The World Heritage Listing

Historical Introduction

This survey should begin with a short recapitulation of events leading up to formulation of the World Heritage Convention, since as an archaeologist and historian I believe historical understanding to be relevant to the consideration of the present situation and of future development.

Awareness of the need for international recognition and protection of human heritage dates back to the interwar years, at the League of Nations. Much work was done on the development of some form of international fund, subscribed to by more affluent countries in order to help countries with fewer economic resources (such terms as ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘developing’ had not entered the international jargon at that time). There was much discussion, but no action. The only concrete proposal to emerge was one for the protection of cultural heritage in time of war.

The end of World War II saw the creation of the United Nations, then UNESCO. The latter took over the cultural work of League of Nations, picking up the League’s projects. But the only result in those early years was the Hague Convention (1954). There were, however, numerous abortive attempts to get the international fund moving again. There slowly developed an integrated idea of List and Convention. This got as far as a draft from the Mexicans in mid-1980s, but it ultimately failed through lack of international support.

The 1960s were a period of rapidly increasing threats to heritage. These threats came from post-war reconstruction, economic boom, improvement in agricultural techniques, and population growth. Large-scale investment in developing countries by major economic powers led to the over-exploitation of natural resources such as precious metals, timber and oil. Natural heritage had a higher profile than cultural heritage. The world started to become aware of the disappearance of large tracts of landscape and the catastrophic reduction of rare and endangered plant and animal species. This period saw the creation of bodies such as the World Wildlife Fund, the Sierra Club, and the foundation by UNESCO of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Threats to cultural heritage were slower to become apparent. Threats came from post-war reconstruction, the rapid growth of towns, the expansion of industries, and infrastructure development such as highways, airports, oil and gas pipelines. The UK was one of first countries to realize scale of this destruction. This led to the creation of RESCUE, and Save Britain’s Heritage in the mid-1960s. A crucial step was taken, with encouragement from UNESCO, when the Venice Charter was drafted by the 2nd International Congress of Architects and Specialists of Historic Buildings (1964), leading to the creation of ICOMOS in Warsaw in the following year. However, their work was aimed at governments and professionals, and did not attain a high profile amongst the general public (though the UNESCO Nubian Campaign, starting in 1950s, had attracted wide publicity).
At the international level, the first determined efforts came from the USA in the days of the Nixon Administration. The idea of a ‘World Heritage Trust’ emerged from the Committee on Natural Resources, part of the 1965 White House Conference on International Co-operation. This idea was picked up by UNESCO, which set up the International Expert Group in 1969 to explore the concept further. However, there was a great deal of disagreement, driven especially by fears of the potential loss of national sovereignty. The IUCN also took up the work, encouraged by the USA, and produced a draft Convention for Protection of World Natural Heritage in 1971.

Suddenly, a process which had moved with painful slowness, with many hitches and false starts, acquired a new momentum. UNESCO set up an integrated working group, which met in New York in September 1971. This was followed six months later by a Special Meeting of Experts, from which emerged, as a result of much horse-trading, the Convention on World Heritage. The Convention was presented to the General Assembly of UNESCO in Paris in November 1972 and approved.

**The World Heritage Convention since 1972**

The Convention is drafted in broad terms. The preamble indicates the framework in which the Convention was conceived. It stresses “the importance for all the peoples of the world, of safeguarding this unique and irreplaceable property”, and goes on to state that “parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole”. The Convention introduced two important concepts: that of “outstanding universal value” and that of the role of all nations in protecting certain aspects of cultural heritage. Incidentally, it also resuscitated idea of an international support fund.

The tremendous advantage of the broad text, not fully recognized until recent years, lies in the definitions included in Articles 1 and 2. Cultural properties are defined as:

- **Monuments**
  Architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements and structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

- **Groups of buildings**
  Groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

- **Sites**
  Works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and arms including
archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view.

