

A RAMBLE THROUGH THE HERITAGE

Martin Spray [1]

What .place' has art? What is arts 'environmental' function? This Article doesn't come to conclusions, but surveys some of the ground in what I hope is a novel way.

LIKE JANUS, the Roman god who looked at both past and future, and had charge of beginnings and transitions, of entrances, passages, and exits, 'heritage' is a twofaced thing. In one way, it is comforting, anchoring, interesting, and inspirational. In another, it is annoying, intimidating, stultifying. The heritage represented by the archetypical English pastoral countryside is often a beautiful desert, sustained by wasteful management practices and our access to cheap imports. It may be no more than a scenery backdrop: for example an upland valley that used to support several hundred people, today might be visited by thousands, but is home (or second home) for a handful of families with incomes elsewhere.

Landscape

We are ambivalent about the landscape. While we want easy access to it (by car), and 'facilities' from loos to luxury hotels in it, we also want to be able to seek out, and if we are rich enough acquire, places that are devoid of (other) visitors. We want a landscape that is up-to-date with mod. cons., *and* has a patina of beauty, history, culture, and (for some) Englishness. That is, we want it to have what we recognise as 'heritage value'. Some of us also like to see our names associated with it – and to become part of the heritage. And of these, many have creative interests: "I am an artist.... I wish to leave a mark."

One of the noticeable, if relatively minor, changes seen in Britain (and elsewhere) in recent decades is the number and diversity of 'works of art' liberally scattered *al fresco* from seashore to hilltop, and from city centre to the furthest Sticks. There is, as They say, a lot of it about. Whether we like the artwork or not, Gateshead (for an example) is now associated with Antony Gormley's 'Angel of the North', much as, though in a more dominant if anonymous way, the hillside above Uffington is associated with the White Horse (or dragon, if you believe Robert Graves), Cerne Abbas with a virile giant, and Salisbury Plain with – above all – iconic Stonehenge. Of these, probably only the 'Angel' was made as what we now call an 'artwork', but that is what, in the Public mind, the others have become.

Indeed, in the specialist mind, too, they tend to be thought about as works of art, and often nothing more. Art or not, such things have from distant times been part of the heritage of Britain, and as such we are inclined to preserve them. Meanwhile social change has made opportunities for outdoor art of all sorts more frequent, and better received than previously.

Don't get me wrong: This is not a build-up to saying that artists should sit quietly at home, and make art for their living-rooms or gardens, where

... shade is on the brightest wing,
And dust forbids the bird to sing. [2]

I like finding what they / you have been up to Out There – so long as it's not everywhere, and not at the expense of all else. I think it sometimes is...

Heritage-

We are ambivalent about heritage. We see this, for instance, here in the Forest of Dean. The blurb for a local booklet tells us "Heritage has become an important word today. It has become a critical part of our identity, and it has also become a battleground." [3] Leaving aside the question of how recently it became important, when the Forest was 'discovered' in the late eighteenth century, it was "not so much in the history as in the aesthetics [that] cultivated urban folk experiencing the frisson of wild nature and derelict antiquity" were interested. The Forest had been and was again becoming a slum of industrial activity... but *that* heritage was - and largely is - politely ignored. The Dean is still presented as one of England's top oak forests, yet half its trees are foreign conifers planted (like today's oaks) in rows. Visitors are enticed with an image of green tranquillity – though they must be alert for mountain bikes and occasional car rallies, and wild pigs; and a thoroughly-beaten, prominently signposted track follows the sculpture trail.

