

MANAGEMENT OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN GALLE FORT – BEFORE AND AFTER THE 26 / 12 TSUNAMI DEVASTATION

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Introduction

Galle Fort was inscribed in the World Heritage List in December 1988 under the criterion IV, as follows;

“... Galle provides an outstanding example of an urban ensemble of which illustrates the interaction on European Architecture and South Asian traditions from 16th to the 19th centuries. Among the characteristics which make this an urban group of exceptional value is the original sewer system from the 17th century, flushed with sea water controlled by a pumping station formerly activated by a windmill on the Triton Bastion. However the most salient fact is the use of European models adapted by local manpower to the geological, climatic, historic and cultural conditions of Sri Lanka. ...”

Since then it has never been the same for this sleepy city in the Southern Coast of Sri Lanka. Covering an area of 40 hectares (100 acres), this walled city is strategically located as the western landmass that protects a natural harbour. With no requirement for a buffer zone to be identified at the time that this site was declared a World Heritage Site, the area that was immediately outside the Fort was under threat because it was also the Central Business District of the City. However, planning controls were brought about with the use of the local Antiquities Ordinance that demanded a 400 yard buffer zone of any listed monument.

Galle is the largest, complete walled historic town in Sri Lanka, if not in the region, that is still a living settlement. It is easily the biggest and the best preserved of the ‘Dutch Monuments’ of the period not only in Sri Lanka but also in South and South East Asia. What make this Fort important are not just its massive 300-year old fortifications, but its total townscape. The combined effect of the ramparts, the street grid, the distinctive streetscapes and outstanding individual examples of buildings such as the courthouse, the warehouses, and churches, the views across the harbour, the sea and the esplanade, the courtyard architecture of the houses, the colonnaded verandas and the underground drainage system make this a unique example of Town

Planning, Architecture, Civil Engineering and Hydrology of the yesteryear. It is a classic example of a blend of professionalism of the east and the west of the period that gives meaning to the shared heritage of two or more nations.

This paper sets out the process and the issues that took place in this historic city before the 26/12 Tsunami devastation and the issues that need to be resolved to preserve this heritage site.

History of Galle Fort

The strategic location of Galle in relation to the main sea routes has given its prominence against the other ports in Sri Lanka. The earliest recorded history of this town dates back to 545 AD when Casmias Indicopleustas makes reference to his visit to Galle in his travel notes. However, there is no material evidence discovered to substantiate this event. The natural harbour in Galle had gained prominence by the middle of the fourteenth century. Ibn Batuta claims he journeyed from Dondra to Galle. The Galle Trilingual Slab inscription of early fifteenth century written in Chinese, Muslim and South Indian Hindu indicates that the Chinese, the Moslem, The Hindu and Jain traders frequented the port. The Chinese junks that came through the Straits of Malacca touched at Galle on their way to Malabar or the African Coast. The Sinhala Literary works of the period describes Galle as a well established commercial centre of the fifteenth century. It was a well established town with wide streets and shops of all kinds.

In 1505, a fleet under the command of Don Laurencio de Almeida, on his way to the Maldives took refuge from inclement weather conditions in the Port of Galle. Since then Galle became a regular port of call for the Portuguese but no fortifications were built by them till 1588. Until then the only construction they undertook was a Franciscan Chapel in 1543. The earliest fortifications consisted of a wall with three bastions facing the land and a palisade facing the sea. The Portuguese occupied the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka from 1505 to 1640.

In 1640, an armada of 12 Dutch ships and 2000 men attacked the Portuguese Fort of Galle. After a short but fierce battle, they breached the fortifications and rested control of the Galle Fort. Many of the Portuguese were taken in as prisoners-of-war. By this time, many Western Nations were vying for supremacy of the sea and this prompted the Dutch to strengthen the fortifications both from land and sea. During their occupation of Sri Lankan Maritime Provinces from 1640 to 1796, the Dutch built 36 fortifications and Galle was one of the major developments during this period. Inside the fortifications was a well planned administrative centre with all key elements necessary for a fully fledged city.

