

Contested Identities: The Dissonant Heritage of European Town Walls and Walled Towns

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Abstract

As well as exerting an enduring influence on townscapes, town walls have always played a critical role in shaping the identities and images of the communities they embrace. Today, the surviving fabric of urban defences (and the townscapes they define) are features of heritage holding great potential as cultural resources but whose management poses substantial challenges, practical and philosophical. In particular, town walls can be conceptualised as a 'dissonant' form of heritage whose value is frequently contested between different interest groups and whose meanings are not static but can be re-written. Evidence is gathered from walled towns across Europe, including member towns of the WTFC (Walled Towns Friendship Circle) and inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites, to explore the cyclical biographies of town walls in their transformation from civic monuments, through phases of neglect, decay and destruction to their current status as cherished cultural resources. In order to explore this area of interface between archaeology and tourism studies, the varying attitudes of populations and heritage agencies to walled heritage are reviewed through examination of policies of conservation, preservation, presentation and restoration, and areas of commonality are identified.

Key words

Town walls; city walls; walled towns; dissonance; archaeology; heritage tourism

Introduction

Any town, which, in the twenty-first century remains defined by its walls, is an anomaly. Yet at a time of perceived insecurity it is salutary to examine past attempts to achieve order from chaos, to give security for life and trading, at the expense of putting up barriers to the free movement of people and goods. Notably, this is a heritage that extends back to the very origins of towns, their first known symbol being the hieroglyph expressing the unison of street plan and enclosure (Fig. 1).

Today, walled towns have come to represent a quintessentially European form of 'heritage site': places such as Caernarfon, Carcassonne, Torun and Toledo, for example, feature prominently on the list of inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites dominated by 'tangible' properties.¹ As such they may be seen as part of the tourism assets of Europe.

This paper examines the experiences of historic walled towns across Europe (Fig. 2) to identify some common themes, exploring not only the ways in which urban walls have been used and treated, but also some less tangible aspects of the heritage of walled communities. Its basis is interdisciplinary, exploring an area of interface between archaeology, tourism studies and heritage studies. In the context of any historic town, community identity or identities are often closely related to the extant physical remains: town walls represent not only physical monuments but also ideas – evocative mental constructs integral to the multi-layered self-images of communities. Yet while these distinctively ‘civic’ monuments outwardly symbolise a shared ‘corporate’ identity, they inevitably represent far more contested, indeed divisive, elements of heritage.

The model of the European ‘gem city’ – where a crisis creates a time-frozen and later treasured cityscape – was developed by Ashworth and Tunbridge, who have taken Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber, itself a walled town, as one exemplar.² By some shift in the pattern of history, a burst of monumental development has become fossilised, bypassed, re-discovered, conserved and eventually treasured. The model applies well to walled towns (especially those of smaller and middling size), not only because walls themselves might exert an imprisoning effect on the life and vitality of the enceinte, but because these places so often had strategic rather than commercial locations. Walls may thus, paradoxically, become a symptom of the vulnerability of a town. Extant or not, town walls frequently freeze the ‘footprints’ of antique cores, typically marking zones with the historic cohesion and spatial extent suited to their promotion as ‘historic urban quarters’.³

As PPG 16 the UK Government's core guidance on Archaeology and Planning identifies “[Archaeological remains] are part of our sense of national identity and are valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism”.⁴ There is therefore a risk that interpretation and the agenda for history and archaeology may be transformed by the commercial tourism pressure to package the past. This paper explores some of the material culture which may be put at such risk. Among its primary data are the preliminary results of a European Commission funded INTERREGiic project examining critical dimensions of historic walled town management,⁵ as well as the experiences of inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites and member towns of the WFTC (Walled Towns Friendship Circle: see below). The paper is structured around the conceptual framework established by the ‘gem city’ model. It considers the physical and cultural resources of European historic walled towns and their sonant heritage, and examines the challenges that their communities and other

stakeholders face in the sensitive conservation and presentation of the historic fabric.

Town walls and walled towns: creation, crisis and decay

Towns encircled by defences dating to any period from the Classical to post-medieval are more or less ubiquitous in Europe,⁶ although variations in distribution are of course apparent and, naturally, the bulk of upstanding fabric relates to the medieval period and later. Some of these variations relate to the historical circumstances of walling – basically why some communities gained walls and others didn't. Defence spread further down the urban hierarchy in some regions, while higher and lower incidences of walling also relate to the levels of wealth and independence attained by the urban communities whose mutual rivalry was another critical driving force, as was the perceived level of insecurity – from internal as well as external threats – through time.⁷ Other variations relate, instead, to the subsequent use and treatment of walls by later societies. The spectrum of responses ranges from the total eradication, piecemeal destruction or neglect of features perceived as defunct military paraphernalia, through to their retention or rebuilding out of civic pride, economic advantage (including tourism benefit) and/or the emergence of a conservation ethos. Differences are also apparent, of course, in the construction and technologies of urban defence, giving rise to greater and lesser levels of monumentality and durability. In medieval Britain for instance, more than half of all fortified medieval towns were embraced within earthworks or else provided only with gates, an image quite at odds with the impression given by the handful of walled 'gems' that dominate popular understanding of the phenomenon.⁸ Another sharp area of divergence is that in Britain local defensive considerations ceased to have a major bearing on urban form from the sixteenth century onwards (despite the aberrant need for defence during the seventeenth-century civil wars),⁹ while across much of continental Europe the science of artillery fortification and the practice of urban design developed in partnership over a far longer timescale in the form of the type of 'fortress town' exemplified by places such as Palma Nova.¹⁰

