

World Heritage Site Skogskyrkogården – the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm*

This Stockholm cemetery was created between 1915 and 1940 by two young architects, Asplund and Lewerentz, on the site of former gravel pits overgrown with pine trees. The design blends vegetation and architectural elements, taking advantage of irregularities in the site to create a landscape that is finely adapted to its function. It has had a profound influence in many countries of the world.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription: 1994

Agency responsible for site management:

Cemeteries Administration of the City of Stockholm

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria: C (ii), (iv)

Justification provided by the State Party: Asplund and Lewerentz's competitor entry for the Woodland Cemetery which was chosen over fiftyfive other entries, clearly stands out in its intense romantic naturalism. The winning scheme was the only one that turned the existing, essentially untouched Nordic forest on the site into the dominant experience. While civilized and wellgroomed English parks mixed with allées on axis, and informal and formal open areas were features typical of the other competitors, Asplund and Lewerentz evoked a much more primitive imagery. The intervention of footpaths, which meandered freely through the forest, was minimal. Graves were freely and informally to be laid among the existing wild forest. The interventions they allowed themselves, such as the moulding of the two old gravel pits and the ordering of the area surrounding the main chapel, became all the more charged because they existed hidden within and in contrast to the raw and untouched forest surrounding them. This contrast is well captured in their as yet romantic competition sketches.

It is the evocation of raw Nordic wilderness that constitutes a radical departure in landscape architecture, not to speak of cemetery layout at this time. Asplund and Lewerentz's sources were not high architecture or landscape planning, but rather medieval and ancient Nordic vernacular burial archetypes. Freely mixed in were elements from the Mediterranean and antiquity whose effects are again heightened by becoming isolated elements in the Nordic forest.

Thus it is the shift to a more Nordic, more primitive and untamed context that makes Asplund and Lewerentz's scheme new, and the fact that the landscape was a cemetery and not a royal pleasure park lent it authenticity. The architects found a receptive audience in the jury, whose key members were Ragnar Östberg and Lars Israel Wahlman,

two of Sweden's leading national romantic architects. The interest in the raw Nordic landscape, while a new phenomenon in landscape architecture and relatively new among architects, was widespread in the national romantic culture of Sweden from the 1890s onward. The writings and poetry of Verner von Heidenstam celebrate the Nordic landscape as well as the primitive vernacular building culture that was an integral part of it. Heidenstam, who saw the intimate and inseparable connection between building and landscape, also spoke of the soul of, and the emotional content of, landscapes and buildings. These concepts were to be central to the idea of the cemetery.

While the scheme draws on Pompeii's Via Sepulchra and other elements from antiquity, it is the primitive Nordic landscape and archaic Nordic burial archetypes that dominate. Thus Asplund and Lewerentz's scheme also stands in contrast to a popular motif in continental European cemetery design at the turn of the century which drew inspiration from the symbolist paintings of Arnold Böcklin, especially his famous "Island of the Dead." Böcklin's landscapes, with their classical fragments and their enigmatic figures, evoke a sense of decadence and an undertone of the sinister. That the jury preferred the northern romantic scheme of Asplund and Lewerentz to one pursuing Böcklin's motifs, is probably a good indication of the different stage in cultural time Scandinavia found itself vis-à-vis the rest of Europe.

The Woodland Chapel, designed and built in the years 1918–20, represents both intensification and a formal disciplining of the romantic naturalism of the competition scheme. The increasing severity and discipline reflect Asplund's developing interest in classicism and classical composition methods. At the point of departure for the chapel, which is set in a grove of mature fir trees surrounded by a wall, is an indigenous vernacular landscape/building type, the country church surrounded by a walled graveyard overgrown with fir trees. Thus, while the plan and major elements are classical, Asplund retains important roots in the vernacular.

Building and surrounding landscape are conceived as an integral whole. One cannot separate the chapel from the carefully chosen setting, or it would lose much of its meaning and resonance. Memory of an archetype and its emotional resonance is of key importance here. But Asplund abstracts, transforms, and intensifies the experience of the original. Not only does the black shingle wooden roof evoke the vernacular country church, but by a subtle shift in its proportioning and by isolating it aloft on Tuscan columns, it becomes, seen frontally, a primitive wooden pyramid levitated amid the fir trees. An example of architecture mimick-



UNESCO World Heritage Site Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm 2009 (Photo: Holger Ellgaard, wikimedia Commons)

ing nature, the pyramidal roof echoes the slope of the tree branches while the columns echo the trunks.