In 1796, the Dutch surrendered the Fort to the British, but Galle continued to retain its importance as a shipping centre. With the enlargement of the Colombo harbour in the early part of the twentieth century, Galle lost its importance as a national seaport but took the role of being the administrative and legal centre of the South, and continues in this role to date. It is of significance to note that the British did not wantonly destroy the buildings of the previous era. They replaced the buildings that they could not use but continued the use of Dutch period buildings if there was a use for them. This was in sharp contrast to the Dutch practice of wanton destruction of the buildings of the yesteryear and replaced with their own. As a result, there are many examples of Dutch and British period buildings in the country but not many from the Portuguese era have survived.

Modern Recovery of Galle Fort

The modern recovery of the Fort was started in 1940 with a private members bill being presented in the State Council. With this Bill, the protection of this Fort became the responsibility of the Department of Archaeology, under the Antiquities Ordinance. The Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946 covered all development in urban areas but did not have the weightage to counter unsympathetic development around the historic sites. The Urban Development Authority Law formed as an appendage to the Town and country Planning Ordinance only managed to expedite the ruination of historic properties. The sites under the Department of Archaeology were under constant pressure from unsympathetic developments and to overcome this setback, an amendment was brought about in the middle of the 20th century to introduce a buffer zone of 400 yards from the boundaries of the listed cultural property. This piece of legislation was brought about long before the World Heritage Centre introduced a buffer zone as a compulsory element in their listing procedures.

It was extremely difficult for the Department of Archaeology to maintain its vigilance in an area of this magnitude, and with pressures from an unsympathetic private and state sector, the site was fast deteriorating. In the eighties the Department with assistance from conservators, architects, archaeologists, historians and friends of the historic properties formed a united front for a wider recognition of the Galle Fort. It is as a part of this agitation that the same group came to the forefront to seek World Heritage recognition to this site in 1988. The result of this huge public awareness campaign was the enactment of the Galle Heritage Foundation Act in Parliament. A unique feature of the Act was that all stakeholders and professional bodies as well as the representatives from residents and other interested parties were active representatives of the Foundation formed to ‘... *promote the preservation conservation and development of the Galle Fort ...*’ It was also a Foundation with wide powers to even own and possess and even dispose of properties within the subject area.

The first Development Plan was drawn by the Department of Archaeology in 1992. This was an extremely valuable document in that it included the measured drawings of all historically important buildings inside the Fort as well as the streetscapes. Unfortunately, the proposals in the document could not be implemented because of lack of cooperation from other stakeholders. The meagre facilities available for implementation of such a plan was inadequate and the Galle Heritage Foundation had not settled down to fulfil its role as an implementing agency. In December 1998, the ICOMOS Monitoring Mission that visited Galle was quite critical of the progress on site even though the logistics in place were quite adequate.

It was in the late nineties that ICOMOS Sri Lanka started agitating with both the Department of Archaeology and the Urban Development Authority to work out a formula to preserve this site. In the meantime, the Netherlands Government was showing interest in assisting the Sri Lankans in the underwater explorations of shipwrecks in the Galle harbour. As a part of the request for recognition of a plan of action for Galle Fort, ICOMOS Sri Lanka prepared a Development Plan and this was approved by all state authorities as well as the ICOMOS Monitoring Mission of 2002.

Physical Characteristics of the Fort

The fortified area is surrounded by massive ramparts around 2.4 km. round. As built during the Dutch Period, it had 10 bastions as against the three during the Portuguese era. Of these, the three facing the land were the highest and

the strongest. The ramparts were made out of raised earthworks fortified by walls made out of granite, and parapets with watchtowers in the shape of pepper pots. The original Fort had only one entrance facing the harbour, but the British introduced a second gateway facing the present Central Business District after filling the 'wet ditch'.

