The best known of these protected forests were the Royal Forests. Today, only limited areas of these forests remain, such as the New Forest and the Forest of Dean. Both these forests are still managed under ancient laws by the Forestry Commission, who now have the problem of the large motor car visiting population.

In common with most European countries, Britain had many formal gardens, both great and small in the 16th and 17th centuries, and which were modelled on the gardens of Italy and France. In very large measure there is no preservation problem because most of these gardens were replaced by informal landscapes in the 18th century. In the case of the few that do remain, the landscape preservation problem associated with a landscape consisting of the topography, grass, trees and other forms of vegetation, is not so difficult because the formal structure, established by the paths and walls, does not change very much with age and can be easily repaired or replaced if the money is available.

The informal landscape of the English School in 18th century England is now entering its period of old age. Soon all the trees will be dead and little work has been done to replace them. It will mean that a gap of perhaps 30 or more years in the appearance of the landscape will have to be accepted while newly planted trees grow to a reasonable size. Some of these parkland landscapes on the periphery of towns have been sold for building development and roads have been driven through other examples.

The historical landscapes closest to the present day are the urban parks and the large suburban gardens of the 19th century. With the former, the problem is to prevent enthusiastic parks superintendents from changing the planting, especially when they add new flower

beds and substitute different plant species.

In this review of the historical landscapes of Britain and of the preservation problems, we should not overlook areas of beautiful humanised landscape which can also be scheduled under the planning legislation as Areas of Special Landscape Beauty and Interest by planning authorities, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty scheduled by the Countryside Commission. Usually this means, as with the few natural landscapes so designated, tighter planning control when proposals for change are made, but there are few signs that any replanting work would be carried out, except through grants by the Commission.

Some reference has been made to the legislation which can enable landscape preservation to take place with respect to the work of the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. Under the planning Acts, the powers controlling the use of land can prevent a new land use taking place in an historical landscape, although if the applicant objects to the refusal, it could lead to a public inquiry at which the appellant might be successful. But while the planning control might stop a new use occurring it, cannot compel the landowner to preserve his historical landscape. An exceptional example could occur when a planning authority purchases compulsorily an historical landscape to serve as an open space which is part of its approved plan for the town.

The Countryside Act enables planning authorities to establish country parks and these can, and sometimes do, take over an areas of historic landscape, and grants of money can be made to adapt the landscape to its new use and for maintaining its character if necessary. There are also grants made by the central government for the repair of historic buildings, and these can include buildings which were specifically designed as elements of the landscape.

A very interesting example of safeguarding landscape results from the legal agreement made between the owner of the Upton Castle estate in Wales and the County Council which is the planning authority. This agreement was made under provisions in the National Parks Act 1949, and it is a voluntary agreement. The owner retains ownership but, in return for an input of public funds, there will be agreed and controlled public access. The funds will be used for repairs, a car park, renewing the planting where necessary etc. The local National Park's direct labour force and Warden wervice will be used for the care and maintenance work.

The National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the National Trust for Scotland are special organisations, independent of government control but acting for the nation in safeguarding historic buildings and landscape. Besides historic houses and their associated gardens and parklands, much beautiful countryside including woodland and moor-

land, lakes and hills, farmland and some coastal areas are managed by the Trusts.

The Trusts operate through gifts of buildings and land, but financial problems now require them to insist upon being given also profit-making farmland when accepting liability for the upkeep of buildings and their associated gardens and parklands. The reason why the Trusts can safeguard the heritage, when the original owner cannot, is because the Trusts are not liable for taxation or death duties.

Finally, reference must be made to the National Parks. These, in Britain, are areas of fine landscape, but mostly in private ownership and under agricultural or forestry land use. The safeguarding aspect works in two ways; first, the stricter planning control over land use change and building design, and second, the provision of funds from the central government for conserving the landscape and for providing facilities associated with recreation. In the Northumberland National Park in the North East of England, a voluntary agreement has been made between the Park Authority and the Forestry Commission which defines the areas which can be afforested, which should not be afforested, and areas which would require special consideration if there is an afforestation proposal.

This is a long list of the several ways in which provision is made in Britain for safeguarding historical landscapes. But there is a long way to go before one can say that the provisions have been acted upon to the extent that the majority of these landscapes are conserved for the future.