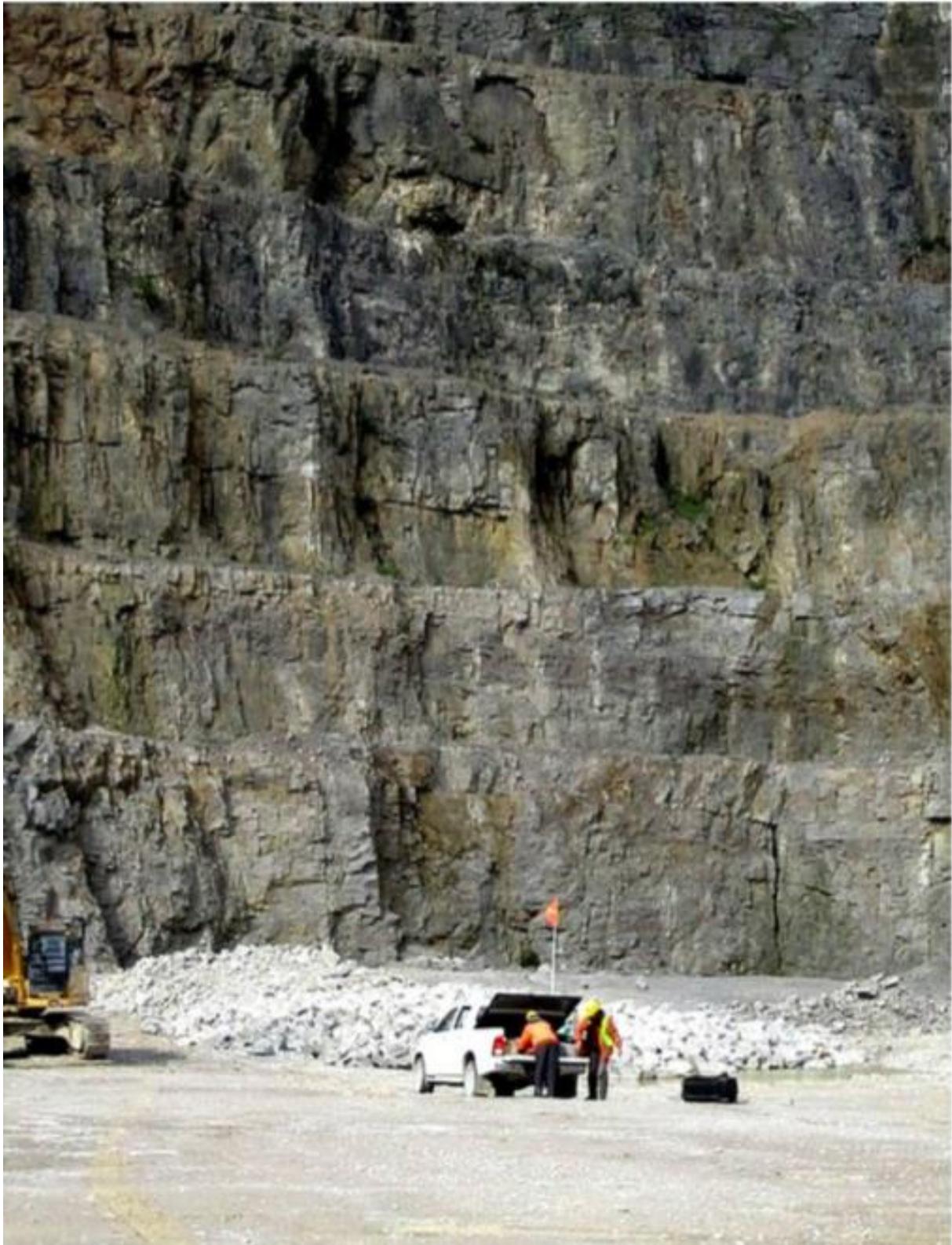
Natural heritage

The pretty Adonis Blue butterfly hangs on in southern England in a few places where, amongst other things, there is grazed grassland facing south with the sward one to three centimetres tall. If the sward grows beyond this by a few centimetres, the species is in danger. Even without the butterfly, we find this habitat attractive - not least presumably because it is reminiscent of lawn. Our culture is one that puts a heavy emphasis on conventionally attractive countryside; on the aesthetics of the landscape rather than the ecology of the land. Ecologist and conservationist that I am, I am not altogether exempt from this.