Walled town origins are manifold. The fortifications of medieval walled towns planted *de novo* – while small in number – have particular value as cultural resources in representing the architectural style of a particular defined period: Domme, Conwy and Telč are classic 'castle-towns' in this mould – their defences never representing communal pride as much as seigneurial or royal control. 's-Hertogenbosch, Toledo or Visby, in contrast, represent the more widespread phenomenon of larger and more independent towns encircled by multi-phase medieval defensive walls which were essentially civic monuments. Other common

scenarios are represented at places such as Butrint, Le Mans and Lugo where medieval walls perpetuated (in full or in part) Roman circuits, substantial remains of which survive, and Berwick upon Tweed, Elvas and Naarden, which exhibit bastioned artillery fortifications of the sort common from the mid sixteenth century onwards. Other places display successive enceintes from Classical through to medieval and artillery-period phases, as at Ibiza, Verona or Lucca, while perhaps the last completed circuit (and immediately obsolete) was that of Koenigsberg/Kaliningrad (1870s-1905).¹¹ In every case, however, walls are multi-phase and multi-layered monuments subject to re-invention in the present, not least for their tourism potential.

Despite these differences, all circuits have in common that they represent an enduring tension between the advantages of secure enclosure and their potentially detrimental effect on development. It is due to the latter that town walls represented until comparatively recently an 'endangered species'.¹² Providing impediments to the free-flow of traffic, gates have proven especially vulnerable, as the evidence from Britain shows. Following a wave of demolition in the century 1750-1850, of well over 200 defended communities in England and Wales, only York and Conwy retain their full complement of original gates. Many survived into and through the twentieth century almost by chance: Canterbury's monumental West Gate narrowly escaped demolition to provide easy entry to the city for the elephant-carrying cars of Wombwell's circus in 1859; and York's were very nearly flattened to make way for double-decker busses.¹³ The Newport Arch at Lincoln – Britain's only Roman gateway under which traffic still drives – was re-built after being famously smashed by a fish lorry in 1964 and damaged again in similar fashion in May 2004.¹⁴ New breaches for road access have continued – for example Chester's 'Barbara Castle Gate' of 1966 or Chepstow's car park access and relief road breaches as late as the 1980s.

Not just traffic: even health considerations demanded the destruction of walls: while York's (almost complete) circuit is now a European 'gem', in 1855 the Board of Health recommended the removal of sections to facilitate the free-flow of air, and it was after prolonged debate that the (heavily Victorianised) circuit was opened in 1889.¹⁵ Tenby tells a similar tale. Indeed, attitudes were always more ambivalent than might be realised: while the loss of city walls and gates might now be seen as representing a loss of exclusivity and 'heritage' it is clear that many communities and other interest groups saw their elimination as a benefit: in nineteenth-century Ireland, for example, the removal of town walls at Galway and Limerick was seen as a positive liberation from an unhealthy antique heritage.¹⁶ On a wider European scale, destruction often continued far later: in France, demolition of fabric associated with the scientifically designed fortifications of

Vauban persisted well into the twentieth century, for instance at Rochefort whose circuit was cleared in the 1920s.¹⁷

Historical geographers and urban archaeologists have long appreciated the enduring impact of even vanished town walls on urban form. In urban centres of Classical origin, defences might frame urban development for more than two millennia, while walled extensions to earlier enclosed nuclei may condition semi-controlled phases of growth: Bruges, Budapest, Cologne, Edinburgh and Paris are classic examples of major European cityscapes whose growths were conditioned by successive (and now largely demolished) defensive perimeters. In sharp contrast, the most prominent examples of smaller European towns with well-preserved walls often provide extreme manifestations of the 'gem city' model of arrested development, leaving fossilised townscapes largely or entirely circled in stone. Aigues Mortes (Fig. 3) is a prime example – the fortified bastide rising to prosperity following plantation in the 1240s yet declining from the 1320s due to the silting up of the *roubines* (or canals) and the port that were its lifeblood.¹⁸ Le Quesnoy, central to the mediaeval Burgundian lands in Flanders, is another, its prosperity frozen by its Vauban artillery fortifications and its subsequent frontier peripherality; Conwy, Cuenca, Mdina, Urbino and Visby are comparable examples.

