

Nordic museum farms and open air museums

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Speaking about open air museums to an audience mainly connected with the ICOMOS I should like to emphasize an opinion which has to do with the relation of open air museums to the institutions concerned with the protection of architecture, monuments and sites. Open air museums as well as building protecting authorities work with the main purpose of preserving old buildings. Nevertheless I think that the work of those two sorts of institutions should not be too much intermingled.

It is of course necessary that to some extent open air museums and protecting authorities work hand in hand. It is natural that their knowledge of which old buildings are existing in some territory should be based on a central collection of data. It is also natural that the planning of what should be preserved in situ and what should be moved into an open air museum, is in some way coordinated. But in my opinion it is most important that the protecting authorities do not regard the moving of a building into an open air museum an easy way of preserving a building which ought to be preserved on its site. And it is equally important that the selection of houses for open air museums is not influenced by the difficulties which the protecting authorities might have in preserving buildings on their original sites.

Though all of us aim at the preservation of old buildings, open air museums and building protecting authorities work along different lines. Most institutions connected with the ICOMOS are concerned with the work of protecting buildings through legislation and through technical preservation. They aim at preserving the buildings on their original sites. It is certainly most important that it should be so, as the documentary, cultural and aesthetic values of old buildings are often much diminished if they are moved into other surroundings. Of course, in many cases the original surroundings are brutally changed, with the consequence that it seems justified to move a building. But it can be dangerous for a good cause if the building authorities know too well that there is a shortcut to preservation, constituted by moving the buildings into open air museums.

Contrary to the work of building protecting authorities open air museums in most cases move the buildings from their original sites to museum areas. There are of course exceptions, some open air museums having arisen from restoration areas where the old buildings have remained on their original sites. What is characteristic of open air museums is that they have mainly an educational purpose. They do not just aim at preserving old buildings but also want to spread knowledge on the basis of these houses. From a preservative as well as an educational point of view it is essential that the buildings of an open air museum be representative of what has once been in existence. So it is important that the development of an open air museum be thoroughly planned. It should not depend on which buildings cannot be preserved on their original sites but might be saved through being moved to an open air museum.

These ideas have mainly been accepted by the Nordic open air museums right from their very beginning at the end of the last century. The large and well-known open air museums of the Nordic countries have been developed on the basis of at least a certain amount of planning. What might look like an incidental growth in the course of the long existence of these institutions, is not due to a tendency to move buildings which ought to have remained where they were. The reason rather is that the museum keepers did not have a full survey of which old buildings were handed down to our time in different parts of the country. In addition their views of how to make an open air museum changed, and this of course influenced museums which were still growing 50 or 75 years after their start. Every new museum keeper had to reconsider the plans for developing the museum and bring them up to date according to the views of cultural research of his time. By the way, in spite of this, open air museums are rather conservative institutions, their museum items being big and expensive and in most cases brought together only through a slow process which gives a narrow scope for revising projects, because as a result of every decision you bind the means of the museum and its capacity for work for rather a long time.

If there are any exceptions from the rule that open air museums have not been influenced by the antiquarian work of preserving buildings on their sites, they should be found among the open air museums or departments of open air museums which contain town houses. The open air museum Gamle Bergen in western Norway is composed of old houses from the city of Bergen, difficult or impossible to preserve on their original sites. They have been moved to this artificial old town at the outskirts of Bergen. It is to be presumed that the existence of this museum has influenced the possibilities of preserving old houses in the centre of the town itself. That also seems to be the case in Oslo and Stockholm where the open air department of the Norsk Folkemuseum (the Norwegian Folk Museum) and the open air museum Skansen have collected