The two warehouses on either side of the original entrance were used for storage of cinnamon and other trade products. These were large and roomy. The roads were narrow and the houses gabled with stoeps or verandas, lofty ceilings and massive pillars, carved wooden doors and windows with armorial bearings. The courtyards were to the rear. The hospital, powder magazines, the Governor's House, administrative buildings and churches were built within the fortifications so that it was a well-contented community that lived within the walled city. In addition, there was a remarkable sea water borne sewerage system that used the high tide to flush the lines. The sewers ran about 2-4 metres below the ground level. Over the years, the sea has receded in some places but the tide continues to run in and out.

The Fort was a highly residential city with 83% of the land used for housing. Most of the occupants were the Dutch East India Company staff or Dutch Burghers drawn from Germany, Sweden, France or Belgium but subjects of the United Provinces of Holland and spoke Dutch. The moors and the chettiers were allowed to reside inside the Fort on condition that they cleaned the moats and carried out other menial services.

Today, the land use pattern has changed dramatically. Various state agencies own and occupy 40% of the land whilst only 10% remain as open space. Around 700 housing units occupy 35% of the land inside the Fort whilst the balance is used for commercial purposes. The state departments and the commercial houses moved in to the Fort after the British take over and when the port lost its importance. This trend continued until the 2002 Development Plan.

The Development Plans of 2002

Public interest in the conservation of historic places is today widespread and growing. The increasing pace of urban change has almost ironically focussed public attention on the nation's architectural heritage and is forcing unprecedented pressures. Perhaps in a fast moving world, there is some deep-felt social re-assurance in the historical continuity of ancient towns. But these towns, the physical expression of much of our civilised history, are highly sensitive to change. Gone is the social and economic system that gave birth to such highly successful urban growth centres and without this

background, they cannot always adapt to the harsh realities of modern urbanism. Many historic sites have perished in their endeavours. The 2002 proposal was an attempt to help the sustenance of the built heritage and the socio-economic balance inside the Galle Fort by encouraging controlled development activity.

The 2002 Development Plan consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of the description of the site, its importance and the identification of the issues that need to be addressed in the Development Plan. Some of the more important issues that came up during the study are as follows:

- Absence of Public Awareness of the importance of this World Heritage Site.
- Many authorities were handling different aspects of the development proposals and these agencies gave out conflicting signals.
- The land use pattern had been developed over the years without any established guidelines and hence was in conflict with the accepted norms in the development of historic areas.
- There has been no improvement of the social infrastructure for the inhabitants and this was having a demoralising affect on the people.
- The removal of solid waste had always been a problem in Galle and the area within the Fort was no exception.
- There were many other environmental issues that were affecting the lives within – the belching of vehicles; damaging the coral reef; pollution caused by the presence of the abattoir within the buffer zone and the absence of basic amenities.
- Absence of a policy on landscapes and the treatment of the streetscapes.
- Lack of vehicular parking facilities and the conflict of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- The power cables and the telecommunication wires were running overhead thereby causing loss of amenity values in the historic areas.
- The host community being kept out of all tourism activities, thereby creating an unsavoury atmosphere towards the development of the industry.

The second part consisted of the Development Proposals providing detailed analysis of the implementation structure towards a positive strategy:

- Apply to UNESCO to extend the boundaries of the World Heritage Site to include the ancient harbour and the natural reserve across the seas – the Rumassala hillock.
- Development Strategies for the area and the buffer zone to include zoning; management plans for the built heritage; environment management plan; housing and social infrastructure; Physical and economic

infrastructure including the identification of alternative uses for existing buildings and a policy for infill development depicting the 'spirit of the age'.