For me, one of the most joyous landscapes, from childhood associations, and from my parents' preferences, is the impoverished, denuded, and, as George Monbiot calls it, sheep-wrecked, moors - the

sheep [...]
Arranged romantically in the usual manner [4] -

in the Pennines, the Highlands, and the Welsh uplands.



The simplest of quarries can intrigue – even though I don't like the need for them.

Also, I am drawn to some other manmade features of the land, in particular quarries, that in other respects I regard with dismay akin to that of the native North

Americans who cannot understand how we can rape our Mother. The slate quarries of Gwynedd are prime examples, especially the mock-Mayan walling of Dorothea [5] near Nantlle, and the glum *llech* of Blaenau Ffestiniog [6], a town carefully excised from the National Park. Or Tout quarry on Purbeck [7], which became a sort of sculptors' garden: a part of the land we manage in order to take refuge in it, because it pleases, or we love it. Or in New York State, where 'Opus 40' is that many years-worth of rearranging leftovers of quarrying. [8] Or, nearer home, the inspirations of the 'Naked Quarry' carried out by Yorkshire Quarry Arts. [9] And, if there is no art, we may still be able to

recall
How once these heavy stones
Swam in the sea as shells and bones [10]

I've never seen the Adonis Blue, but I like its habitat..

Being heritage doesn't imply being beautiful, though it often is, and there is often a presumption that if it is something wanted, it is *likely* to be beautiful. Adonis Blues and Bluebells (and also, for instance, York Minster) are at least good for looking at. Maggots and anonymous slimes are, most of us say, not. Yet, maggots and the annoying flies they become, and the anonymous slimes are (like your local sewage works) of greater ecological importance....

Oh, don't mistreat the fly!
He wrings his hands.
He wrings his feet!. [11]

Cultural heritage

These are two examples of evolutions of landscapes I would miss if they were lost. And this is while I deplore the virtual disappearance of wilderness - that is, as it were, "where the foot of mankind has not trod" (more particularly, where it is not allowed to tread). It is also while I want, in both wild and humanised landscapes, the 'ecology' to be intact and healthy, and our understanding of this ecology to include *ourselves* as a benign component.

Of course, not everyone gives priority to their heritage. 'We' at best means most of us, but it usually means only some of us. For instance, many - perhaps most of us - rate 'convenience' or 'modernity', and things technological, higher than a heritage - as Stonehenge once again shows. Or, they believe they have something better with which to replace a piece of heritage. Or, they simply want to leave something that they will be remembered by. As garden designer Martha Schwartz boldly put it: "I am an artist.... I see the landscape as a vehicle for self-expression, I wish to leave a mark." [12] I guess most gardeners would agree with Hugh Johnson [13] that a garden is about the only piece of art they make.

Show me your garden and I
Shall tell you what you are. [14]

Marks are being left regardless of context, history, or the sentiments of other people. "A gigantic eye, familiar to fans of the television game show 'Big Brother', has been daubed alongside the [Uffington] White Horse." [15] This was only a temporary intrusion, but was enough to annoy. Rather more intensive, and destructive because of its materials and the larger potential disturbance (whether or not the art stays intact), is the new habit of 'stone-stacking', commonly by making 'fairy castles'. "Stacking or balancing stones is a pleasurable pastime for some lovers of the outdoors and a precarious natural [i.e. naturalistic] sculpture is a familiar sight on mountain, riverside and beach. But Historic England said stone stackers should not tamper with spots classified as ancient monuments." [16] "It is a natural part of civilisation's lust of re-arrangement that we should be so ready to conventionalise the beauty of this world into decorative patterns", mused *The Roadmender* - which reminded me of the comment by the seventeenth century Platonist Nicolas Malebranch, that "the visible world would be perfect if the seas and lands made more regular figures"! [17]

But if the likes of Goldsworthy, Long, and Drury can show us what a first-rate artist playing with stones can do, and be praised for it..., aren't some of the rest of us going to "have a go" for ourselves. Even if the results are noddy, we are responding to the call for us to be more creative. [18]



Wood stacks may be a bit noddy, but making them can be fun.