Note the use of the phrase 'outstanding universal value'. It is a leitmotif of the Convention. It is a noble phrase, but is almost fatally vague. The World Heritage Committee spent much of its time in early meetings producing criteria to permit the implementation of the Convention. It came up with six criteria for cultural properties, four for natural properties. Cultural properties are defined as:

i. representing a masterpiece of human creative genius
   - Taj Mahal, India
   - Pyramids at Gizeh, Egypt
   - Stonehenge, England;

ii. exhibiting an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture, monumental arts or town-planning and landscape design
   - Acropolis of Athens, Greece
   - Great Wall of China
   - Ironbridge, England (Old Furnace);

iii. bearing a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a civilization or cultural tradition which is living or which has disappeared
   - Mont Saint-Michel, France
   - Mesa Verde, USA
   - Rapa Nui;

iv. being an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history
   - Visby, Denmark
   - Taos Pueblo, USA
   - Itsukushima, Japan;

v. being an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it had become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change
   - Banaue, Philippines
   - Sana'a, Arabia
   - Venice, Italy

vi. being directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considers that this criterion should justify inclusion on the List only in exceptional circumstances and in conjunction with other criteria, cultural or natural)
   - South Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, Israel
   - Liberty Bell, Philadelphia, USA
   - Uluru, Australia

To qualify for inscription on the World Heritage List, property must conform with one or more of these criteria. It must also meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines in respect of the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship, or setting and, in the case of cultural landscapes, their distinctive character and components.
The subject of long anguished discussions since ratification of the Convention by Japan in 1982 has been Western myths about Japanese ‘conservation’. In fact, Japanese methods are more scrupulous than much of European practice, and a comparison may be drawn between the painstaking restoration of the temples at Horyu-ji in Japan, and the freer interpretation employed in the refurbishment of the walled city of Carcassonne in southern France. The lesson here is the necessity of having adequate legal and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural properties or cultural landscapes.

The first inscriptions to the World Heritage List were made in 1978, and they make an interesting group in relation to the future trajectory of the List. They are:

- City of Quito (Ecuador)
- Aachen Cathedral (Germany)
- L’Anse-aux-Meadows (Canada)
- Mesa Verde (USA)
- Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (Ethiopia)
- Ile de Goree (Senegal)
- Historic centre of Cracow and the Wieliczka salt-mine (both Poland).

Of these, two may be characterized as archaeological sites (L’Anse-aux-Meadows and Mesa Verde), two historic towns (Quito, Cracow), two religious sites (Lalibela, Aachen), one industrial monument (Wieliczka) and one ‘social’ monument of the slave trade (Ile de Goree). In terms of Article 1 categories, two qualify as monuments (Wieliczka, Aachen), four are groups of buildings (Quito, Cracow, Lalibela, Ile de Goree), and two may be considered sites (L’Anse-aux-Meadows, Mesa Verde). Thus, the broadly representative of spread of properties envisaged in definitions has materialized, with monuments, groups of buildings, and sites in roughly equal proportion. Three are in Europe, two in North America, two in Africa, one in South America. Asia and Pacific region were not represented, but these were still early days. Australia ratified the Convention in 1974, but was still getting its act together, and the major Asian states of China, India, and Japan had not yet joined the Convention.

All of this was doubtless received optimistically by the Committee. However, it gives a false impression of what was to follow. It cannot be denied that the perception of cultural heritage was seen through a ‘Western’ perspective of art/architectural history, traditional history-based archaeology, and aesthetic values derived from a single intellectual school of thought. To illustrate this point, it may be sufficient to mention a Bureau meeting where the Greek delegate queried the use of Criterion VI in respect of the Chinese mountain where Taoism was founded.

Cultural properties now inscribed on the World Heritage List do not truly reflect the cultural and geographical diversity of human achievement from the arrival of *homo sapiens*. This diversity itself makes the use of concepts such as ‘outstanding universal value’ somewhat questionable. The anthropological record makes it clear that, strictly speaking, universality begins to fade at the end of the Lower Palaeolithic. This is manifested on the actual List in two ways:
• A bias in favour of certain regions, notably Europe (including the Mediterranean Basin and European colonial cultures of the New World), the great pre-Hispanic civilisations of Latin America, and certain Asian cultures, in particular those of China and India. Cultural heritages of vast regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, central Asia, the Caribbean and Oceania, scarcely figure on the List. Currently European properties represent 50% of all inscribed properties, and the present rate of nominations confirms this overall picture.

• Certain types of cultural property are disproportionately represented on the List. These include European and ‘European colonial’ historic towns, Christian places of worship, and archaeological sites (especially those of ancient Greece and Rome).