- Enhancement of the tourism potential of not only the cultural site within the fortifications but also taking into account other assets in the District. A key issue on this was the emphasis on passing the advantages, both monetary and social, to the host community.
- Means and methods of enhancing public awareness including the participation of school children in the process.
- Guidelines for would be developers and those who intend carrying out modifications to the existing building stock. It was proposed that the planning committee of the Municipality/Urban Development Authority be re-constituted to include professional conservators through the Galle Heritage Foundation.
- Means and methods of encouraging the owners/occupiers to maintain their buildings by a system of continuous professional development within the region and monetary assistance.
- As a part of creating public awareness, the proposal went on to identify some priority projects that could be implemented to enhance the amenity values.
- Development Controls of the buffer zone to provide an environment conducive to the historic site beyond. This included the relocation of the international cricket stadium to a location where they could improve the necessary infrastructure facilities.
- Augment the existing environmental infrastructure to improve the quality of life of those who live within the city.

The Issues that came up in the Application of 2002 Development Plan

With the approval of the 2002 Development Plan, there was much hope that at last Galle Fort could be conserved as a model site of an urban historic area. The Legislators were advised and the Gall Heritage Foundation assumed its role as the implementation authority. In the meantime, the Central Cultural Fund was finishing their work in the other World Heritage sites at Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya and was entrusted as the implementation arm of the Department of Archaeology for Galle. The Netherlands Government came forward to improve on the marine archaeology laboratory and the training of divers with a view to conservation and investigation of the VOC ship Avondster. In addition the Dutch Cultural Fund began the conservation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle, under their guidance and supervision from the Cultural triangle.

Since the approval of the 2002 Development Plan there were many positive signs for the preservation of the unique example. There were also the minuses that came with the awareness programme carried out. However, Sri Lanka managed to overcome many of the minuses and managed to forge forward the programme they set out to, sometimes overcoming many a stiff hurdle. Since the 2002 Plan was to be absorbed in to the Structure Plan for Galle, things were promising that we could implement a plan that would benefit this historic site, and that was before the tsunami struck. Some of the positive factors included:

- Regularising the guidelines as a draft form and creating a public awareness on the said document. There were regular Planning Committee meetings to encourage conservation of the building stock.
- The Galle Heritage Foundation became an active member for the conservation of the Fort. Through this institution the government of the day began to show interest in the work being carried out by the Foundation.
- The schools around the Fort started their Heritage Societies and through these societies, developed public awareness.
- A policy decision was taken to relocate all government buildings outside the Fort and 26 such offices were moved out within this period. There were many refusals for the government offices to expand within this area, thus encouraging them to find alternative locations.
- Some of the unacceptable private sector establishments such as garment factories were moved out.
- A traffic regulatory plan came in to force.
- The warehouse complex at the entrance to the Fort was designed as a Visitor Centre and a Maritime History Museum. The work is under way.
- The site is talked of as a venue for Regional Training Centre for Maritime Archaeology, a project sponsored by the UNESCO.
- The former Dutch Hospital (later used as the Divisional Secretariat) is being designed to have regional centre for aesthetics to preserve the regional traditional arts, crafts, dances, music, etc.
- The citizen's committees became active and watchful outside the political scene.
- Developers began to show interest in developing infrastructure facilities such as underground telecom and electricity cables within the area.
- The Maritime Archaeology Unit was developed with laboratory facilities and the annual general meeting of ICUCH was held in Galle in 2003.
- There were many discussions with authorities to identify the historic sites in the City of Galle, particularly those within the Central Business District

and develop a conservation policy for these as a part of the Galle Structure Plan.

As if to counteract these positive factors, there were many issues that came up. Some of the main issues are as follows:

- There was an increased demand for foreigners to buy property inside the Fort with a view to gentrification of the area. This would have created an imbalance in the social structure that was in place when this site was listed.
- There were increased political pressures to disrupt the smooth functioning of the planning committees for selfish reasons.
- The Dutch Reformed Church was ‘conserved’ with assistance from the Dutch Government. But this action destroyed the authenticity of the building because it was more restoration than conservation. Plaster rendering, floor tiling, roof timbers, ceilings were all replaced. ICOMOS Sri Lanka’s appeals on this fell on deaf ears. It was plastic surgery at its best to make a 100 year old grand mother to look like an 18 year old virgin.
- There were pressures from the authorities to resist the official recognition of special regulations.
- The officials could not introduce a system of patrolling and monitoring construction activities and hence there were still some unauthorised construction going on, specially during the week-ends.
- There were increased pressures from all and sundry for construction work in the buffer zone and there was a general reluctance from the authorities to stop such activity or press charges.