As the number of cremations increased steadily and the previous crematory of the Sandsborg cemetery soon became too small, the Cemetery Board commissioned Professor Asplund to draw up a proposal for a new building. According to the programme the scheme consisted of three different chapels with common incinerators, mortuaries and other necessary localities. In front of the biggest chapel the architect had drawn a memorial hall where he planned to place a piece of sculpture called the Resurrection by John Lindqvist. Closely connected with this hall was a place for open air ceremonies intended for funerals with many attendants.

Construction started in 1937 and three years afterwards the consecration took place. One of the main conditions for the building project was that it should be possible to have funerals going on in all the chapels at the same time, the total capacity of the incinerators amounted to five cremations per chapel per day. This centralization had many economic and technical advantages, but it also had certain disadvantages such as the mixing of different funeral groups and the transmission of sound. The architect solved these problems by building separate chapels with enclosed gardens between them. It was, however, not only practical but also aesthetic motives which made him break up the facades. It enabled him to take full advantage of the natural conditions of the landscape. The soft slope was stressed by the gently descending height of the buildings towards the open air columbarium and the head entrance. The very position of the site seemed to make the traditional east-west orientation necessary, but at the same time the architect also gained a

beautiful view of the open horizon. Because of the topographic character of the building site a lower part could be added to the back of the chapels, and this basement was utilized for incinerators and other technical equipment.

The interior architecture has been based in the principle that the coffin and not the altar or the decoration in the background has to be the chief object of the room. Thus the catafalque has been made the central point round which the mourners can gather.

Instead of surrounding the coffin with flowers, as is usually done, it has been regarded more beautiful to spread out the wreaths between the catafalque and the back wall, where they are hung either on stands which can be pulled out of the floor or on nails in the side walls.

The organ lofts have been removed to the background and placed next to the back wall. The detached and projecting organs suspended above these organ lofts expose their pipes and windchests to the view, partly for acoustic reasons, partly and above all because of the decorative effect. The big chapel, called the Chapel of the Holy Cross, and the monumental hall in front of it are separated only by an 18 m. broad door which can be lowered and raised. At funerals with many attendants the door is lowered and the hall becomes part of the chapel.

Near the hall is a pond with water lilies and other water plants. On the other side of this pond is the open space for outdoors ceremonies. North of the chapels is the columbarium. The urns are kept either in niches in the walls or in graves.

A competition open only to Swedish artists, for the decoration of the main chapel was authorized by the City Council in 1937. A jury composed of the architect, members of

the Board and representatives of modern Scandinavian art was appointed. At the same time the Cemetery Board also invited the artists to deliver proposals for the decoration of the smaller chapels to this jury. The first prize in the competition was awarded to the painter Sven Erixon for his fresco «Life-Death-Life» which was recommended by the jury for execution. The second prize-winner, Professor Otte Sköld, was requested to execute a mosaic work based on a proposal he had made for the Chapel of Hope. Concerning the Chapel of Faith, none of the delivered proposals was chosen, but in 1939 the sculptor Ivar Johnsson was entrusted with the task of decorating the wall behind the altar with a relief in stucco. The altar crucifix in the Chapel of the Holy Cross made of gilded silver, and the figure of Christ was modelled by John Lundqvist. The crucifix in the chapel of Hope was designed by Otte Sköld. In the chapel of Faith the crucifix has been cut out of onyx by Ivar Johnsson. The doors of the chapels are ornamented with pictures by the artist Bror Hjort.

There is an interlocking of architecture and nature via the extensive set of courtyards. By jumping scale, we may see the three chapels of the building, fronting on the landscape as they do, as side chapels to the main «cathedral space» of the open landscape itself. And in a reversal of an ancient metaphor developed in a number of other Asplund projects, the sky becomes the ceiling.

The forms of both natural and architectural elements take on symbolic meaning. The great earth mound recalls the archetypal Nordic burial mound, but also evokes a great earthen breast; the double symbolism appropriately echoing the Cremation Movement's coupling of death and rebirth. The main chapel, its organic shape suggesting both burial cave and womb, echoes the same symbolism. While the meditation grove and the loggia echo each other, they also provide a twoway directional force between earth and sky, symbolically a kind of communication system. The trees of the grove reach up towards the sky while the loggia with its inverted roof and impluvium, receiving the life-giving water from above, inflects towards the ground.

