

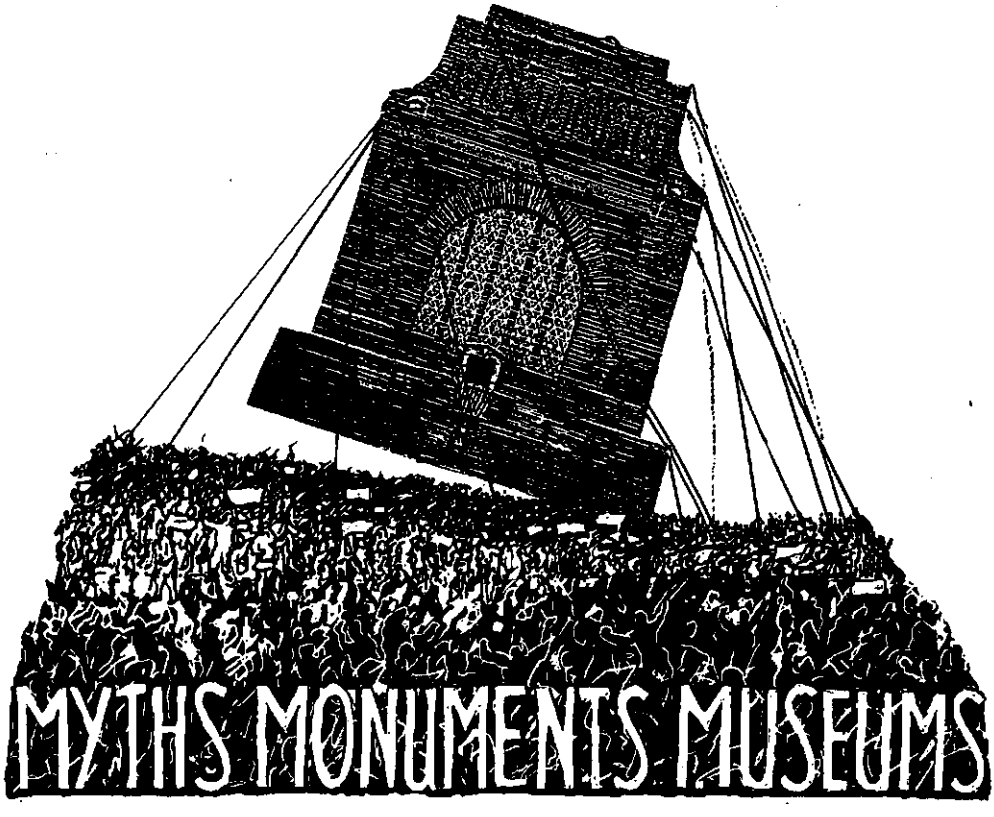
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1992-07-08T11:42:04Z
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NEW PREMISES?

16 - 18 JULY 1992

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
HISTORY WORKSHOP

LOCAL CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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AFRICANA

Paper to be presented at the History Workshop on
MYTHS MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS
16, 17 AND 18 JULY 1992
University of the Witwatersrand

LOCAL CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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Introduction

For conservationists working with cultural artefacts the definition of what is culturally important is problematic in a number of ways. For not only have items that have been the focus of official conservation efforts till now been mainly those associated with a specific culture, but conservation policy itself has been framed in terms that create a sense of cultural hierarchy.

It is therefore obvious that one of most important tasks for us, as we move toward a just and equitable dispensation in this country, is to redefine the concept of culture so that it represents the *ex*pression rather than the *op*pression of the people of our country.

People have provided statistics which show the tendency of white culture being always validated at the expense of black cultural conservation. But as they concentrate on the negative aspects they skirt what we at the National Monuments Council have long considered a more important issue, the development of a theory and practice of conservation to which the involvement of the people whose culture is to be conserved is intrinsic.

Community Participation

For conservation practice to respond to the needs of local communities, community participation in the identification of their culturally significant sites is essential and conservationists must respond by aiding the community.

The key to a process of democratisation could lie in the 1986 amendments to the National Monuments Act. In this paper I want to try and discuss the development of a theory and practice of conservation that will preclude the possibility of one community's culture taking precedence over another and will explain how these amendments to the Act allow for this.

Although long aware of the imbalance reflected in our cultural conservation programme, we have also been conscious that it is not enough to simply start declaring as monuments buildings and sites of cultural importance to black people. In order to rid cultural conservation of the old assumptions the only option is to democratise it.

A starting point in an integrated conservation programme is an inventory of conservation-worthy items. This can be achieved by conservation surveying resulting in the compilation of a national register.