The Damage to the Fort and its Environment due to Tsunami 26 / 12

On the 26th of December disaster struck the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka and other South and South Asian countries. Within a matter of two hours hundreds of thousands were killed, injured or displaced, lives disrupted, homes destroyed. Many cultural sites of these communities were damaged or destroyed. We mourned the death of thousands of fellow Sri Lankans and people of neighbouring countries as well as the visitors from faraway countries. We were also taking stock of the cultural properties. On this subject, I would be failing in my duty if I do not thank the ICOMOS family that stood by us to commiserate on our losses. I regret I cannot thank them individually but we were indeed touched with the solidarity shown to us.

The angry sea waters came in to the Fort from three directions – From the main entrance facing the harbour, the second entrance facing the city and the Cricket Stadium and

over the ramparts in Akersloot Bastion. At first, on a superficial study there was not much damage visible on this Heritage Site. But once the dust settled and the debris removed, the damage was obvious.

- The ramparts wall has been damaged in more than one place and we fear that there would have been some movement in the foundations, too. There was a study carried out by Sri Lanka ICOMOS on the ramparts in 2003 and this was being looked at by the Department of Archaeology when disaster struck. There is now an urgent need to re-open this issue.
- The Maritime Archaeology Laboratory was destroyed and some of the artefacts were reclaimed by the sea.
- The underground sewer line caved in, in two places.
- There was no serious damage to the buildings inside but minor damage to the carpentry and joinery in the Court House and the Dutch hospital is visible.
- Many unauthorised buildings in the buffer zone were destroyed.
- The International Cricket Stadium was devastated and there were serious structural failures in the unauthorised pavilion that was built a few years ago. It is to be noted that a plan to develop a six storied press centre/pavilion 24m high was proposed by Sri Lanka Cricket and was rejected by the Planning Committee on 24th December, just two days before the tsunami.
- There was much damage to the old city of Galle outside the Fort. There were many inquiries on the well being of the World Heritage Site, but none about the old city. It should be noted that this is also a part of our heritage and that as is common in most countries, all attention is focussed on the World Heritage Site thus neglecting the less important sites. If this trend continues, the so called less important site will be lost forever.

Development Plans after Tsunami 26 / 12

The preparation of Redevelopment Plans for Galle got under way within a month of the disaster. It was fortunate for us, conservators, that two senior personnel involved in the initial blue print stage were members of ICOMOS Sri Lanka. Thus it was decided that the 2002 Development Plan would be a part of the new proposals, and the political obstacles to clear unauthorised construction were overcome with the new coastal buffer zone controls which were introduced. The 100 metre freeze from the coast brought fresh hope to provide the vista that conservators had always planned for the Fort. The old quarter of the city was identified for conservation and general upgrading. The old fish market just outside the Fort was completely demolished but other buildings such as the vegetable market survived, with minor damage.

The maritime archaeology laboratory was to be rebuilt with overseas assistance. But regrettably instead of using the funds for a permanent home in building already assigned for the purpose, the Dutch and Sri Lankan 'Experts' picked on a temporary site on the Akersloot Bastion right next to the damaged wall with no approvals from the planning committee and thereby contravening the Antiquities Ordinance as well as the Urban Development Law, with the guilty party being the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. This was overlooked by the World Heritage Centre Mission that came to Sri Lanka on a fact finding mission.