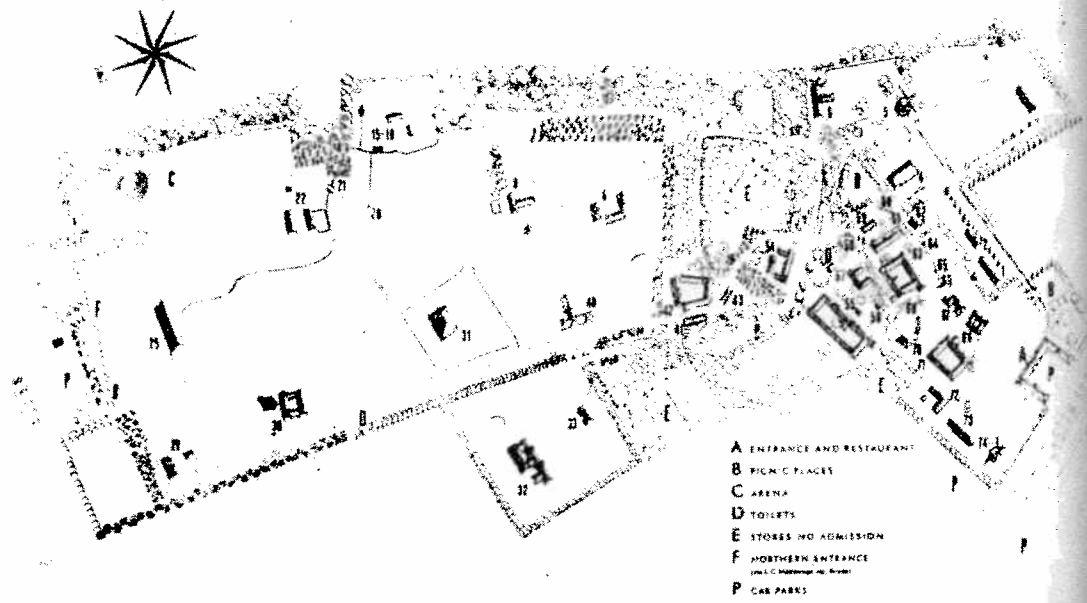
houses from the two cities where these open air museums are situated. The town house open air museum in Århus in Denmark has taken in old houses from towns all over the country. In some cases it has helped to ease the conscience of town planners who wanted to clear away old houses in order to build modern ones.

Unfortunately it has been possible only in a very few towns to preserve whole quarters of old houses and give them the function of an open air museum. Such was the case in Åbo (or Turku) in Finland, where a small part of the town was preserved, consisting of small houses with workshops and dwellings for craftsmen and tradesfolk. Such restoration areas in some cases are not real open air museums but have mixed functions. Some houses are normal private dwellings, some are workshops for some sort of antiquarian production for tourists, and other houses are proper museum houses. One example of such a restoration area is the small town of Frederikstad in southern Norway.

When an old house is preserved on its original site, it is often a problem which function it should be given in the future. In many cases this problem has been solved through making the house a museum of some sort. But of course there is a limit to how many small museums ought to be founded. Very often the wish to found a new museum has not been a primary thought but has arisen out of difficulties in finding a reasonable purpose for an old house. Nowadays there is a reaction against putting small local museums into old houses. Museum keepers usually want modern buildings designed for museum purposes, including modern technical facilities for changing exhibitions and educational activities. In this way the museum should develop from a storehouse for old items into a popular centre for many sorts of educational, cultural, and recreative activities.

A similar mixture of historical museum purposes and popular meeting activities has for many years been characteristic of what the Swedes call "hembygdsgårdar". The typical hembygdsgård is an old farmstead preserved on its original site. It has been made a museum for some small region, say a parish, and is at the same time a meeting place for a historical or archaeological society which owns the buildings and takes the initiative in the organisation of lectures, folk dancing, performances etc. In many places the hembygdsgård for many years has served as a main meeting place within a parish and often as a public summer restaurant or coffee-room as well. Sometimes the buildings have been moved in order to be conveniently situated for these activities, e. g. to a park already in existence. In that case the buildings may have come from different places but the buildings of most hembygdsgårdar have been parts of or represent one farmstead only.