The amendments to the Act which marked an important shift in emphasis in conservation in South Africa was section 5.1(cC) which gave the NMC the instruction to "compile and maintain a register of immovable property which it regards as worthy of conservation...", as well as section 5.9 regarding the designation of "...any area of land to be a conservation area. Previously the act only allowed for the protection of individual buildings - in the form of national monuments. With these amendments the NMC was empowered to control whole, cohesive, homogeneous areas in consultation with local authorities.

Ideally, the power to protect these registered properties should be delegated to local authority level and included in physical planning, with the compilation of a national register of conservation-worthy property and the designation of conservation areas controlled and monitored on a local level. It is in fact the only way.

According to Gregory Young, an Australian historian and conservation planner, "Conservation must serve to promote understanding of the meanings and artefacts of different cultures, living or historical. Conservation must contribute strategies for the stability of the environment." The essence of conservation work in the built environment is the creation of an environment in which communities feel they belong, from which they draw a sense of identity. The presence of the elements and the ambience of an area, which for the inhabitants are imbued with particular significance, gives meaning to their lives, satisfies a fundamental need for continuity.

As we see it, a way of making people aware of the richness and variety of their surroundings can be found in surveying. The plan is that communities will be encouraged to do their own surveys and nominate buildings that they consider conservation-worthy for the register and areas that they consider valuable as conservation areas.

We are in the embryonic stages of compiling the register, but it is a very exciting project and, we believe, at the core of a conservation plan for our cultural environment.

I will talk later in detail about the way we will do this. First a brief outline of how integrated conservation evolved.

The first Act regarding conservation was promulgated in 1911 with the Bushmen Relics Protection Act, covering rock paintings and engravings and other archaeological remains.

The next step was the Natural and Historical Monuments Act of 1923, under which the Historical Monuments Commission was established.

In 1934 these two acts were revoked and the Natural and Historical Monuments, Relics and Antiques Act was promulgated, empowering the Commission to protect archaeological and palaeontological sites and objects, control the exportation of relics and antiques, proclaim national monuments and control their alteration or destruction.

In 1969 the National Monuments Council was established under a new National Monuments Act - Act 28 of 1969 - which gave a very wide range of powers.

During the seventies there was a growing consciousness of the need to consider conservation of the historical environment in an integrated way. There had been talk of compiling a list of conservation-worthy buildings as early as the sixties but it was only in 1986 that the state acknowledged that preserving monuments in isolation was not adequate or appropriate protection for the historical environment and that national monuments should be limited to a number of very special buildings. Buildings as individual objects are meaningless unless seen in relationship to their surroundings.

Thus the Act was amended to include the compilation of the national register of conservation-worthy property and the designation of conservation areas. These amendments also included blanket protection for all buildings older than 50 years. This controversial "historical sites" clause has prevented the demolition of many properties.

There is, of course, a worldwide trend towards environmental conservation, with the recognition that buildings require a meaningful context and that it is the collective quality that makes the character of the place which has to be protected against being altered and lost.

Different countries have developed various techniques for surveying their national estate. Comprehensive scientific inventories such as the French General Inventory and the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings are detailed systematic ground surveys, region by region, province by province, supported by typologies, standard terminologies, and other detailed assessment techniques. This kind of system is what we are working towards. A look at how conservation has been handled in Australia, Britain and America makes it clear that compiling a register is a process and one that needs the interest and effort of many people with voluntary support and participation and ongoing programmes teaching groups how to conduct surveys.

For conservation to be effective a comprehensive inventory established in consultation with the community, properly administered, is essential, and will mean that owners, developers, planners, architects and responsible authorities will be aware of the special qualities of environments and particular properties before they invest time and money in developments which may alter or damage vital parts of the cultural fabric of a community.

Conservation Education

The education of the public and public officials, old and young, is essential. Conservation education should be introduced at school. To my mind encouraging the understanding and appreciation of the environment is the area in which the NMC must direct its energy - therefore the publishing of pamphlets and brochures explaining conservation is one of our priorities. People are becoming aware of the effect of the environment on their lives, but education is needed in order to show people that they can play a part in conservation. Education begins with the child and this is where one needs to awaken interest and develop an understanding of the environment. Thomas Jefferson put it this way: "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion".

Conservation Surveying

The NMC's Conservation Surveying Kit is a method of surveying that has been designed for

people who have never done a survey before. It explains step by step how to do a survey, how to map property and landscape elements, how to write the history of the area and so on.

Surveying
A survey involves providing a comprehensive description of sites in an area, noting aspects like their age, function, condition, context, development trends, the character and extent of its historical heritage and the value of sites in terms of the area's conservation-worthiness. Once these properties have been identified and marked on maps, it is possible to identify groupings and areas of conservation-worthy property. After this, suitable action for protection can be taken.