Heritage landscape

I am aware that there are numerous images of 'heritage landscape': Epping Forest, Avebury, Kew gardens, Dovedale, Alton Towers, Wistman's Wood, Trafalgar Square: these are all parts of the landscape we want to be protected - not all of us, of course: some of us *don't*....

Is it not the case that whatever list of heritage landscapes one thinks of contains contradictions, conflicts and collisions? A diversity of things *become* heritage for a diversity of reasons – and long have done, as Bill Bryson thought: “ It sometimes occurs to me that the British have more heritage than is good for them.” [19] Your list might (say) include Gateshead, York Minster, Blaenau Ffestiniog, and the White Cliffs of Dover. You wish these to be protected; but you might want especially to preserve the favourite place you played as a kid, where you first said “I love you”, and where you buried Rover.

This once I saw, but not again,
Above the water pocked by rain.
Three mottled eggs in a moorhen’s nest,
In a clump of kingcups by the edge
Of the water, in amongst the sedge. [20]

They are *your* ‘becoming-heritage’, not mine. And, of course, these places probably lose attention when we lose you; but while you are here, they may be your most important places, and you wish them to remain as they are into the future.

Some – probably many – things that become beloved heritage also and simultaneously become hated and disheartening impositions. We see this in trivial, ephemeral, examples such as a seat placed where someone *else* habitually stopped to take in the view (but the seat has ‘domesticated’ a flowery bank); and in the reception of a pride-and-joy cypress hedge by its neighbours. And we can see less trivial examples in the arguments and violence around statues of, for instance, Cecil Rhodes and Robert E. Lee. [21]

A dead man
who never caused others to die
seldom rates a statue. [22]

Perhaps it is at its most grotesque in cases such as the preservation *or* the total eradication of Auschwitz.

Aesthetics

Since the eighteenth century, when the idea came into common philosophic use in Europe, “aesthetics has”, as David Harvey has somewhere written, “trampled over ethics as a prime force of social and intellectual concern”. [23] What we would preserve does not equate with, and concerns very much more than, aesthetics; however, when some part of The Heritage is discussed, one thing likely to come to mind is how beautiful it is.

It is difficult not to think of the land (or sea) as something seen; and it is very difficult to think of the ecological integrity of an area without rating it in terms of attractiveness. We still sell nature conservation via the florid wildflower meadow, the sumptuous multiplicity of the tropical forest, the iconic face of the tiger, and the beautiful melody of the songbird (or resplendent plumage even if its owner sings

like a toad). We do not sell conservation to many people via slugs or amorphous slimes, though they may be ecologically more important – or more important for the so-called services it is now fashionable to say they do for us . [24]

Art 1 : Science 0

White horses and Adonis Blues were brought together in the Millennium and how it should be commemorated. Artist Charles Newington proposed a modern chalk-figured horse on the hill over the entrance to (or exit from) the Channel Tunnel at Folkestone. This would be a suitable if local marker of time, and a suitable addition to the country's heritage. It would be the first thing someone arriving in England would notice, and it would "divert the eye and correct the natural imbalance that has been created with the construction of the Channel Tunnel". [25] An aesthetically useful piece of heritage for the future....

The advice of English Nature was to reject it. "This is a site of European importance [...]. It is [...] a Site of Special Scientific Interest for chalk grassland plants which support the rare Adonis blue butterfly." [26] *That* was rejected. "Art 1: Science 0", one might say. But we all know it is more complex than that. The amenity is better, with an artwork to admire – or worse, if you don't like it. The ecology is little disturbed by the digging-up and translocation of 0.02 hectare (0.049 acres) square metres of turf, and probably rather more by the white plastic sheets used in the mock-up and the chalk slabs used to pave the 100 metre long sculpture. A cynic might say that another small piece of the globe has been successfully domesticated and paved.