I talk about this phenomenon in some detail because there are a great many hembygdsgårdar in Sweden. They amount to about 1000 inside that country. Another reason is that at the present time there is a lively



1. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. Map of the museum area.

2. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. Half-timbered houses in a village street.



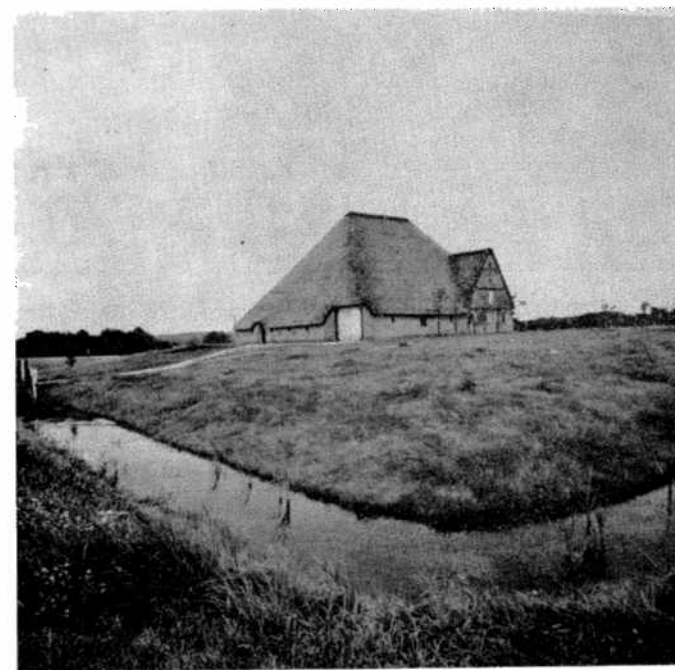


3. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. Half-timbered barn of a manor house surrounded by large fields.

4. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. Brick-built farmhouse in an open heathland with a scattered habitation of single farms.