A site has been found for the International Cricket Stadium, along with facilities for other sports activities. The government has already given their approval to the new development proposals and it is hoped that there will be continuity in the policy of the state on this. The grounds are to be converted to the esplanade that it was, before international cricket was played and handed to the people for their leisure activities. It is to be used as the lung in the city of Galle and a suitable forecourt for the majestic ramparts.

The demand for housing within the Fort has increased since the tsunami because of the comparative safety that was provided by the rampart walls and hence the sales of the lands have ceased. People who own the property want to keep them and improve their stock with the knowledge that the quality of life will improve within the fortifications.

Assistance for Implementation of the Development Plan

As a developing nation, we always look for assistance to implement the grandiose plans we develop in the preservation of our cultural heritage. The government has little funds to be spent on this aspect because there are more pressing issues in the country such as the provision of housing, employment, education and medical facilities to the masses. In this instance, we are not seeking to address the world community with a begging bowl but in a more sustainable way. Monetary assistance need not be hand outs but should be in the form of capacity building and asset development for enhanced tourism promotion and other activities on a socio-cultural background so that there is a gain for the host community. The donor should also benefit from a partnership of this nature.

More important for Sri Lankan conservation scene at this stage is the voice of encouragement and moral support on the activities of conservators in Sri Lanka. We thought we had a glorious opportunity on this when we were told that the World Heritage Centre was visiting Sri Lanka to assess

the tsunami damage to cultural property. We thought that they would take the trouble to meet the planners involved in the preparation of development proposals for Galle, the Galle Heritage Foundation and ICOMOS Sri Lanka. Unfortunately they met only the government officials from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage during the deliberations and hence the report they prepared is not conclusive. We would in future like to see the participation of all stakeholders in these visits so that the authoritative reports they are expected to compile should be more comprehensive. We all know, that in most countries, the vision of the salaried officials of the state is not always what is best for the country and its cultural heritage and that the public and private sector participation in these activities should be encouraged.

Conclusion

All matters related to the historic city and the area immediately surrounding the Fort rests on the Department of Archaeology and the Urban Development Authority. Being a living settlement of around 700 houses alone, this historic site cannot be frozen in order to preserve. There should be an articulated Master Plan to guide the sympathetic development within the Historic Area as well as in the buffer zone and a strong authority to implement and execute such guidelines. The plans should not be the dream of a romanticist but a practical socio-cultural solution developed on a sound economic background. In a Sri Lankan experience, the authority is in place as in the case of the Galle Heritage Foundation, but what is required is the moral support from all to have the courage to progress. Tsunami 26/12 has given us a fresh opportunity and we intend accepting it with both hands.

Abstract

Galle Fort was inscribed in the World Heritage List in December 1988 under the criterion IV. Galle gained its importance in the yesteryears as a strategic location in the main sea routes that interested many maritime powers and trading nations. The historic importance is the legacy that some of these nations left behind as a mutual heritage in a country that had its own vernacular architecture and engineering skills developed to a high degree.

There have been many attempts by the authorities to conserve this monument since 1940. They included not only the legislation brought about under the Antiquities Ordinance but also Planning Legislation that covered Housing and Town Improvement Ordinance. In contrast there were the others with self-interests to earn high monetary stakes thereby over exploiting the site. This included the landowners, the foreign buyers who were trying to gentrify the area and the politicians who had their own vote catching agendas.

There was a conservation and development plan in place for Galle Fort since 2001 and this was operative when the 26/12 Tsunami devastation took place. Water from the tidal waves that followed came inside the Fort not only from the western front directly from the sea but also from the land side as the receding waters took its toll. Even though at a first glance there was not much damage to be noticed, a closer look at the monument reveals some serious concerns on the safety of the structure.

This paper sets out to discuss the attempts by the island nation in planning for the conservation and development of this World Heritage Site whilst still prioritising the rehabilitation of the lives and property of those who survived the terrible ordeal.

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Fig.1 Aerial View of Galle Fort