Formally the crematorium represents a head-tail organization with the static loggia acting as head, and the frontal walls of the small chapels together with the wall following the path constituting the subordinate tail. As a compositional device, this is a repeated theme in Asplund's work, from the winning competition scheme where the Path of the Cross was the winding tail leading to the chapel, the head. But, in addition to its semianthropomorphic quality, the Woodland Crematorium most clearly indicates another important feature of this organizational device. For here the combination of tail and head, wall and loggia, may also be seen as the combination of the vernacular (the wall) and the classical (the loggia). Thus we may see Asplund has successfully combining two separate traditions, the classical and the vernacular, of siting buildings in the landscape, a phenomenon that parallels their integration in his architecture. The buildings stand as a separate static element in the landscape in the manner of the classical tradition while at the same time are moored to and integrated with the landscape via the wall, in the manner of the vernacular tradition.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Qualities: Architects have always debated the problem of the relationship between architecture and the landscape within which it is located. During the present century the concept of architecture wholly integrated into its environment has been developed to a high degree by certain architects and designers. Skogskyrkogården is an outstanding example of the successful application of this principle. The chapels and other buildings there would lose much of their meaning if isolated from the landscape for which they were conceived. The Woodland Chapel is intimately integrated into its setting, whilst the impact of the later group of chapels is heightened by the use of their landscape as a background. In both cases the architecture has a quality of austerity which is appropriate to its function and does not compete with the landscape.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria i and ii:

Criterion i: Skogskyrkogården is an outstandingly successful example of a designed cultural landscape which blends landform and natural vegetation with architectural features to create a landscape that is ideally suited to its purpose as a cemetery.

Criterion ii: The creation of Asplund and Lewerentz at Skogskyrkogården established a new form of cemetery that has exerted a profound influence on cemetery design throughout the world.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1991): the Bureau deferred the examination of this nomination pending the results of a comparative study of this type of property.

Bureau (June 1993): the Bureau recommended that the inscription of this property be deferred until the results of a comparative study on cemeteries and that of a study on XXth century architecture to be undertaken by ICOMOS, are known. Furthermore, the Bureau considered that this property should also be evaluated as a cultural landscape.

Bureau (December 1994): The Bureau at its seventeenth session deferred this nomination until a comparative study on cemeteries and a study on XXth century architecture be undertaken by ICOMOS. Furthermore, the Bureau considered at that time that this property should also be evaluated as a cultural landscape. ICOMOS informed the Bureau that, as a result of a colloquium on cemeteries and consultations with expert groups, it had concluded that the cemetery of Skogskyrkogården is the most influential and best preserved of the 'forest cemeteries' and that it is an outstanding example of designed cultural landscape. ICOMOS, therefore, recommended inscription of this property under criteria (i) and (ii). The Bureau recommended that the World Heritage Committee inscribe the property under criteria (i) and (ii).

Session (1994): the Committee, in debating the universal value of this property, concluded that the merits of Skogskyrkogården lay in its qualities as an early-20th century landscape and architectural design adapted to a cemetery. The Committee in inscribing this site stressed the impor-

tance of explaining to the public the criteria for which it was accepted as a World Heritage cultural property.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately defines the outstanding universal value of he site
- Text proposed by State Party
- UNESCO official description of site should be improved. State Party has provided suggestion

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: not adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone has been defined
- The buffer zone with its legislation is however not quite adequate to protect the site

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained and the Service Building, designed by Asplund in 1923, was restored in 1997. The restoration increased the authenticity of the site, as the original shape and value was brought out and the building is once again in use
- Due to natural life cycle of vegetation, the pine trees are aging and decreasing in number. Numerous new pine trees must therefore be replanted and the authenticity of the original pine forest will diminish. Since 2000 is the Burial Fee, an income related fee for all Swedish residents, separated from the regular income taxes in Sweden. That means that the economic integrity has increased for Skogskyrkogården as the cemetery today is a more independent place with possibilities for the Cemeteries Administration to act on the basis of needs and conditions

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The Heritage Conservation Act (1988:950); Act of Burials (1990:1144); The Planning and Building Act (1987:10);The Environmental Code (1998:808)
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Religious use, visitors attraction with no entrance fee, urban-close park

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group: forum for information, consultation and regulation of the management of the site. No formal decisions are taken, but the representatives have the possibility to give their point of view
- Formally constituted
- Management under protective legislation
- Site manager with the responsibilities added to an existing job
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional; local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- Management plan is being implemented
- Implementation commenced: January 2005

- Very effective
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: The Cemeteries Administration of the City of Stockholm

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- The Burial Fee; Government Grant
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status through European Commission, Government Grant, Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 5
- Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:
- Good: management; visitor management
- Average: conservation; promotion; interpretation; education

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Funeral/burial services; memorial park management; building and landscape management; visitor management; conservation and restoration; architecture history