Critics and fellow artists might say it stands out (i.e. intrudes) somewhat – as it's supposed to. Enthusiasts might – sincerely – say that something beautiful , of benefit to society, and a piece of our **future** heritage, has been made. They might add that we can't live by Adonis Blues and stone henges alone, and that the bread-and-butter of art is needed for our nourishment. But this is ecological, and needs balance: "If a man finds himself with bread in both hands, he should exchange one loaf for some flowers, since the loaf feeds the body indeed, but the flowers feed the soul." [27]

To have '(becoming) heritage value', a landscape does not have to be beautiful (let alone biodiverse). It may be special in some other way. And, indeed, 'beautiful' comes with qualifications and cultural baggage. [28] "I now find much of the Scottish Highlands visually less attractive than I used to, because I know too much about the hardship, violence and injustice that produced the landscape we now see", [29] a comment by planner Paul Selman that I willingly echo, although I continue to find the Highlands beautiful, and a partial substitute for wilderness.



Straw bales being played with.... Stonehenge and the 'Angel' are both 'iconic'



Objectivity

I find it difficult to remain objective about heritage. Much of the thinking about what to protect is grounded in personal experience, family and group traditions, belief, and other things usually called subjective, or cultural. Scientists are not immune. In 1945, looking towards a post-war Britain, Arthur Tansley, a leading plant ecologist and one of British nature conservation's modern founding fathers, wrote in his 'plea for organized nature conservation' that the "combination of cultivation with half-wild country is one of the most precious parts of our national heritage. [...] How much of this unique inheritance can we preserve in the years of profound change that lie ahead of us?" [30] He would be horrified.

What Tansley saw was as much part of his *cultural* as of his 'natural' heritage. The cultural history that we inherit on the land is a compromise selection of what has been, and sometimes is a very distinctly skewed preference. The rest is lost, some of it by accident, some by decay, some because its guardians couldn't afford or no longer wanted it – and of course some was rejected with disgust, shame, or embarrassment. Currently, the destruction of the 'wrong' heritage by Islamic State is a notorious example; an earlier example, closer to home, was the removal of idolatrous statuary from the English churches.

What remains with us is wanted, but perhaps only by a sector of society (often an elite); and it may be a burden. Can we today afford what survives? Shall we be able to tomorrow? The question is as applicable to the Yorkshire Dales or the North York Moors – or the Adonis Blue – as it is to York Minster. The question includes such things as the cost of maintenance, and the shortage of skilled people able to do the maintaining, but it also has to accommodate knowledge that what was once desirable or essential is now considered by some an anachronism, or indeed altogether a bad thing. My example of the minster, of course, for some people represents just this ambiguity: its architectural and artistic treasures are enveloped in mediaeval miasma – yet their loss would be widely regretted. We compromise, and keep beautiful old buildings, and scenic landscapes, with the help of cream-teas, souvenirs, and curious olde customs.

New York might have 'restored' the 'Opus 40' quarry, or filled it with garbage, or left it to Nature to make its own nature reserve; but no: it became a work of art, the biggest in that country, apparently, commemorating the artist, not the quarrymen – or the 'healing power of Nature'. Certainly, 'Opus 40' is not the remains or even the memory of a quarry. It is, largely because of its size, best read as a new landscape – done artistically. What would have been the best future: filling it in and forgetting its history, or leaving it hopefully as a gradually-ameliorating scar, or tidying it and making it an officially heritage industrial site, or doing something else, or moving things around artistically for forty years? It depends, of course, on *you* – what you want to be kept, what you would *strive* to keep; what changes you would tolerate, what changes you would *notice*: what messages you want places, objects, and events, to propagate; and – not least important – whether or not you feel able to take an opportunity, make a change, and propagate your own message.