Patterns, such as land use patterns and patterns of consistent building types, as can be seen on this map, must be considered when making recommendations and planning for its conservation. Understanding the nature of pressures on conservation-worthy areas is a prerequisite for coping with them.

Once the survey has been completed, the community, the local authority and the National Monuments Council decide on the conservation action that is appropriate. In doing the survey, the community will identify which properties or areas are significant, whether they be associated with an historic person or event, or a religious, social, economic or political activity, if it is important to archaeology or geology or if it is a landmark in the town, and so on. The protection is determined jointly by the National Monuments Council and the local governing body together with community representatives.

Protection
Property can be protected basically in four ways:

(i) Declaration as a national monument - this is used for the protection of property of outstanding or national importance;

(ii) Provisional declaration as a national monument - this temporary protection is used mainly when a property of national importance is threatened in some way;

(iii) The National Register - this applies to immovable property which is of local or regional importance or property which contributes to the environment of conservation-worthy property. The primary purpose of the national register is to identify property so that it can be incorporated into the planning process. For the register to be a useful planning tool, registration of property should result from co-ordinated listing or cataloguing of towns and areas and the identification of historical districts. The compilation of this register will be an on-going process.

(iv) Conservation areas - this applies to the protection of the environment and context of important property or sites in order to conserve the character of historical areas. These areas may include national monuments, registered property, other conservation-worthy items,such as bridges, parks, watercourses, etc., and items of little significance provided the area itself is regarded as of historical, aesthetic or scientific interest. The purpose of this is also primarily for planning purposes. The quality of an area is based on the relationships existing between building and building, building and landscape and building, landscape and

the users.

A conservation area is a rural, urban, archaeological or natural area in which the environment and context of groups of buildings or sites are protected. Its management is facilitated by the provision of guidelines which should be compiled in a way that an understanding of the history of the area and its character is clear and significant areas are identified so that they can be taken into account in the planning of projects, etc. These then serve as a basis for the formulation of by-laws.

For the property to be protected the register must be incorporated into the Town Planning Scheme and administered by the local authority with procedures for consultation between the NMC, local authorities and the community established once the properties have been identified.

I will now explain a bit about how one goes about identifying these properties, and what surveying consists of.

Research
It is essential that a considerable amount of work is done in the archives before getting involved in the surveying of any area because the evidence of architectural history needs to be built up.

Form
Surveying is being carried out by many different people and institutions all the time and therefore of course different forms are being used. The NMC has devised a form which it is encouraging everybody to use. The reason for this is that information that is collected must be easily retrievable by the NMC who will then decide, in consultation with the local authority and the community, on the protection needed and the policy to be adopted for its conservation. This is the form. You have one in front of you. It has been designed to be as simple as possible so that it can be used by amateurs as well as professionals. There is place for a photograph and a short description of each property, with a check list so that nothing is left out, a place to describe any alterations that have been made to the property, what its conservation potential is in terms of its use and condition, a statement of significance, and so on.

Handbook
The form will be distributed with a handbook. It explains step by step how to do a survey, how to do archival research and where to find the information needed; where to find basic information like erf numbers, zoning that applies to the properties, scheduled projects that may affect the properties, such as road widening schemes, urban renewal programmes and any other development pressures, where to find survey maps and how to map, how to take photographs and so on.

Mapping
The map is the essential inventory tool - it is the map that represents the place. Date screens are compiled by using the information found on reliable historical maps found in the archives or museum and then checking, in the field, to see whether the buildings are there at a

particular date and whether they are still standing. The most important products of a conservation study are the maps. These are produced by: *Mapping buildings and other elements considered to be significant in certain categories; *Mapping streets that have retained their historical character; *Mapping streets that have retained the historical grain of their development; *Mapping landscape features such as trees, open spaces, hedges; *Mapping buildings by dating; *Mapping areas that are considered for promulgation as conservation areas; *Mapping buildings that are considered for the register. *Mapping areas of development pressure, road widening; Here you can see at a larger scale how it is done.

Assessment of Significance

The development of suitable criteria of significance to be applied to the evaluation of historical properties is another important aspect of a conservation study. The assessment of significance should be tailored to each area once the documentary and physical evidence of the area is familiar.

The involvement of the community is part and parcel of the exercise and posters and pamphlets explaining conservation and planning regulations and controls, and discussing guidelines will stimulate debate on the subject while serving to raise conservation consciousness.