Unease on part of the Committee in respect of this imbalance began in the later 1980s. Concern grew over cultural landscapes, arising from the growing number of properties nominated under both sets of criteria.

A great amount of discussion finally culminated in the definitions of 1992:

Clearly defined landscapes designed and created intentionally by man (gardens, parkland, etc.),

Organically evolved landscapes resulting from an initial social, economic, administrative or religious imperative which have developed their present form in association with and in response to the natural environment,

Relict landscapes where an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, but the significant distinguishing features of which are still visible,

Continuing landscapes which retain an active role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life,

Associative cultural landscapes, with powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations to the natural element.

Planned landscapes were already well represented on the List, but in addition a new idea, that of organically evolved continuing landscapes, has recently taken root. This posed some problems for the Committee at first, but the nomination of continuing landscapes is becoming more frequent each year. Tongariro was the first Associative Landscape inscribed on the List, but only after long debate in the Committee. The inclusion of the Philippines rice-terraces marked a watershed. This year saw the first industrial landscape (Blaenavon) inscribed on the List, and the opening up of other areas for serious consideration. Relict landscapes are also already there (Stonehenge/Avebury, Rapa Nui). This is an area that needs much more thought, not least by archaeologists.

Concern has also been expressed about thematic lacunae. Two areas have been identified as being almost entirely lacking: industrial heritage and 20th century heritage. Active steps towards redressing this weakness have subsequently been taken by ICOMOS in association with other specialist non-government organisations. Working with TICCIH has produced a number of thematic industrial
comparative studies (bridges, canals, railways, industrial towns), with criteria for evaluation. Case-studies are already beginning to correct the balance. Less successful has been the collaboration with DoCoMoMo, but nevertheless this has produced a valuable handlist of major works of 20th century architecture. The work of the Committee in this area has also benefited from the excellent UNESCO study of Art Nouveau in early 1990s, and results of this are now starting to appear, such as the architecture of the Bauhaus and Horta’s buildings in Brussels, with Ciudad Universitaria in Caracas and Aalto’s Paimio Sanatorium to come. Perhaps the Committee will be seeing similar nominations from Australia:

Sydney Opera House
Goldfields sites.

The Future

These were separate approaches to problem of achieving a balance of nominations. An overall, integrated approach was attempted in 1984 by a working group set up to produce a Global Strategy (which replaced the ICOMOS initiative, with Greece and the USA opting for a global study, based on a systematic approach to the identification of specific geocultural areas on chronological and thematic bases). This was a high-level group, consisting of anthropologists, archaeologists, planners, etc. It came up with broad guidelines for development of the Convention, and identified gaps that should be considered in the broad anthropological context:

Human co-existence with the land:
- Movement of peoples (nomadism, migration)
- Settlement
- Modes of subsistence
- Technological evolution.

Human beings in society:
- Human interaction
- Cultural co-existence
- Spirituality and creative expression.

The group recommended encouragement for nominations from under-represented regions by organizing a series of regional meetings, and the effects of this recommendation are beginning to be seen. Meetings organized in Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions are beginning to produce results, although slowly. A major problem is a lack of experience in the preparation of nomination dossiers. Also, management requirements present problems: administrative systems in many smaller, developing countries find themselves unable to prepare and implement appropriate mechanisms. There was a notable breakthrough in Marrakesh with inscription of the Suqur landscape, where management is given over to the traditional owners of the land. Mention should also be made of the work done in Nigeria in this regard by Dawson Munjeri. The first nomadic society inclusion came in 1998, and now the Committee is considering two Central Asian (Mongolian) nominations. Uluru and Kakadu provide excellent examples of hunter-gatherer societies, and Uluru achieved cultural inscription on the List in 1994.
Conclusion

I hope that the above survey will have given some idea of the evolution in perceptions of cultural heritage that has taken place since 1972. I believe that striving for 'universality' is against the intentions of the Convention. The importance of human heritage lies not in universality - otherwise the monuments erected by McDonald’s, Esso and Coca-Cola would have a strong claim for inscription on the World Heritage List. The real importance of human heritage lies in its diversity: in human endeavour, and the spirituality of mankind as expressed in material terms. Much remains to be done to ensure that we can hand on intact to those who follow, our world’s dazzling variety and richness that so enriches the lives of our generation.