

Conservation & Interpretation of Battlefields: The English Experience

Presented at the Workshop on the Cultural Landscape as a Heritage Feature: a Comparative Study of the UK and Russia
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Aim of the session

- Examine how battlefield conservation and interpretation has developed in England.
- Identify examples of good and bad practice from England
- Use the examples to reflect on your own experience of battlefield conservation and interpretation.

How the study came about

- Culloden battlefield visit in Scotland in 1990.
- Had a visitor centre and attracted over 100,000 visitors.
- In England a new road cutting through Battle of Naseby raised the issue of preserving English battlefields
- Simple question raised ...why haven't more English battlefields been used for recreational purposes?

Some background facts on English Battlefields

- Last pitched land battle was over 300 years ago (Battle of Sedgemoor)
- The term 'battlefield' is an accurate description for England
- "Sites of conflict" is a broader term and can be used to refer to such things as the Battle of Britain, or naval campaigns
- Primary focus is on the battlefield
- The number (supply) of battlefields can vary

key problems with battlefield conservation and interpretation

- How many there are?
 - Number depends on the definition:
 - E.g. broader term "site of conflict" Raynor (2005) makes reference to over 500 sites of conflict in England, of which 384 are land-based battlefields?
- Do you know the location of the battlefields?
- Note: research and location is a key foundation in any attempt to conserve a battle site.



Registered battlefields.pdf

Key challenges (cont.)

- Boring, dull empty field? Or a site where history was made, which stirs the imagination?
- To help conserve, you must show the worth (SEE NEXT SLIDE), which is to show its cultural significance, its educational value and its use as a recreational/tourism resource.
- They can compliment, but they can also come into conflict.

Key challenges (cont.)

- Facilities can quickly age
- Vandalism
- Ethics (Culloden v Bosworth)

Why conserve a battlefield? (Showing their worth/functions)

- Hallowed ground/memorial function
- Education function and archaeological resource
- Land base function
- Recreational/tourism function
- Cultural function

Conservation in England

- **Battlefield Register set up (useful planning document in land use)**
- English Heritage list 43 sites which can be located with a degree of confidence in their location/significant remains
- In the register they use the terms "Secure location," "approximate," "alternative," "probable."
- Quality in interpretation and conservation varies



Releasing the tourism potential – making the site tangible

Methods of interpretation:
Dedicated visitor centre, Off-site museum/interpretation
Monuments, Plaques,
Self-guided trails, Guided trails,
Books and maps, TV documentaries,
films and plays, Leaflets, Re-enactments

Releasing the potential - making the site tangible (Cont.)

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Releasing the recreational potential – location factors

- **Vital criteria:**
 - Degree of confidence in actually locating the battle (importance of historical/archaeological research)
 - Extent of physical remains
 - Permission to develop interpretation
 - Securing/preservation of site

Releasing the recreational potential (Cont)

- *Cultural significance and emotional appeal*
- *Coherence of stories which can be told.*
- *Time, distance and population factors (size of population under 30 miles)*
- *Literature, play, film and TV coverage/references which can create awareness/recognition.*

Conclusion

- Continued research into battlefields location and events is vital underpinning
- Which battlefields should be turned into a potential recreational attraction is not the same as which ones should be conserved
- Diversity in interpretation vital (managed portfolio)
- Need to be sensitive and remember each death can represent and untold story and tragedy.