

Sir Alexander G l e n (United Kingdom)

#### DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN SMALL HISTORIC TOWNS

My problem in preparing a paper like this is not what to say - that is usually only too easy, frequently to the exhaustion of one's audience - but what not to say; above all the avoidance of what has been said already too often. But perhaps on this occasion the task is easier.

Many of us are in the middle of European Architectural Heritage Year, a year important not only for the physical preservation of places and buildings which otherwise would have continued neglected, but perhaps even more so for the opportunity which it gives to involve in this work as large a number of the community as possible. For conservation is not inanimate - it is living, it depends on people, it demands patience, energy, dedication. But let me go further: its success requires not only the involvement of the older and more experienced, it demands even more the involvement of the young, especially when they are at school, their discovery that much which was made in the past will always be better than what is contrived today or will be tomorrow.

It is this increasing human involvement which I believe may well be the most lasting product of European Architectural Heritage Year. This unquestionably is true in Britain. Already I can take evidence from a number of competitions amongst the schools, already has grown from these a staggering involvement of younger people, not only with the objectives of preservation but even more, for they are pragmatic and hard-headed also, with the search for the best means of achieving this coupled with an absolute refusal to admit defeat.

Let me give one example: the winner of the very first competition which we in the BTA ran with that great newspaper THE GUARDIAN was a young lady called Miss Snowdon from Edinburgh. Her subject was Dean's Village, a small 16th Century fishing community engulfed in the growth of Edinburgh City over these last two centuries, totally forgotten. By dint of relentlessly, but at the same time most charmingly, bullying the Lord Provost, the City Council, and then the builders to whom, as a result of her efforts, conservation was at last entrusted, she has achieved in six months what others had failed to do over two centuries.

The Duke of Gloucester presented her prize some few weeks ago in the glorious Goldsmiths Hall. It was well earned - and her age, ladies and gentlemen, is 9. Quite an object lesson of what the young can do where we older ones may often fail.

This may seem a little far from the development of tourism in small historic towns. On the contrary, it is very close. And Katie Snowdon's kind of tenacity is the lifeblood of success in ensuring the dual objective that places of beauty remain as such but, whenever possible, not as dead monuments but instead as vital and living places.

We are fortunate in Britain in having so many towns and villages, parts of large cities too, of this character. What a variety in a small island, most of them capable of being reached within driving times of only a few hours. The black and white timbered houses of East Anglia and their counterparts in the sleepy villages of Sussex and Hampshire; the wealth of the wool trade in the middle ages brought those glorious stone-built towns of the Cotswolds - Chipping Campden, Broadway, the Slaughters, Stanton, where I am lucky enough to live - buildings which have the sun in their walls and roofs and peace in their quiet streets.

The villages in the Ridings of Yorkshire have their own character - Grassington, Bolton Abbey, to mention but two - while in Scotland and Wales you can stumble on gems like Plockton or Portmerion. It all builds up into a rich heritage, a very rich heritage, and we its heritors have the responsibility of ensuring that the vandals of today do not destroy what was fortunate enough to escape over the centuries the ravage of foreign armies or the destruction of internal dispute.

Just as we have sought to make that other priceless part of our heritage, the historic houses, lived in and not dead museums, so our purpose today must be to ensure that the small towns and villages retain vividness and reality of life in the 70's and the years that are to follow.

Let us be quite clear, with no ambiguity or fine words of dissimulation, that frequently an immediate point of conflict can and does arise between the development of tourism in small historic towns with the lives of those who live, trade or work there as well. It is healthy to recognise that this point of conflict can be real, that on both sides it contains and sometimes can loose powerful emotive forces, reconciliation between which is something that must never be ducked but faced openly for better or for worse.

And there are small towns which should be left as they are, which are unsuitable for more than the occasional visitor. But I suspect their number is relatively few. So let us look instead at the others as they are, sometimes rural centres of substantial commerce but often extremely ill-equipped to cater for even moderate numbers of visitors. How far are they wise in going to provide facilities to deal with more visitors - car parks, toilets, perhaps even multiple stores and, even if I deplore many of them, modern hotels which so easily can look totally out of keeping in such an environment.

At the European Travel Commission joint meeting with Europa Nostra in Copenhagen 1973, one firm conclusion was that tourist development must be planned with due regard to the character and capacity of the localities and the interests of their inhabitants.

Yes, indeed, "due regard" - but are these empty words or do we mean them? It is so temptingly easy to use such words as an alibi or escape from the hard solid job of sitting down and

tackling a problem. The key word should be 'planning'. I do not mean by this a cold, academic solution imposed by faceless men from outside. Certainly not. For by planning, in this context, I mean the task of achieving reconciliation between two or more views. On one side are all the local interests concerned, those who live in the place, those who work in it like the professional folk - the vicar, the doctor, some of the shopkeepers, the farmers and the like, those who may love it as it is like the curators of museums or old buildings, members of the local amenity or historical societies. On the other side are those who want for perfectly justifiable reasons more money to come in: the hotelier and the pub keeper, may be some of the shopkeepers, sometimes the local authority impelled by ambition or prodded by directive from central Government. These form the customary make-up of the two opposing sides who have to agree or disagree to stay still or venture ahead into a tempting but somewhat daunting development which, if it goes astray, can mean the end of peaceful and contented centres.

How can a tourist trade be fitted into the life and fabric of the town without this nightmare becoming a reality? Can it indeed be fitted in without seriously damaging or even destroying the quality of life? Yes, I think so, always provided - as I have already said - that the problem is faced at the beginning, not only in terms of the safety of buildings, of the width or capacity of roads and the additional demands which are going to be imposed upon them, but even more important viewed sympathetically and understandingly from the attitude of people, their prejudices and hopes, and very much their fears as well.