Walled perimeters mark the position of ring-roads in countless cases. Places such as Canterbury, Hereford, and Exeter exemplify the English experience whereby roads follow the lines of extant walls (and, incidentally, serve to lend mass exposure to walled heritage in an everyday context). In contrast, much of the line of Paris's fortifications was famously converted to tree-lined boulevards, while Vienna's Ringstrasse similarly exemplifies the alternative scenario of the wholesale removal of multi-layered artillery fortifications to create a belt of land dedicated for a ring-road.¹⁹ Indeed, the changing usage of the word *boulevard* symbolises this common metamorphosis of European town defences.²⁰ Initially a technical term for a rampart walkway in the age of artillery fortification (which survives as a walk and cycleway to this day in Lucca), it was transformed first into a word for a pathway created on the line of a dismantled fortification and ultimately into a generic term for a tree-lined road. The preservation of parkland belts marking the former positions of defences is still widespread, the earthworks of relict bastions sometimes forming 'natural' and pre-positioned suburban greenbelts, as at Bremen and Tallinn. Other classic features of extra-mural planning include: railway stations (Breda, York, and less well known and itself a now lost example, St Andrews); bus terminals (Valetta); and of course, the car parks which may free the walled area of congestion but also sometimes impinge on the visual impact of stretches of wall (Chester and Aigues Mortes).

Valuing and consuming walled towns

From sporadic roots the emerging European conservation movement from the late nineteenth century came to value town walls. Closely linked to the impact of industrialisation on traditional urban societies, this saw widespread re-evaluation of the identities that defences were thought to symbolise. Attitudes have, in many ways, come full circle and continue to revolve:²¹ many town walls have had cyclical biographies, declining from icons of civic pride to redundant encumbrances before eventual commodification as cultural resources to be valued and cherished.

Walled towns are generally small, their circuits lending integrity to townscapes, while wall-walks have potential as perambulations from which the gem city can be observed and experienced holistically. As part of their promotion, Colchester, Chester and York among others have online 'virtual tours' of their walls.²² Walls form both a backdrop to the urban built environment and provide a unifying force for the urban self-image. Concentrated skylines are one manifestation of this: those depicted in the Braun and Hogenberg prints, for example, often have profiles dominated by public structures – Oxford's 'dreaming spires' being a case in point.²³

The link between walled towns and 'national' heritage may be particularly strong. For example, the famous group of over one hundred places fortes established by Marshall Vauban in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century France are celebrated not only for the aesthetic value of their geometrically designed circuits, giving a pleasing and harmonious effect often captured in photographic form in tourist and other literature, but also for their role in defending and defining the modern nation state and their associations with the glory of Louis XIV.²⁴ Civic rivalry is doubtless another factor in the valuation of town walls – Colchester's town wall is marketed as 'the earliest', York's as 'the longest' and Chester's as 'the most complete' by their respective proud civic authorities. On the other hand walled towns might also be seen to have a 'group' value. The UNESCO inscription of the 'Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd', for instance, was based on their common origin not their tourism value, although that may be open to exploitation. The collective identity of the bastides of south-west France as represented by the Centre D'Étude des Bastides, and the confederation of the WTFC both reflect wider valuation.²⁵ Founded in 1989, WTFC has given formal recognition to Europe's walled towns as a valuable heritage resource. It has brought together representatives and citizens of a wide range (some 140) of such towns from across Europe to uphold the Piran Declaration (1997): "Walled Towns are unique inheritances from times long past and should be treasured, maintained and safeguarded from neglect and destruction and

passed on to perpetuity as irreplaceable “Timestones of History”.²⁶

These organisations have built on the increasing awareness of the value of walled towns, yet it is frequently events and associations rather than purely the historicity, age or architectural quality of surviving fabric that are celebrated and contested, which can lead to the development of a dissonance heritage. During the period of Italian colonialism in the Mediterranean, for instance, the City of Rhodes and particularly its walls were monumentally preserved as the Italians associated themselves with the Catholic Knights of St John, who had built and (unsuccessfully defended) the walls in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In a present-day context, as a heritage site Aigues Mortes is associated with the confrontation of medieval Christendom and Islam, its *raison d’être* as a *bastide* being a base for campaigning in the Holy land during the Seventh Crusade; Valetta is linked forever with the crusading Knights of St John; Montlouis with Marshall Vauban, and so on. But historical associations are not always so straightforward, as the cases of Carcassonne, Conwy, [London]Derry and Jerusalem developed as part of the following sections illustrate.

Dissonance in walled heritage

Walled towns mean different things to different people. Dissonance – or tensions between different social groups – has been characterised as the ‘fundamental problem and opportunity’ for the development of the tourist-historic city.²⁷ On the one hand, heritage management of such places can stimulate economies, conserve built heritage and strengthen local identities; at another it runs the risk of alienating host communities and turning places into ‘stage sets for economic exchange’.²⁸ Tunbridge and Ashworth go on to contend that urban walls represent the ‘heritage of atrocity’, because their martial origins are at odds with present-day uses.²⁹ While chronologically distant in origin from the type of modern fortifications that might be termed ‘dark’ tourist attractions,³⁰ the status of town walls as living social monuments means that they present ideological dilemmas for communities and heritage agencies in essentially similar ways. In Drogheda, for example, the town’s heritage trail takes in the splendid monument of the medieval St Lawrence Gate (perhaps the finest in Ireland architecturally) but also the section of wall adjacent to the breach made by Cromwell in 1649 prior to the infamous massacre seen in Irish folk memory as one of the bloodiest atrocities in history. Town defences – whether surviving as extant monuments or their memory preserved in other ways – may thus relate to a specific period of the town’s history that is contested in the present. In short, walled communities are presented with the ongoing challenges not only of *living in*, but also *living with* their walled heritage.

