

The future of historical
landscape in urban areas

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The Future of Historical Landscapes in Urban Areas : Part III : Theme II : Agenda II

by Professor Brian Hackett : England

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X Many of the historical green landscapes in urban areas are difficult to separate administratively from areas of urban landscape which comprise streets and buildings as well as their accompanying trees, shrubs and grass. Thus, there are occasions when the safeguarding policy is bound up with the conservation policy of the streets and buildings, for example, the tree planted avenues of a city like Paris. In Britain, it is possible to declare as a Conservation Area an area which includes buildings of architectural or historic interest, although the buildings may not be very distinguished individually, yet when grouped together they constitute an area of interest and character ; in such an area, the green landscape can be subject to the same strict planning control that can apply to the streets and buildings.

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X The public parks which were laid out more than one hundred years ago come within the understanding of historical landscape, and this period of time would also apply to the smaller open spaces which form green centres to squares in some of the older British towns, and many of them acted as the garden space for the houses around. X This approximate date of one hundred years ago is too long to include the Garden Cities in England which form an important stage in the development of town planning; nevertheless, their place in the history of town planning and their special character of well planted streets and gardens indicates that we should accord them the status and consideration for preservation that belongs to historical landscape.

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X There are not many examples in Britain of the historical landscapes which have been developed out of the town fortifications of the Artillery Age, although there are more towns which retain all or parts of the medieval walls. In both cases, it is possible to apply for the fortifications and their associated lands to be scheduled as ancient monuments and, as a result, taken into the care of the Central Government.

The preservation of the green landscape in the older suburbs of British towns is a difficult matter. The ownership of the land is very varied and there is no possibility of enforcing good maintenance or replanting. Sometimes, the house is pulled down and the site divided into three or four plots, upon which new houses will be built. X The new layout will almost certainly lead to the removal of many trees and shrubs, but I know of one case when, before planning permission was given, the architect's design had to be modified to suit the existing tree pattern. The hope in these cases is for a wise, but firm, planning authority. The trees are usually the most important part of the green landscape in the suburbs of one hundred and more years ago.

X Because of the system of making grants available to local authorities for the reclamation of derelict industrial landscape, it has sometimes been possible to use this money for the restoration of industrial canals, which in Britain would have been constructed more than one hundred and fifty years ago. The policy adopted by most designers in this kind of work has been to incorporate the particular character of the canal landscape, paying attention to the detailing of the hard landscape elements so that they carry forward this character. The work has also involved finding new uses of the landscape, such as recreational facilities - it is always an important point in conservation to find new uses which not only ease the financial burden, but help to ensure the future maintenance of the restored landscape.

A problem with the safeguarding of the older public parks is the different ways in which they are now used. When many of these parks were laid out in Britain, the six day working week and the longer hours meant that the landscape had frequent periods of rest during which time damaged vegetation could recover and the larger staff of gardeners then possible could repair damage to structures. Also, these parks were originally used for people sitting on seats and watching other people walking by, rather than for the more active recreation of today. Thus, a sensible

safeguarding plan must first overcome the problem of adapting the historical landscape to accept new uses; this suggests preserving the main elements of the planting, and preserving certain areas as examples by restricting their use. A difficulty arises when the park gardening staff change the planting to accord with some later period, and in these cases, supervision by persons qualified in landscape design, including its traditions, is the answer.

subject before
X X The open space around the older churches in towns, usually called churchyards, rank as examples of historical landscape, and they have acquired a particular landscape character through the centuries. Because relatives or descendants of people buried in the old churchyards have long ago left the district or no known relatives remain, there is not a strong case for preserving the graves. Also, there is usually a shortage of quiet open spaces in towns. Thus, many projects for converting these churchyards into open spaces have been carried out during the last few years. Some of the old gravestones have considerable artistic merit or historical interest - these should be retained, either in a new position, used as paving slabs, or kept in their original position with the less interesting gravestones removed. The designer of the modifications always has the problem whether he should retain the existing plant species which probably were planted about one hundred years ago, or whether he should try and bring the planting back to the species which might have been present at a much earlier date.

There is not time to discuss at length other uses of historical landscape in towns, but possibilities are gardens for displaying sculpture or for a special section of the population, like blind people.

A problem which is common to many historical landscapes in urban situations is atmospheric pollution. Whereas a considerable improvement has occurred over the last few years because of the smokeless zones instigated by

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by the Clean Air Act, the increase in motor cars produces a new kind of pollution. X
Again, this is likely to mean a change in the plant species from those planted
in the early days of the historical landscape. The increase in the population
brings an increased wear and tear element to the landscape. X And while the
departure of the tram car and trolley bus in many cities has reduced the
pressure upon cutting down trees at the sides of roads, there are still too
many trees lost as a result of new road works.

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protection
In Britain, a lot of credit must go to the many amenity societies, with
a voluntary membership, for the safeguarding of landscape, as well as building.
In the countryside, we have the Council for the Protection of Rural England,
and in the towns, there are numerous local societies who raise opposition when
there is a threat to destroy the best of the past. X X

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proposed.