How to start? Well, may I suggest that at the very outset the local tourist organisation should be brought into discussion, or failing this, an organisation experienced enough to assess the potential which the town possesses, to sketch the benefits which could be derived from an increasing number of visitors, to make quite clear what additional facilities will be needed, but wise enough to know too that a place is pleasant to visit only if it remains pleasant to live in. From this a dialogue can be begun out of which the town interests, if I may call them that, can decide how far they feel they could and should go with the tourist interests. They won't get it right at the first go, or even the second, but if dialogue continues, it is surprising how reconciliation of objectives does emerge.

But it requires vigour of argument on both sides, a hard fight for the preservation of the unique assets which the town may possess, but on the other side recognition of the compelling need that it should continue to provide a lively and satisfying centre for its inhabitants. Then there will be those who urge that tourism should be forgotten, that industry or commerce in one form or another is preferable. But they may remember also that tourism is an industry too but one without chimneys or smoke.

It is this reconciliation of human objectives, of a way of life present and future, which I feel is the essential first step, an achievement if practicable of a common wish that the town

should welcome additional visitors and that the life of the town will benefit from this. If that wish is not powerful enough, if it is not convincing, then I would urge that the decision should be that the town retains its original character.

But I could comment again that such a character rarely thrives strongly enough in isolation; the process of decay can be appallingly swift.

If this first step is surmounted, then the physical problems and possibilities must be examined in depth. Streets look too narrow for a mass of cars and certainly are not nearly wide enough for coaches. Well, if this is the case, the coach and the car have to be barred from the town itself. Parking facilities in that event can be provided outside - no bad thing - for all of us have two legs and most of us don't use them nearly enough.

But the right of residents to shop conveniently must be safeguarded too - it is very hard for the old or even the young wife with her kids when heavy shopping baskets have to be carried a long distance.

We are developing schemes like this increasingly in Britain with pedestrian precincts, car-less zones, etc. In York, for example, buses are not allowed inside the town walls, except to one particular coach park. In Chester, parking is limited to the briefest possible period and an elaborate one-way road system has been created. In Oxford, out of earlier chaos, which I remember well even 50 years ago, the main shopping centre has now been turned successfully into a pedestrian precinct. There is no doubt about it, the physical layout, no matter how cramped it may be, can be preserved, and indeed restrictions appropriately qualified in ways such as I have suggested may lead to benefit for those who live in the town which previously many might never have imagined.

How does the visitor find, understand and appreciate individual buildings or groups of buildings. How can he best walk round? Well, much can be done with the development of town trails. Today there are over 200 of these throughout Britain - a successful means not only of adding to the visitor's enjoyment of a town but also a surprisingly effective means of controlling and managing visitor movement. You can walk round appreciating lovely buildings or their setting in a rational, unguided and unhurried way, using only a relatively simple leaflet which provides the necessary information.

And it is not only the visitor who benefits, more frequently it is the local inhabitant, for so often what we do not know is where we live and what lies under our very eyes.

If this can be coupled to an Interpretation Centre, so much the better. These can be more or less sophisticated. They offer vast scope for imaginative layout, appealing design, persuasive techniques. York and Chester are amongst other historic towns which are developing them successfully, sometimes in the school room, the museum or as part of the town's tourist information centre.

Coming to terms with motor transport and effective information seem to me two essential links in making it tolerable for substantial numbers of visitors to move around a small historic town, to do this in a way that is just not negative or haphazard but which can be fulfilling and creative.

I started this talk on conservation. I stressed that it was not dead or academic but a living thing demanding the involvement of the hearts and minds of the young just as much as the old. My message would be that the development of tourism in a small historic town is of the same characteristic.

I have touched on some of the physical obstacles and suggested a few simple means by which they can be overcome. Indeed, I believe that in most cases most of them can be overcome. But, just as in conservation it is the attitudes of the people which are more determinative, it is those who live in a place who must decide. If they remain convinced that tourism is hostile to their lives, then I would leave sleeping dogs well and truly alone.

In more cases, however, I believe that hostility can be turned by persuasion into participation, that welcome can replace barred or locked gates. Where indeed this is achieved, visitors may find no less enjoyment in the welcome they receive than in the lovely buildings which they have just seen. Indeed it is the former that may be remembered far longer than the latter.

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BOTSWANA

#### Background

Physical: Botswana, 570,000 sq.km., is entirely landlocked, being adjoined by South Africa, Namibia, the Caprivi Strip, Zambia and Rhodesia. Its mean altitude is 1,000 m. above sea-level, and its annual average rainfall is 450 mm - although this is highly erratic and unevenly distributed. 84 % of the land surface is covered by Kgalagadi sand supporting a low savannah vegetation type. The Okovango and Chobe drainage systems represent the only perennial surface water. 80 % of the de facto population of 574,000 (1971), nevertheless, live in the south east side of the country, in the catchment area of the Limpopo River, where the soils are generally more fertile.

Economy: The few years since independence in 1966 have already brought about profound change. Annual development expenditure has increase fivefold. With the completion of the necessary infrastructure for the mining of diamonds at Orapa and copper/nickel at Pikwe, meat, previously accounting for 75 % of total exports, has been displaced as the country's primary revenue earner. Already 8 % of the population are living in urban centres and the number of vehicles on the road - to take one particularly pertinent example - has doubled.