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 150,000 in 2003 – trend: increasing
- Visitor facilities: 5 chapels and information and management services; visitors center; guide; brochures; literature and information on the Internet; WC; car park and possibility to go by touring coaches in the area. Municipality buses operate in the cemetery in the weekends
- Tourism/visitor management plan: www.kyf.stockholm.se

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys. Unesco Associated School Project ASP
- Scientific studies and surveys are the basis for or at least support all activities at the World Heritage site

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising
- The Visitors Center at Skogskyrkogården has a permanent World Heritage exhibition and a bookstore where brochures are available and World Heritage books are for sale. An special event in December 2004 for the 10-years anniversary for the World Heritage site Skogskyrkogården
- Web site
- No local participation

Education, information and awareness building activities

- Skogskyrkogården joined the Unesco Associated School Project ASP in 1998. In cooperation with The Swedish National Commission for Unesco and an upper secondary school, research programmes and studies are conducted. A Swedish manual of The World Heritage Educational Resource Kit for Teachers: World Heritage in Young Hands, is elaborated

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)**Reactive monitoring reports**

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Restoration and conservation of the Mortuary at the Resurrection Chapel, the Woodland Crematory and its three chapels, the former Service Building renovated and turned in to a Visitors Center. The original Lewerentz chairs in the Resurrection Chapel were renovated and recovered; the windows of the Woodland Crematory and its three chapels were renovated; approximately 11,000 plants of pine have been planted at the cemetery; the shingled roof of the Woodland Chapel has been renovated and re-tared; renovation of the original Asplund chairs in the Woodland Chapel; a replica of the small sculpture “The Death Angel” made and put up on the roof of the Woodland Chapel. The original is kept in the archive of the Cemeteries Administration; lighting is put up outside the main entrance in order to increase the presentation, accessibility and safety of the site; reconstruction of lampposts at the Resurrection Chapel after an original lamppost by Lewerentz; facade marble plates at the Monumental Hall have been renovated
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, environmental pressure
- Specific issues if mentioned: one of the major problems at Woodland Cemetery is the replanting of the pine forest. The majority of the trees have now reached a high age and the number of pine trees is decreasing. One of the issues is how to re-create the characteristic “pillar hall of pine” at the cemetery. Modern demands for accessibility, safety and technical solutions could always be a threat to the integrity of the site. For example the accessibility for visitors by car and belonging parking places, more heavy machinery in the maintenance of the site, which require different pavement and more space. The Woodland Cemetery is located in an urban environment, which means that there is a risk with expansion and exploitation of the city in areas nearby the site

Actions taken

- An action plan is elaborated in 1995 by a consultant. The plan discusses among other thing the issues with the pine forest. Suggestions are given and a strategy is worked out how to re-plant the pines and thereby maintain the significant experience of a “pillar hall of pines”
- On-going co-operation and consultation with Stockholm City Museum Administration and the County Administrative Board of Stockholm is an action necessary for the preservation and conservation of the integrity of the site. A quality plan will elucidate the historical cultural values and significance of the site

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: a quality plan is under preparation in a consultative process in the administration. The plan focuses on the cultural heritage values of the site and how to maintain the values and the integrity of the site

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social
- Strength: valuable contacts are made in the business sector and organizations. Valuable attention of the site from media, business sectors and the public are obtained. Evaluations, recordings and strategies of the site are developed. A Visitors Center is established. Several restorations are realized. The knowledge of the site and the World Heritage Convention has increased
- Weaknesses of management: the knowledge, responsibility and management of the site are concentrated to very few persons. The site requires a responsible webmaster and information coordinator for implementing information services to partners, clients, visitors and staff
- Future actions: not provided

Zusammenfassung**Welterbe Skogskyrkogården – Waldfriedhof Stockholm**

Der Beitrag von Karin Söderling (Stockholmer Friedhofsverwaltung) stand leider für die Tagungsdokumentation nicht zur Verfügung. Er vermittelte wesentliche Denkmalswerte des Waldfriedhofes in Stockholm (1917–20, G. Asplund, S. Lewerentz) und Gründe, die 1994 zur Eintragung als UNESCO-Weltkulturerbe führten. An Beispielen wurden Merkmale für den historischen Zeitgeist und die „Stimmungsarchitektur“ der Landschaftsgestaltung erläutert und Aufgaben des Welterbemanagements vorgestellt. Der oben wiedergegebene Text entstammt der letzten periodischen Berichterstattung des UNESCO Welterbezentrums für die Welterbestätten in Nordamerika und Europa (2005/2006).

* Note: Text from the Periodic Reporting on the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention in Europe, 2005–2006, see <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/periodicreporting/EUR/cycle01/section2/558-summary.pdf>