'Who owns the past?' asked Lowenthal.³¹ Ownership gives responsibility to host local governments for (and rights to) interpretation and ultimately the creation of 'heritage', yet the character of town walls – in particular their long-term histories and role in defining communities – means that physical remains require negotiation of the past. Walls fundamentally serve to exclude as well as include sectors of the population, allowing or forcing communities to harbour separate identities. As well as embracing high-status cores, town walls have historically defined, through exclusion, liminal districts. The 'city fringe' of London north-east and east of the Roman/medieval wall is a classic example: the city's extra-mural liberties developed from the middle ages onwards as a haven for excluded social groups, initially migrants barred by the guilds, later Protestant Huguenots and Jews and presently Bangladeshis and Somalis.³² Liminal activities such as prostitution and theatre-going took up similar opportunities, for instance in Southwark, as the 'Winchester Geese' and the Globe show. In Newcastle, an immediately extra-mural isolation hospital has had its liminal position preserved by an enhancement scheme of paths and grass just outside the walls.³³ There are other examples of isolation hospitals or Lazarettes beyond the walls, for instance in Dubrovnik. The association between Jewries and immediately intra- and extra-mural areas is an enduring characteristic of historic European cityscapes and an underestimated feature of walled heritage. In Slovenia, for example, Maribor's *Zidovski Stolp* (Jewish Tower), marks the focal point of its Jewish quarter, with the nearby synagogue built against the town wall renovated at the heart of the historic district,³⁴ while the restored Jewish ghetto of Piran/Pirano similarly lies against an early medieval wall line.

This latter example also highlights how political changes can give different perspectives to walled heritage. Piran is among a number of borderland walled towns whose allegiance has not been static. From Roman origins and later with a mixed population of Italians and Slovenes, the city was for 600 years within the territory of the Venetian Republic, yet its allegiance has been redefined seven times within the subsequent 200 years before settling within the European Union nation state of Slovenia. The built cultural heritage visibly reflects Piran's past with Venetian Walls, an Austrian town hall and library, Italianate churches, private and public buildings, and Slovene civic design all visible within the main town 'square'. (Fig. 4).³⁵ In a twentieth-century context, the Russian Baltic exclave city of Kaliningrad (former German Königsberg) has witnessed a dramatic re-appreciation – and indeed re-creation – of 'Germanic' features within the historic townscape post-1990, notable among them the city ramparts (the nineteenth-century defensive ring is a remarkable survival, depicted in newly completed form in the Baedeker Guide of 1913) and gates, including the monumental Königs Tor.³⁶

In Derry the (still London-owned) town walls rising over the Bogside remain an arena for conflict, its celebration and commemoration (Fig. 5). Conflict arises not so much from the physical fabric of the walls, of course, but their association in memory with resistance to the Williamite siege of 1689. It was this event that transformed the meaning of the walls. Its impact was registered in several ways: the renaming of ten bulwarks with 'commemorative' identities such as 'Gunner's' and 'Coward's'; their careful maintenance in following centuries (and the addition of a triumphal arch in 1789) against a background of the neglect and decay of town defences in much of the rest of Ireland; and their association with activities including parades and the ritual shutting of the city gates.³⁷ Today the siege is not only commemorated by the seasonal repetition of the march around the walls, but contested through the changing nature of the route and (until recently) challenges to the parade's admission into the walled city. On the Nationalist (west) side a much photographed example of graffiti immediately outside the city wall reads 'LONDONDERRY WEST BANK LOYALISTS STILL UNDER SIEGE NO SURRENDER'.³⁸

Although not in Europe, a city long central to the faith of three world religions and to the European imagination is Jerusalem. Nowhere are these issues of dissonance brought into sharper focus, than in this quintessential contested walled city whose extant ramparts date mainly from the time of the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (sixteenth century).³⁹ In the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion advocated the wholesale destruction of Jerusalem's city walls to eradicate forever the division between the 'new' (western) and 'old' (eastern) city; while this was rejected the scheme was realised in model form and displayed in the early 1990s in an exhibition housed in the citadel *Dreamscapes: Unbuilt Jerusalem*.⁴⁰ The fact that the Old City was inscribed as a UNESCO WHS in 1981 following a proposal put forward by Jordan (despite, or because, of its 'occupied' status) reminds us again that conquest, along with changes in borders, political control, and even populations can all render 'national' heritage contestable and dissonant.

