

SPEECH BY Mr. Van Doorn, Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Works

European Architectural Heritage Year, 1975, has in many ways caused people to go more deeply into the question as to what exactly their architectural heritage consists of. A directly related question is, how to find a fitting place for this heritage in modern society. It would actually be better if we recognised the priority that ancient monuments deserve and formulated this question differently, asking ourselves how, and to what extent, present-day needs can be met in and around this valuable old buildings.

We should bear in mind that it is not only monuments of a purely architectural kind that have a right to our attention in this Architectural Heritage Year. The monuments which are being studied and discussed in Zeist this week-historic gardens - share this right. These strange and fascinating creations of both nature and architecture are products, as it were, of marriage between nature and culture, in which each gives the other an added dimension. Sad to say, they have not been very successful in rousing public interest, which has been centred mainly on our architectural heritage, urban and otherwise.

Historic gardens have usually been regarded, erroneously, as a problem which is only marginally connected with monument conservation.

The gardens, which are situated next to or around buildings, form a whole with the building. Their architecture has a dual purpose - it is directed both at the building and at the surrounding countryside. The outdoor area, "les salles du dehors", "les salles de verdure", extend and supplement the indoor area; they belong together, enrich each other, and are two parts of a single indivisible monument.

The garden component, however, has been studied and appreciated far less than the buildings have. The study of historic gardens requires a knowledge of trees, flowers, herbs, and shrubs, and also of the history of landscape gardening. Without the help of this discipline, so different from their own, art historians and architectural historians will never be able to explore gardens properly.

This is why I consider it very important that a colloquium is being held in this country this year which is devoted exclusively to the study of Dutch gardens. I hope it will achieve three things

Firstly it should show clearly how extensive the field of monument conservation is - more extensive than many realise. After all, the concept "monument" and "protected monument" have become much broader over the last hundred years, and now include gardens and parks. The growing awareness people have of the value and public importance of monuments should therefore be extended to include historic gardens.

At the same time this colloquium should encourage the study of historic gardens. Without the necessary knowledge we cannot respond properly to the call to protect, conserve, restore, and maintain our historic gardens. All too long monument conservationists have been prevented from doing anything about gardens by this lack of knowledge. Now time is running out. I trust that the colloquium will awake interest in our gardens and provide a strong stimulus for deeper study.

This brings me to my third goal, which is to rouse interest in historic parks and gardens especially among those who are responsible for maintaining them. For this purpose the knowledge and insight obtained should, insofar as this is feasible, be popularised at an early stage. This will also allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of parks and gardens more fully.

This will result in greater understanding of and respect for these monumental gardens, and will make it easier to answer the second question how the historic gardens can be made to fit in with present-day needs, because people will agree more readily on priorities.

I trust that this colloquium will do much, nationally and internationally, to promote expert conservation, restoration, and maintenance of this national heritage, which has been partly hidden from the public eye and is waiting, like a sleeping beauty in the woods, to be recalled to life.

Monsieur Pechère remercie Monsieur Van Doorn d'avoir bien voulu ouvrir le 3ème Colloque, après avoir permis qu'il se tienne. Il est heureux de voir combien Monsieur Van Doorn est attentif aux problèmes de la conservation et de la protection des jardins historiques.