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## **Who are the custodians of the spirit of Blenheim?**

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**Abstract.** Insofar as the spirit of Blenheim can be confined within the selection criteria entitling the site to be included on the World Heritage List, the integrated management plan of 2007, provides a framework within which different ways of safeguarding such a spirit may be studied. The plan incorporates national and world heritage site features, the latter creating the need to build on the principle of cultural sustainability. Thus the post selection values of care and management may be scrutinized in relation to the intangible cultural heritage. Although local authorities undertake to recognize the status of world heritage sites, management plans are not statutory documents in the United Kingdom. The main question resolved therefore, through documentary analysis, is that on-going rivalries are beneficial for, rather than inimical to, safeguarding the spirit of this place in Oxfordshire, United Kingdom.

### Introduction.

The question posed arises from continuing debate about the historical and memorial approaches to heritage (Lowenthal, 1985}. The spirit of place may be seen as an inherent quality of a continuum from tangible to intangible cultural heritage. Indeed the historians of the late twentieth century began to study the past in terms of landscape and nation, for example in the context of dynamics such as

place.(Merriman, 1996. Plumb, 1973). Typically this involved an historical understanding of the construction or invention of cultural heritage in the Western imagination. This understanding came to be expressed by material objectification and preservation of the vestiges of history.

Addressing the question of custodianship within the framework of the World Heritage movement, a perceived imbalance was detected in the 1980's and a global strategy outlined in 1994. The western Eurocentric imagination however, remains a vital element within the contemporary global context. This westernized cultural heritage discourse has a Eurocentric base. Nowhere is this more evident than at Blenheim Palace. To begin with the very word Blenheim has to be distinguished in terms of place. The eighteenth century Palace and Park to which the word refers is set in Oxfordshire, England. The word derives from Blindheim, a Bavarian village around and in which the Battle of Blenheim was fought in 1704. This evolution highlights a distinction between space and place(Bender, 2002) and between place and landscape. Thus the places of Blindheim and Blenheim Palace and Park contribute to a meaning of space. Similarly, Blenheim Palace and Park is a named locale or place within a wider landscape of named places.

#### The Parameters.

By confining the spirit of Blenheim within the criteria for inscription on UNESCO's world heritage list a useful perspective is gained into different approaches to conservation. These approaches range from those of the State Party to those of the world heritage committee on cultural heritage. The promoters of a cultural property for inclusion on the world heritage list must demonstrate that the site is of outstanding universal value. This is measured against a number of criteria that relate to the significance of the property. The convention sets out the criteria and divides the heritage sites into cultural and natural. There are six criteria for cultural sites. The criteria provide a framework for assessing the significance of a site and the values associated with it. The criteria under which Blenheim was initially nominated were paragraphs i ii and vi. The site was eventually inscribed under ii and iv. Interestingly, it is paragraph vi that addresses intangible values directly and the selection of indicators for intangible matters, such as paintings, for example, is demanding. The perception of value varies enormously depending on the cultural traditions of the observer.

There is even variation within the European tradition. The Saloon at Blenheim Palace was painted by Louis Laguerre in 1719. In addition to panels depicting representatives from the continents of the globe, the doorcases are emblazoned with the double-headed eagle Hapsburg crest. After the Battle of Blenheim, not only did

Queen Anne gave John Churchill the estate of Woodstock but the Holy Roman Emperor made him a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. The implications flowing from this tangible indicator of an intangible European nationalism are significant.

A comparable translation of spirit is seen in the case of a watercolour, painted by Sir Winston Churchill and hanging in the Churchill Exhibition in the Palace. His painting of 1948 depicts one of the tapestries illustrating the Siege of Bouchain (Churchill, 1963). The siege was the First Duke of Marlborough's final engagement in the War of the Spanish Succession. Following the siege and the subsequent peace treaty Marlborough lost power when the Whig Party fell. Sir Winston Churchill painting over two hundred years later identified with his ancestor. He was painting at Blenheim Palace having lost political power in the first post World War II election. Attempts to standardize interpretation of such indicators of intangible heritage would detract from the intrinsic value of such aspects of the spirit of place.