The dissonance – both trans-national and inter-communal – presented here well justifies the concern of the committee of experts of UNESCO, who in 1994 drew up the 'Nara' Declaration to protect the 'authenticity' and fairness of designated World Heritage Sites.⁴¹ This insists that "The cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all". It is attached to the application forms for WHS Designation and is worth examining in detail not just for such applicants. It attempts to ensure that the discussion of authenticity and therefore the judgements on whether places have 'outstanding universal value' go beyond the priorities of that

nation state that must always be the sponsor of World Heritage to the United Nations agency UNESCO.

Towards the conservation of the walled city

The physical character of surviving town walls – as long, sinuous and often discontinuous features intricately bound up with and inseparable from the historic townscapes they embrace – ensures that their conservation and management present special challenges. Among prominent European ‘gems’, the walls of Aigues Mortes are 1,650m, with 20 towers; Avila’s 2500m (82 towers); Carcassonne’s outer walls are 1,650m (42 towers); Conwy’s 1,300m (21 towers); Lugo’s 2,100m (46 towers); and Derry’s 1,300m (10 towers). For the conservation of upstanding remains of such magnitude, techniques such as the ‘soft-capping’ of walls using turf is emerging as a useful option alongside more conventional treatments, and holding an advantage of giving a less sanitised appearance by introducing vegetation.⁴² Yet elsewhere it is rampant vegetation that is the prime threat, as at Butrint. Below ground remains require management too, of course. For archaeological resource management ‘vanished’ walls still demarcate zones of high potential as well as holding particular practical challenges when excavated; in particular their status as multi-layered ‘belts’ of features (including, for instance, ‘berms’ and ditches) rather than simple linear forms means that surprisingly few full sections are recorded across defensive systems.

Management plans must also take into account that the fabric of town walls is often vestigial, standing the risk of appearing to be irrelevant monuments, out-scaled by urban development and too often lacking context. Furthermore, standing evidence may be dispersed and feature less than monumental architecture. Many major European walled cities have particularly unintelligible remains, as Berlin’s principal vestige of 120m of the Stadtmauer, restored in the early 1980s, shows. The city wall of London has historically been scheduled as 24 discrete monuments, and it is only at the beginning of the twenty-first century that a unified conservation management plan is moving towards the holistic management of the resource.⁴³ At Dublin a new conservation plan for the city walls sees these somewhat minimal remains as a key means of recreating the physical cohesion of the medieval cityscape lost to development from the seventeenth century and re-installing its sense of place.⁴⁴ A historic lack of certainty regarding the ownership of the dispersed remains (designated as more than 40 separate monuments) has led to serious dilapidation of the city’s principal civic monument; practical measures to reverse this include enhanced streetscape presentation of the wall and traffic calming measures at former gateway points.

Complex decisions concerning the designation and physical delineation of walled towns as recognised heritage sites highlight another important dimension to the challenge. The list of inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites holds much relevant evidence. Effective management is best achieved, of course, where the circuit is not divorced from its urban context but treated holistically in the context of the townscape and its setting. An early precedent for the maintenance or creation of open space around a city wall is the policy of the British authorities to the Old City of Jerusalem during the mandatory era; here, preservation of an extra-mural greenbelt was geared to the emerging tourist industry, allowing uninterrupted views of the ancient walled city in all its glory, unencumbered by development.⁴⁵ The concept of the 'buffer zone' has particular relevance here. Baku, Bruges, Rhodes, Salzburg, Tallin, Telč, Urbino, Verona, Vilnius and Visby are prominent examples of World Heritage Sites defined physically by walls but with designated extra-mural strips acting to preserve the integrity of the enceinte's physical context. Elsewhere, the limits of walled World Heritage Sites might specifically encompass features of perceived historic value in the extra-mural zone, as at Riga and Sighișoara which encompass historic suburbs. In contrast, at Acre, Rome and the Old City of Jerusalem, initial proposals received criticism because the definition of the sites within their walls was seen to exclude extra-mural monuments and archaeological sites of equally high value. At Urbino the 'buffer zone' was extended from the narrow strip originally proposed, while Avila was inscribed on the condition that the designated area was extended to embrace an ensemble of extra-mural Romanesque churches forming a part of its historic setting characteristic of the region.⁴⁶

There are a number of precedents for the limits of walled World Heritage Sites to be extended as ideas change or new evidence comes to light, as the examples of Butrint (inscribed 1992) and Dubrovnik (1979) show. Butrint was a walled settlement from at least the fourth century BC and its turbulent medieval history ensures that its continuously rebuilt defences exhibit an unusually deep and complex cultural stratigraphy from the Hellenistic Greek to the Venetian period (although targeted restoration has focused on the more monumental remains of the latter). Since 1994, extensive archaeological investigation has indicated that the below-ground remains of the town extended far beyond the late antique walls (and WHS as originally designated) onto the plain below.⁴⁷ This played a major role in the extension of the WHS in 1999 to include the extra-mural area and the designation of a surrounding zone of some 29 square kilometres as a National Park. At Dubrovnik, meanwhile, the WHS as initially defined was extended in 1994 to embrace the suburb of Pile. While this was again an extra-mural area, excavation had recovered a suite of features worthy of protection, raising the important question of

whether the type of suburban industrial activities so characteristic of extra-mural zones (and integral to the historic functions of these settlements) represent an archaeological resource worthy of importance.⁴⁸