Personal questions

This ramble through the idea of heritage will, I hope, prompt a few thoughts that perhaps might have slipped by uncaught. I realise that although I would like to prompt thoughts especially in artists, much of the article is, as it were, written tangentially, due to a belief in the idea that often to make headway one must make detours to the side.

I am not an artist, but as I noted earlier like exploring what artists have been up to Out There. Although I've never tried to be scientifically 'objective', and face an artwork with a checklist of questions, the work inevitably begs such questions as:

- How would I like Dorothea to become decorated with fairy castles?
- Would I enjoy meeting a Henry Moore sculpture by a lonely Highlands wayside?
- Should a big Big Brother logo eye be allowed next to the Cerne Abbas Giant: (a) if it is temporary? (b) if it is permanent?
- Ought Banksy use his art to ridicule The Establishment? Ought The Establishment try to obliterate Banksy's art?
- Does, and should, a redundant quarry commemorate quarrymen or artists? Or should it be filled in?

These, of course, are only my examples. Some, clearly, look for an aesthetic response, some a cultural one; others need an ethical reaction; and some a scientific evaluation. A 'conclusion' may be a difficult prospect!

What is heritage?

We need a calm rethink into what 'heritage' is about, *and* into how useful a concept it is? Its usefulness may be diminished by a suspicion that there apparently are several heritages, dependent on whose they are, what their main aspects are, and what values we ascribe to these aspects. [31]

The idea of heritage is becoming ever more clouded, in the flux of political and philosophical changes, the slowly growing influence of women, the increased clout and demands of youth-culture, and the fascinating but bewildering multi-cultural social mix. Perhaps the idea is fading. But - we still, for instance, need to ask "*Whose heritage?*", and "*How far back are we going?*", though the answers are less obvious than they were, and the outcomes need negotiation. The blurring of distinctions between 'real;' and 'virtual' has only just begun to be a consideration!

Whatever the future heritage / heritages may be (and we shall surely have them), we shall probably need to check individually against our personal assumptions what 'our' heritage means and offers to other people. What does it mean and what does it offer, for example, to someone who is chronically disabled, or blind, to an immigrant or exile, to a devout Moslem, or an animist, to someone

suffering agoraphobia, to a down-and-out, or to a victim of violence? Heritage is a fluid multiplicity of things, not a fixed, static, and predictable, list.

It is qualified for each of us by our upbringing and our experiences. Increasingly, these experiences include the exotic and unfamiliar. For people who have been in Britain for only a short while, our land and its history is not their 'heritage'; they each have still to make a relationship with its landscapes, and these relationships may be – probably will be – very different from the ones the native population grew up with (and which themselves may be quite diverse). We may struggle to like or understand them and their *raisons d'être*.

As Julian Agyeman, a founder member of the Black Environmental Network, has pointed out, the English countryside "is still portrayed by advertising and the media as the true keeper of Anglo-Saxon culture. [...] Black people in the countryside are [...] perceived as being 'out of place'". And "what is the Black listenership of *The Archers*?" ...[32] Not that the only divide is by nationality and ethnicity. We should all beware of ignorance of others and their views.

I could draw its map by heart,
showing its contours,
strata and vegetation,
name every height,
small burn and lonely sheiling,
but nameless to me,
faceless as heather or grouse,
are those who live there
[...]. [33]

If Janus is still in charge, two faces will probably not be enough.

1 This is a development of 'Green and pleasant heritage' *Ecos* 35(2) 48-54, 2014.

2 Edith Sitwell 'Popular song'.

3 Clare Ham & David Adams *In search of our Forest heritage. A field guide* 2013.

4 R.S. Thomas 'The Welsh hill country'.

5 At Dorothea, much of the walling was just to hold the debris rock back from cascading into the pit. It was interesting to stand at the edge of the pit, and look at the clear water, and realise that it went down below sea-level. This was over 30 years ago.