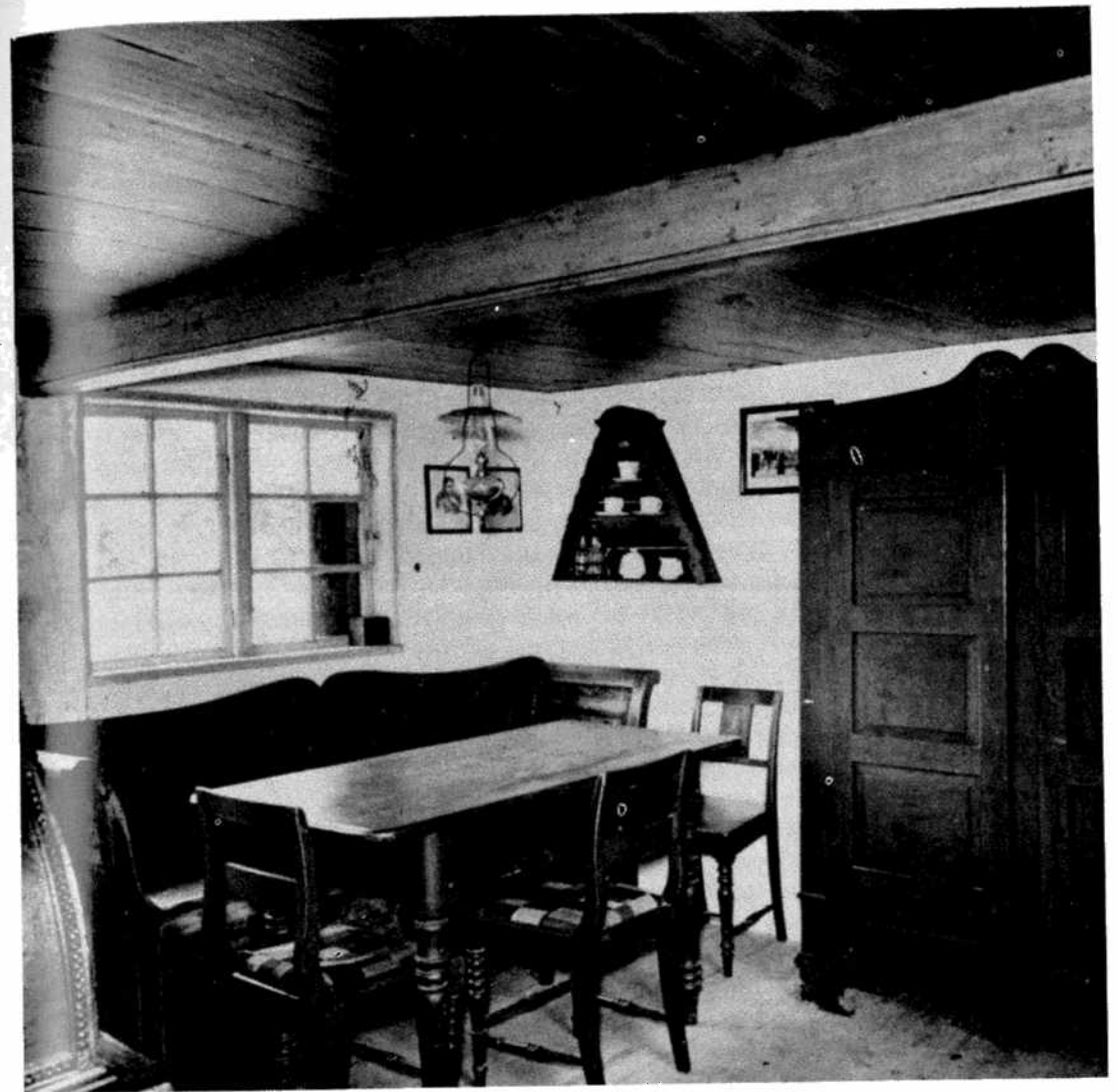
5. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. The miller's garden, reproduced as it was at the original site.



6. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. The farmstead from the marshland is surrounded by drainage dykes as it was at its place of origin.



7. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. In front of the wheelwright's house is the saw-pit.



8. Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri, Denmark. Most of the furniture in the wheelwright's dwelling-room is made by the wheelwright himself.

discussion in Sweden about the future of these old houses, which of course raise some problems of upkeep. In many cases they lead a declining life nowadays because the eager amateurs who founded the historical societies and their local meeting farms died long ago. Now presumably some of the best hembygdsgårdar will be taken over by the municipalities or by the big regional museums, and in some cases the most important old houses preserved as hembygdsgårdar can be moved into the real open air museums.

The problem of the hembygdsgårdar is to some extent known in Norway and Finland, where a certain number of single farmsteads have been preserved with similar purposes as in Sweden. On the other hand we do not know the problem in Denmark, as we have no proper hembygdsgårdar here. A related problem is of course well-known, as we have great difficulties in maintaining several isolated old houses, some of which are used by small local museums. There is only one old farmstead in Denmark which can be compared with the Swedish hembygdsgårdar, it being owned by a local society which uses the buildings as a museum and a meeting place. Two old farmsteads have been preserved on their original sites by the Danish state and turned into museums, but they have no functions which can be compared to those of the Swedish hembygdsgårdar.

The movement for the preservation of isolated museum farms and shaping of restoration areas with the functions of open air museums, is somewhat younger than the founding of the first Nordic open air museums. Such a museum consists of several rural buildings which have been moved from different places in the countryside into the museum area. This area as a rule is situated near the capital of the country or some provincial town. I need not go into detail as far as the history of Nordic open air museums is concerned. It is rather well known inasmuch as the idea of open air museums has spread from the Nordic countries to a great many places all over the world and the name Skansen is in common use in some countries.