Of crucial importance here, and linked closely to the question of dissonance in walled heritage is the observation that the policies of heritage agencies towards the physical fabric of town walls embody complex value judgements about the past – about what is of greater and lesser value and significance. At its most stark, conservation and restoration in early twentieth-century Germany went hand-in-hand with the racist awakening that culminated in National Socialism: the walled town of Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber, for instance, was showcased as a ‘pure’ Aryan settlement through medievalist restoration and policies of racial exclusion.⁴⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, twentieth-century ‘total war’ came to include the mutual destruction of monumental town centres.⁵⁰ The shelling of the iconic walled city of Dubrovnik in 1991-92 – and the integral part of the walls in the subsequent UNESCO-sponsored restoration programme – provides a chilling latter day example.

When sensitively managed, multi-phased remains can provide a physical manifestation of layered urban identities: in the gardens of the Yorkshire Museum, York, for example, conservation of an excavated section across the city defences in 1970 displays labelled layers of stratigraphy from the Roman period until the thirteenth century. But while the priorities of heritage agencies might ostensibly be the physical condition of monuments, there can be no ‘neutral’ handling of the fabric of ‘living’ town walls; their meanings are active not passive and can be written and re-written in myriad ways through their physical treatment and commodification. The heritage industry’s constructed image of Carcassonne as *la Cité Médiéval*, for example, is false: the physical fabric is visibly an amalgamation of fabric from the Late Roman Empire onwards. This rich stratigraphy is intact and intelligible yet remains understated and doubtless obscure to many visitors. Jerusalem, unsurprisingly, throws up compelling evidence: for example, Abu El-Haj has shown how selective conservation and presentation of the (partially excavated) remains of the city wall bounding the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem has contributed to the creation of a value-laden historicity emphasising the Jewish past.⁵¹ Particularly notable in the displays associated with the Broad Wall are the twin messages of military sophistication and the necessity for defence in the Iron Age; in the excavated remains of the Israelite Tower, for instance, displays emphasise the circuit’s martial Israelite heritage punctuated by sieges and battles.⁵²

Decisions relating to the removal of ‘encumbering’ structures – either within or without the circuit – can be particularly

controversial. The town walls of Lugo – arguably the most complete Roman walls in the Western Empire, owe their present appearance to the removal of houses between the towers in 1971-2.⁵³ In its most extreme form this can be termed the ‘Carcassonne syndrome’ after Viollet-le-Duc’s famous restoration of the *Cité Médiévale* in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the most obvious hallmark of this was the rebuilding of the city defences, in places, to parapet level, the project also involved the removal of houses and small-scale industrial buildings, in particular between the inner and outer walls, to present an unencumbered but sanitised view of the monument (Fig. 6).⁵⁴ Here, the actual process of restoration features heavily in its marketing; its international significance is not so much the architectural qualities of its fortifications *per se* as its significance as the master-work of Viollet-le-Duc and its pivotal role in the Romantic movement and, indeed, in the emergence of a global conservation ethic (the restorations – despite frequent criticism, including the construction of roofs in a supposedly unauthentic northern French style – were informed by systematic historic study). Carcassonne’s application for WHS status in 1985 was deferred not only because too many medieval fortified towns were perceived to be on the list, but because the nineteenth-century restorations were seen to ‘impinge’ on its authenticity, while its final inscription in 1997 recognised its ‘exceptional’ importance as an icon of the restoration movement.⁵⁵ As such, the city is a striking example of the heritage of heritage conservation.

Clearly, the distinction between the removal of later additions perceived to interfere with the integrity of the wall and the ‘sanitation’ of fabric through unnecessary clearance to create something new and artificial is a blurred one. We should also remember that historically, many town walls were always effectively hidden by development. The obliteration by the Israeli military of the Mughrabi Quarter outside Jerusalem’s Western Wall in 1967 is an extreme and controversial example,⁵⁶ and while this is an intra-mural wall, it highlights the conflicting ways in which such policies can be interpreted. Ostensibly designed to clear an open plaza by removing houses built up to the wall (access to it had previously been via a narrow alley) and removing a slum in order to lend dignity to a sacred site, these actions have, alternatively, been taken as an aggressive display of Israeli sovereignty, some Muslim writers arguing that the settlement’s history can be traced back to the eighth century.⁵⁷

