



GET THE FACTS - HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

38. ORIGINS OF THE HERITAGE MOVEMENT

Heritage denotes everything we suppose has been handed down to us from the past. Although not all heritage is uniformly desirable, it is widely viewed as a precious and irreplaceable resource, essential to personal and collective identity and necessary for self-respect. Hence we go to great lengths, often at huge expense, to protect and celebrate the heritage we possess, to find and enhance what we feel we need, and to restore and recoup what we have lost. Not until the 19th century did the pace of change and Romantic feeling sanctify both nature and antiquity, promoting their protection against not only

decay and dissolution but improvidence and iconoclasm. Pressures to preserve the past and to conserve natural resources gained urgency and began to converge in the late 19th century, as industrialisation and urbanisation threatened to obliterate both the natural environment and the remnants of antiquity. Nostalgia for what was seen as ancient and stable idealised pre-industrial life and landscapes. Concern for protecting nature and antiquities peaked around 1900 in both Europe and the USA. Early American conservationists exalted nature in place of history even while gutting the wilderness. Their conservation efforts

resulted in the setting aside of national parks and forest reserves, which were seen as enduring oases of recreation and refreshment remote from the turmoil of the man-made world. By contrast, Europeans long bereft of pristine environments turned for solace to pre-industrial heritage, treasuring remnant features and folkways and the bucolic joys of rustic parochialism. The century's end saw the inception in Britain of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the first Ancient Monuments Act.

Ref: David Lowenthal - International Journal of Heritage Studies Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2005, pp. 81-92