As regards paragraphs ii and iv of the UNESCO criteria, paragraph ii states that the site must exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within an area of the world, or development in architecture, monumental arts, or town planning and landscape design. By their rejection of the French models of classicism, the palace and the park illustrate the beginnings of the English romantic movement which was characterized by the eclecticism of its inspiration, its return to national sources and its love of nature. The influence of Blenheim on the architecture and organisation of space in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries extended throughout England and abroad. It is within the definition of criterion ii that the reality of safeguarding the spirit of the palace and the park is analysed.

It is convenient to examine the palace and then its setting, the park, a former Royal hunting ground. While the palace was intended as a permanent memorial to John Churchill's [first Duke of Marlborough's] victory at Blenheim, the landscaped design of the park is a testament to one of his descendants, the fourth Duke and Lancelot Brown's landscape design. The palace and its setting evoke the spirit of an age of successive monarchs from Queen Anne to King George III. The period was characterized by the growth of nation states, colonial expansion, and the gradual development of parliamentary democracy. Queen Anne gave John Churchill the Park and the means to build the palace in 1704. The palace erected there was an expression of military power, as the victory it commemorated was regarded as being responsible for limiting King Louis XIV's dictatorial power in Europe. It is more than an expression of military dominance; it is a work of art; an intended monument. The building has in fact acquired a revered status. The extraordinary piece of architecture associated with the first Duke's victories represents a symbol of cultural identity; an intangible value in manifestly tangible form. Furthermore, the eighteenth century Whig party aspired to civil and political liberty. Vanburgh and Hawksmoor intended to express this Whig ideal in the built form. There is a distinct architectural style, namely, a heavy massing of the building with a romantic silhouette along with an advance and recession of forms. A unique design was produced from Italian Renaissance, English medieval and Elizabethan sources. The resultant celebration of European Baroque power is overlain by the military symbolism of Vanburgh's design.

As regards the core area of the park, Lancelot Brown was unrivalled in the realm of landscape design. He created the English landscape style from foundations laid by William Kent; a style which spread beyond the United Kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Part of Blenheim's universal significance is the way this style combines Brown's devices, for example the lake system, with

the original landscape setting of the palace. In short, Brown successfully absorbed the medieval [ for example ancient oaks] and early eighteenth century features.

### The Management Plan.

The spirit or sense of place of this site predates the palace's construction and is safeguarded by the provisions of a management plan , as the plan adequately addresses the concerns of a large number of stakeholders at the site. Although the management plan was implemented as a result of requirements arising from the site's world heritage site status, its provisions include those applicable to Blenheim as a conditionally exempt estate for the purposes of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The management plan , like a conservation plan, focuses on the conservation value of the site. It is important that the conservation of the value is the principal purpose of the plan. However the plan has to be more embracing in developing overall policies not just for the conservation of the site but also for its sustainable use and development. There has to be a balance between access, the interests of the local community, sustainable economic uses and conservation. Clearly, safeguarding the spirit of the place is also synonymous with the application of the principle of sustainability.

While the world heritage site features created the original need to build on the principle of cultural sustainability, sustainable values characterize the management of the conditionally exempt estate as well.[Historic Land Management.2006]. The values identified in the management plan's statement of significance are multiple.. Cultural value is nevertheless clearly defined. However the cultural value does vary slightly between the national heritage site boundaries and the confines of the world heritage site. Of the plan's objectives therefore, 1a, for example, deals with the palace and the park and the requirements of undertakings for conditionally exempt estates. Objective 1b , on the other hand, deals with maintaining, conserving and enhancing the outstanding universal value of the world heritage site. Outstanding universal value [or international significance]is comprised of cultural, historic and aesthetic elements in the management plan. The spirit of the place as encapsulated in the cultural values is identifiable in the palace and the park.

The site is privately owned and it is John Spencer Churchill,the eleventh Duke of Marlborough and the Trustees who direct and foster continued development of the estate. As a result, one of the key management objectives is to provide a home for the Duke of Marlborough while also providing a visitor attraction in a rural setting. Conservation of the property on the heritage estate can only be achieved if Blenheim remains a viable business entity and the use and enjoyment of the property by the family is a key element in the successful conservation of the heritage quality of Blenheim. This heritage quality includes those elements defined by the world heritage convention, which combine to produce the spirit of the palace and the park.