Those few places where town walls have been reconstructed wholesale raise similar questions. As a general rule, reconstruction of town defences is rare and invariably partial: at Riga, for example, one section of the town wall demolished in the mid nineteenth century was re-erected, complete with a bastion. Quite exceptionally, the vestigial remains of the wall embracing

the Swiss town (and WHS) of Bellinzone was partially rebuilt to its presumed original height, complete with crenellations, in a scheme of restoration from 1953, only for many of these additions to be rapidly removed following debate about their authenticity.⁵⁸ Alongside Carcassonne (see below), the post-Second World War restoration of the Dutch fortress-towns of Bourtange and Heusden, with their fine bastioned enceintes, stand virtually alone as large-scale examples of the re-building of complete circuits.⁵⁹ The example of Heusden is particularly instructive. In the wake of devastation in 1944 (including purposeful destruction of the defences by the retreating German army), the 'Old Dutch System' fortifications, symbolising the perceived apogee of the place's importance as a border town (and, of course evoking the Dutch Golden Age in a re-assertion of the place's identity) were reconstructed almost wholesale in the period 1968-1990 following rejection of an earlier modernist redevelopment plan.⁶⁰ The justification that reconstruction of the townscape should accompany restoration of the defences was that the 'painting' had to be adapted to the restored 'frame'.⁶¹ Yet such enterprises inevitably cause tensions: the enormous increase in traffic resulting from the place's rise as a tourist attraction meant that a new (and false) opening had to be cut in the perimeter adjacent to the reconstructed Wijkse Port, and the dangers of the community becoming a sterile 'museum town' remain ever present.

At Conwy, the conservation programme initiated after the state's acquisition of the walls in 1953 has similarly extended beyond treatment of extant physical fabric to include the recreation of an external town bank and part of a ditch (Fig. 7).⁶² Furthermore, views of the walled town have been further 'enhanced' through the purchase and demolition of selected structures.⁶³ Yet we should remember there such an appearance is not necessarily authentically medieval: indeed, the present external appearance of the town is quite unlike its medieval highpoint, when suburbs spilled beyond the walls (subsequently to retract in its late medieval decline). In addition, there is a hazier distinction than may first appear to be the case between the exposure of the most historically important fabric and the production of a sanitised version of an unambiguously 'English' monument' in a modern Welsh setting. Conwy's heritage too is contested: it is the Red Dragon of Wales and the cloven Celtic cross of Cadw now fly from the Edwardian castles and the statue of Llywelwyn (the Welsh prince whose power base the English *bastide* replaced) that stands in the town square, despite the place's inscription on the UNESCO list for its association with Edward I. Cadw's treatment of these monuments in guidebooks has even been accused of relegating the Welsh dimension of Conwy's heritage through concentration on architecture as the expression of power.⁶⁴ What is clear is that in this context 'heritage' is more easily applied to the physical built environment rather than the less tangible Welsh

past – for instance the fact that the town’s charter, in common with other walled Edwardian towns in North Wales forbade Welsh settlement within the walls.⁶⁵

Conclusions

In one sense, town defences represent one manifestation of a wider field of built heritage that includes monuments such as castles and citadels at one end of the spectrum and boundary/frontier walls of other sorts at the other – Hadrian’s Wall WHS has now been extended to include the German *Limes*, for example.⁶⁶ While much of the literature relating to the heritage of town walls and walled towns has focused on the particular character, circumstances and identity of discrete places, this paper has attempted to search for commonalities in the experiences of these communities and attitudes to their past. There is of course further work to do to integrate within these findings the different and comparable experiences of walled communities beyond the European stage that has been the focus for this paper. Islamic walled cities present particular questions, for example,⁶⁷ as do Indian, Chinese and other non-European cities distinct from the specifically colonial fortified cities in South-East Asia and the Americas.⁶⁸

The key issues and challenges presented by the town walls include their extent, their relationship with the urban context, their effects as barriers within the townscape and the divisive dissonance of a heritage owned used and exploited by different groups over the centuries. Each of these matters is critical to the effective and sensitive conservation of town walls and walled towns, which if successfully managed can create specially valued living places for residents, their surrounding communities and even the tourist who may be attracted to them as sustainable gems of urban conservation. An historic perspective is vital: to some extent urban communities always saw walls as part of their ‘heritage’, and the strong local civic value of extant walls remains as clear as ever. As Alfonso the Wise, put it in the eleventh century (and as quoted in Avila’s recent tourist brochure): “You need a good wall to have a proper city”.

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Fig. 6. The walls of Carcassonne, showing one of the 'lists' cleared of development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Fig. 7. The walls of Conwy, showing an area of masonry cleared of encumbering structures and the 'recreated' medieval ditch.