It is curious that the incidental presence of an old redoubt on the coast just outside the centre of Stockholm should be the origin of a word widely used to indicate a sort of cultural institution. The Skansen in Stockholm, as the first open air museum, was opened to the public in 1891. As a matter of fact, already in the 80ies some Norwegian buildings had been moved to a place on the outskirts of Oslo and these buildings later became parts of the open air museum of the Norwegian Folk Museum on Bygdøy near Oslo. But when Skansen was opened it was rightly regarded the first of its sort and was soon followed by the small open air museum in the town of Lund in southern Sweden.

I have no intention of going through the list of all Nordic open air museums, not even the large ones. Besides those mentioned already, it might have been worth while to look at the museums in Helsinki in

Finland and in Lillehammer in Norway. In the provinces of Norway and Sweden there is a very great number of open air museums often connected with the bigger local museums. Some of them dispose of very large areas, others only have a few hectares. Also the number of buildings transferred to the museum areas varies quite a lot. They are not just duplicates of the big central institutions of the capitals and each one has its own characteristics. So the Swedish provincial open air museums usually do not try to compete with Skansen as far as the zoological department and the amusement park is concerned.

In Denmark there are not so many open air museums as in Norway and Sweden, even relatively. By the way, although the country is small the popular architecture of Denmark is rich in variations. Examples of regional building customs are seen in some local open air museums. One of these should be mentioned. It is the Funen Village, situated in a suburb of the city of Odense. It is a fine example of a regional open air museum, where rural buildings from a district of cultural unity have been placed together like a living village.

The main open air museum of rural buildings in Denmark is the Frilandsmuseet ved Sorgenfri which is situated in a northern suburb of Copenhagen called Lyngby. It is one of the old open air museums inasmuch as it was founded in 1897 and in 1901 moved to its present place. It has grown from a size of 2 hectares and 4 buildings in 1901 to 36 hectares and 40 buildings to-day. I should like to use this museum as an example of the planning of an open air museum. I do so partly because I know the history of this museum somewhat better than that of the others, partly because in this case I also know partly the plans for the future development of the museum, which are in most cases hidden in the thoughts of museum leaders.

In Frilandsmuseet, as well as in other open air museums, museum history is to some extent a key to understanding what the museum is like. First it was the aim of the founder of the museum to collect as many old houses as possible. Later another criterion for the selection of buildings was accepted, inasmuch as it became the intention to have the main types of regional variations of buildings represented. Still later there was a growing tendency to accept the idea that the different social layers of the rural population should have their dwellings in the open air museum.

The landscape of the Frilandsmuseet was dominated by the difference between the villages of eastern Denmark and the scattered habitations of single farms in western Denmark. This pattern of habitation is indicated by the localisation of the buildings in the museum. It is well known that the surroundings of the houses such as gardens etc. are reconstructed. In the same way the more distant surroundings are landscaped to resemble the districts from which the buildings have come. The most striking example of this are some stretches of heath. Similarly, native

wild plants have been introduced throughout the park to give an impression of the flora of different regions.

What was said about the planning of Frilandsmuseet all refers to the museum as it stands now. We are still at work on the fulfilling of these plans as there are still some buildings left which ought to be taken into the museum. But the whole plan refers to a pre-industrial age. So, at the same time as we are working along the lines mentioned, we are preparing an extension of the museum, which will be a section for the era of industrialism, covering the period of c. 1880—1950.

This new section will hardly contain any building worth being preserved according to the policy of most institutions connected with the ICOMOS. As I have mentioned before I also regard it unfortunate if the question of building protection is too much mingled with the collecting policy of open air museums. From the viewpoint of these museums it must be more important that the museum keeper can make his plans independently in order to have buildings transferred which are really representative and not just ripe to be rescued. So, in my opinion we are fully justified in being organised in two different organisations, the ICOMOS and the ICOM.