Styles

Most historical towns or villages contain buildings of different types from different periods, each with typical forms and details. The character of the town or village depends on these. The surveying kit will include a simplified book on house styles and one on details in order to enable non-architects to identify and name styles and elements.

Value

The value of conservation is as a reflection of the culture that created it. And that is what we are concerned with. People must be made aware of the importance of their own environment in their lives. Awareness, observation, information gathering, analysis, and action are all part of the environment problem-solving process in which people of all ages and all communities can participate. We are convinced that this awareness will enrich their lives.

People in official capacities need to build up a sensitivity to the question of identity, with trust being built up between officials and communities. This seems to be happening, for example, in the Bokaap. The National Monuments Council's involvement in the Bokaap has been characterised by extensive consultation with the community enabling them to become home-owners, while ensuring the conservation of the dwellings. It is the first tentative step toward an entirely new conservation practice. Although it has not been without its problems, the mutually beneficial relationship which has developed between the Bokaap Community and the National Monuments Council is clear evidence that community participation in conservation is not only possible but essential.

However, we are under no illusions that communities are as a matter of course aware of the need to conserve their built environment. Such awareness has to be cultivated. Education is ultimately the way to proceed. This obviously has implications for the whole study of history in our country - there needs to be a shift towards the documentation of local history, the

history of ordinary people and their communities.

The National Monuments Council's contribution to this effort is to encourage people to survey their areas, thereby educating themselves about the history of their area. There are embryonic plans afoot in the National Monuments Council to combine surveys of the built environment with oral history studies conducted by local universities.

Conclusion

A sense of cultural identity is basic to the well-being of every individual and knowledge of it is essential to full participation in society. The surveying kit will provide the skills to learn about their history and culture and the values to protect and respect the heritage of all.

The importance of local history can be introduced into formal education by encouraging school children to find out about the history of their surroundings through projects - inculcating the concept that the present is continuous with the past. Conservation-consciousness must become part of our way of thinking, and the only way to accomplish that is to incorporate environmental and heritage education at every level of schooling. In many other countries environmental education is part of the school curriculum. It will be an integral part of ours some day.

The built environment is a vital part of the cultural heritage of a community. No conservation body is as well equipped as the local community to determine what is of cultural importance and what is not.

NMC601/C

NATIONAL MONUMENTS COUNCIL
CONSERVATION SURVEYING FORM

SURVEY OF	DATE RECORDED

PROPERTY NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

BLOCK	SITE	ERF NO.	ZONING	FILM NO.	NEG. NO.



CHECKLIST

Please describe the property in the following order.

EXTERIOR
No. of storeys
Form
Roof
Walls, gables and parapets
Doors
Windows
Stoep/verandah

INTERIOR
Floors
Walls
Ceilings
Doors
Details

DESCRIPTION (See checklist alongside)

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CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS: .....

ALTERATIONS: .....

..... DATE .....

SITE FEATURES .....

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ENVIRONMENT .....

.....

ARCHITECT / BUILDER	CONSTRUCTION DATE	BUILDING STYLE

BUILDING TYPE	PRESENT USE	☐ UNOCCUPIED ☐ OCCUPIED

CONDITION: ☐ GOOD ☐ FAIR ☐ POOR

EVALUATION

☐ OUTSTANDING IMPORTANCE ☐ SIGNIFICANT ☐ CONTRIBUTING

☐ NOT RELEVANT TO SURVEY ☐ INTRUSIVE ☐ VACANT/ UNDEVELOPED

PHOTOGRAPH

NOTES

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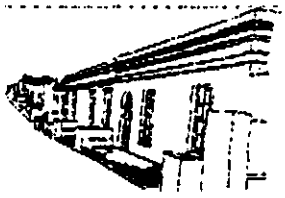
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HISTORY .....

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SOURCES .....

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SIGNIFICANCE (cross where relevant)

Historical
- ☐ Associated with historic person or group
- ☐ Associated with historic event or activity

Cultural /Social/Educational
- ☐ Associated with religious, social, economic or political activity
- ☐ Illustrates an historical period

Architectural/Aesthetic
- ☐ Important example of a building type
- ☐ Important example of a style or period
- ☐ Fine details, workmanship or aesthetics
- ☐ Work of a major architect or builder

Scientific/Technical
- ☐ Example of industrial, technical or engineering development
- ☐ New, rare or experimental building techniques
- ☐ Important to archaeology, palaeontology, geology or biology

Environmental
- ☐ Landmark in town of city
- ☐ Contributes to character of neighbourhood or area
- ☐ Contributes to character of street or square
- ☐ Part of an important group of buildings

MOTIVATION AND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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RECORDED BY .....

ORGANISATION ..... TEL .....