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- ¹ <http://whc.unesco.org>; see also Graham 2002
- ² Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000, 155-63
- ³ Tiesdell *et al.* 1996, 7-11
- ⁴ Department of the Environment, *Planning Policy Guidance 16*, 6
- ⁵ Entitled 'ARCHWAY' and in receipt of Euro 459,725.00 (Award No. 3W0083N), the project will culminate in a conference in 2007 and the publication of five 'good practice' guides formulated through research with nine towns: Conservation and Interpretation; Transport; Spatial Planning; Tourism; and Cultural Heritage Management. A key perspective is the 'access' to the towns' monuments including walls and defensive structures for the socially disadvantaged, which may also include the socially excluded. Further discussion of social exclusion from and inclusion in heritage is to be found in the IJHS special edition of 2004 (Vol. 10:1) edited by Andrew Newman and Fiona Munn
- ⁶ Gibbon, writing in the late eighteenth century, identified 2300 in Germany alone (see Gibbon 1994); for European towns in general see Perbellini 2000 and Tracy 2000
- ⁷ Creighton and Higham 2005, 249-51
- ⁸ Creighton forthcoming
- ⁹ Porter 1994
- ¹⁰ Norris and Kain 1982, 10; see also Hopkinson 2000
- ¹¹ In the Russian Exclave, formerly East Prussia; see Baedeker 1913
- ¹² Schofield and Vince 2003, 52
- ¹³ Creighton and Higham 2005, 223-41
- ¹⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/lincolnshire/3751711.stm>
- ¹⁵ Creighton and Higham 2005, 243
- ¹⁶ Thomas 1992, 196-7
- ¹⁷ Johnston 2003, 180
- ¹⁸ Sournia 1976
- ¹⁹ Kain and Norris 1982, 11
- ²⁰ Miles 1998, 18
- ²¹ Glendinning has condemned "the driving, controlling force implicit in the totalitarian (mis-)conception of a rational basis for conservation of the built environment (2003, 18)
- ²² For Chester see <http://www.bwpics.co.uk/chester.html>; for Colchester <http://www.camulos.com/virtual/towns/colchester.html>; for York <http://www.york.gov.uk/walls/mapage.html>.
- ²³ Goss 1991, 90; Benevolo 1993, 41
- ²⁴ Johnston 2003, 176, 180-1
- ²⁵ For the Walled Towns Friendship Circle see <http://www.walledtowns.com/>; for the Centre Etudes des Bastides <http://etudebastides.ifrance.com/>
- ²⁶ Peter Osborne, who founded the WTFC in Tenby, coined this word 'Timestone'; see Bruce 1994; Bruce, Jack 2001
- ²⁷ Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 273
- ²⁸ Graham 2002, 1007
- ²⁹ Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 115
- ³⁰ Lennon and Foley 2000, 12, 66-7
- ³¹ Lowenthal 1996
- ³² Shaw and Macleod 2000
- ³³ Fowler 1992, 165
- ³⁴ Gruber and Gruber 2003
- ³⁵ Bruce 2004
- ³⁶ Worthington 2005, 127
- ³⁷ Mac Giolla Christ 1996, 130-33
- ³⁸ Kelly 2001
- ³⁹ Join-Lambert 1966, 221; see also Armstrong 1996
- ⁴⁰ Abu El-Haj 1995, 295
- ⁴¹ UNESCO 1994
- ⁴² As used to conserve the towers of the Roman Lower West Gate under City Hall, Lincoln.
- ⁴³ Chapman *et al.* 1985; Brindle 2002-3
- ⁴⁴ Gowen 2004, 32-3
- ⁴⁵ Cohen-Hattab 2004, 290; see also Amiran *et al.* 1973, 24
- ⁴⁶ http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/148.pdf
http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/348.pdf
http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/828.pdf

- ⁴⁷ Hodges *et al.* 2001, 26; Hounslow and Chroston 2002; Martin 2002; Bowden *et al.* 2004; Butrint Foundation
- ⁴⁸ http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/095.pdf
- ⁴⁹ Hagen 2004
- ⁵⁰ Glendinning 2003, 368
- ⁵¹ Abu El-Haj 1995, 309
- ⁵² Abu El-Haj 1995, 241-3
- ⁵³ http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/987.pdf
- ⁵⁴ Amiel *et al.* 2000. It should be noted that it was largely Viollet-le-Duc's successor, Paul Boeswillwald who was responsible for
- the removal of houses in Carcassonne's lists (the space between the inner and outer walls) in the period between his
- death in 1879 and completion of the restoration in 1909.
- ⁵⁵ <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repbur85.htm>; http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/345.pdf
- ⁵⁶ Other than the human cost of removing in excess of 135 houses beneath the wall, these actions dulled the aesthetic value of
- the wall by removing indications of its scale and imposition; see Abu El-Haj 1995, 301
- ⁵⁷ Prittie 1981, 114; Klein 2001, 27
- ⁵⁸ http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/884.pdf
- ⁵⁹ Baalman 1989, 29-32; Scheltema-Vriezendorp 1989
- ⁶⁰ Alkhoven 1999
- ⁶¹ Sholten 1975, 30; quoted in Alkhoven 1999
- ⁶² Taylor 1970, 6-7; 1995, 339; see also Creighton and Higham 2005
- ⁶³ Despite claims to the contrary (Austin 1997), these buildings were overwhelmingly worthless in terms of architectural or
- cultural value, including two electrical substations, a coal order office, a mortuary and numerous shacks.
- ⁶⁴ Hywel 1990, 184
- ⁶⁵ The only exception is Aberystwyth; see Creighton and Higham 2005, 99-103
- ⁶⁶ UNESCO new designations June 2005
- ⁶⁷ Slyomivics 2001, 4
- ⁶⁸ See, for example, Quebec: Evans 2002, 121