Although the whole of the world heritage site is owned and managed by Blenheim Estates, who have primary responsibility for its management, Blenheim Estates does operate within national planning legislation as delivered by the West Oxfordshire District . Nature England advises on the site's areas of special scientific interest and on issues relating to the national heritage landscape The historic buildings inspector at English Heritage together with the local planning authority conservation officer advise on the management and conservation of buildings. The stakeholders include local communities, specialists and local economic interests as well as government agencies and local authorities. All these interests contribute to the safeguarding of a

spirit of place, which primarily exemplifies the ideals of the eighteenth century. The pre- and post-eighteenth values contributing to the spirit of place are less clearly identifiable. For example, only a small monument marks the site of the original Royal building in the grounds. Furthermore the grave of Sir Winston Churchill lies outside the perimeter wall at Bladon, several miles from the Palace chapel.

As regards the eighteenth century however the intangible cultural values protected by the plan are clearly translated to the tangible built form and the landscaping of the park. Hence the palace represents a permanent memorial to the first Duke of Marlborough's victory, while the landscaped design of the park is a testament to one of his descendant's [the fourth Duke] association with Lancelot Brown's landscape design. The outstanding universal value [or international significance] of the palace and the park can be dated from 1704 when Queen Anne gave John Churchill the Royal property at Woodstock.. Blenheim is an intended monument. Marlborough and his architects, Vanburgh and Hawksmoor intended the building to be a permanent memorial.. The palace and the park and the associated buildings and statutory ultimately express a celebration of British liberty. The extraordinary piece of architecture is thus a symbol of cultural identity, an identifiable cultural value. More specifically, Vanburgh and Hawksmoor intended to express the Whig ideal of civil and political liberty in built form. Similarly the spirit of the English romantic movement can be seen in the whole landscape design of the park. There is an overlap inasmuch as the ensemble of buildings in the park derive from Hawksmoor and Vanburgh as well as from Lancelot Brown's contemporary, William Chambers.

The built environment of the site demands that the conservation of these values are expressed in the objectives of the plan, which are in turn translated into a plan of action. The objective of cultural sustainability motivates both Blenheim Estates and the Trustees. It is expressed as an objective for the world heritage site as well as for the conditionally exempt estate. Thus objective three is to ensure that all uses, activities and developments within the world heritage site and the national heritage landscape be undertaken in a sustainable manner and to the highest possible standards. Hence the cultural qualities outlined, which give Blenheim its outstanding universal value have to be considered in relation to any management actions which affect them in order to benefit the present generation and to pass these cultural values on to future generations. An example from the Action Plan is that all works should be sustainable, of the highest standards of design, relate well to their setting and use local materials.

Blenheim Palace was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987. Six years later the newly created UNESCO world heritage centre and its advisory bodies considered the question of improving monitoring at world heritage sites. The central question was and is the impact of time and circumstance on the heritage values defined in the inscription process.[UNESCO criteria a[i] and [iv] ] .In this as with other aspects of conservation a large number of stakeholders proves to be advantageous. The following definitions illustrate the links between the national heritage landscape and the world heritage site. Thus the national heritage landscape is designated as part of the United Kingdom's national heritage primarily because the palace is of outstanding historic and architectural interest, as is its setting, which is essential for the protection of the building. While English Heritage advise the Department of Culture Media and Sport on the exempt estate, ICOMOS is the main adviser for the world heritage site, which is defined as the palace[representing the beginning of a new style of architecture]set in a park, which is a work of landscape art

in its own right.

## Conclusion.

It is concluded that drawing a distinction between a conservation plan and a management plan is one way in which to illustrate how multiple interests are beneficial to safeguarding the spirit of place. The Department of Culture, Media, and Sport is the government department responsible for the application of the convention. DCMS has two principal sources of advice; the UK committee of ICOMOS provides an independent source of advice, while English Heritage advise DCMS on general matters and works directly with managers. Important stakeholders at local level include the owner and occupiers of the site, local businesses and the local community. Conservation and management plans are among the techniques whose objective is to define values in the historic environment in a way that can feed directly into the informed management of the site. Blenheim's management plan, therefore, by being used as a way of outlining and implementing measures needed to care for the site, is advantageously accommodating a large number of interests in order to, inter alia, safeguard a unique spirit of place.

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