- 6 *Llech* is Welsh for slate. As you say it, you can almost hear the slate scattering down the hillside! If anywhere in Britain is a Heritage Landscape, this is. Overall extraction of rock in Britain in 1953 was “equivalent to the abolition of Snowdon every ten years” wrote Walter Shepherd in *The living landscape of Britain*.
- 7 Well known to early L.A.N. members. A good place to start is Tout Quarry map at learningstone.org/?attachment_id=24252
- 8 ‘Opus 40’ (“It looks like too much *opus!*” said a sculptor friend) is relatively little documented. A good way to start is to google site images.
- 9 *The naked quarry*. Yorkshire Quarry Arts ed. Noelle Odling & David Walker Barker, Walker Fine Arts, 2008.
- 10 Andrew Young ‘Idleness’.
- 11 Kobayashi Issa (Japanese).
- 12 Martha Schwartz is an innovative, non-naturalistic designer. See e.g. www.marthaschwartz.com
- 13 Hugh Johnson *The principles of gardening*.
- 14 Alfred Austin.
- 15 ‘Big Brother logo ‘defiles’ White Horse’ *The Observer* 4 May 2017.
- 16 ‘Stone stackers at ancient sites could face jail, warns Historic England’ *The Guardian* website, 13 September 2017. ‘Stone stacking is destroying Britain’s Neolithic monuments, warns Historic England’, *The Daily Telegraph* website, 13 September 2017 - has good photos.
- 17 *The roadmender* Michael Fairless i.e. Margaret Fairless Barber. Malebranch source lost.
- 18 An earlier Article, nr. 16, ‘Stacks of fun’, Woodrow Morris 2011, describes a rather more innocent improvising of ‘sculpture’ using the debris left by forestry workers.
- 19 Bill Bryson *Notes from a small island*.
- 20 Vita Sackville-West *The land*.
- 21 ‘Cecil Rhodes statue pulled down in Cape Town’ *Daily Telegraph* website 9 April 2015. The headline to the story from the U.S.A. by David Olusoga, in *The Observer* 27 August 2017, is informative: ‘Statues are not the issue; These are ‘history wars’, a battle over the past’.
- 22 W.H. Auden *Marginalia*.
- 23 Also Richard Dixon *The Baumgarten corruption. From sense to nonsense in art and philosophy*.
- 24 The idea of ‘ecosystem services’ is controversial (if only because ‘service’ evokes ‘servant’...). An interesting view is *Arts and humanities perspectives on cultural ecosystem services* at uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx (2014).
- 25 HoldtheFrontPage.co.uk, ‘Reporter’s planning evidence sways landmark decision’ 9 April 2002. Debbie Bartlett *The White Horse of Folkestone – desecration or overreaction? Ecos* 23(1) 85-88, 2002 gives a nature conservation perspective.
- 26 English Nature Press Releases, Press statement – White Horse decision, 30 March 2002.
- 27 A saying from Muhammad. Variations are found in several parts of the Old World.
- 28 A wider context is given by Crispin Sartwell *Six names of beauty*.

29 Comment by planner Paul Selman (source lost).

30 Arthur Tansley, *Our heritage of wild nature*.

31 Several heritages –

(i) Here is one way of categorising reasons for treating places, objects, and events as heritage. I don't pretend that it is exemplary.

Cultural (the collective human heritage, including narratives, and symbolic uses)

Human-ecological (the services)

Productive (the resource, including various ways of harvesting it)

Scientific (its 'interest', and scientific value, including of its biodiversity)

Aesthetic (its beauty perceived by the various senses)

Recreational (its use for play, exercise, challenge)

Psycho-spiritual (its use for recovery and recharge, and as a source of inspiration, admiration, and awe; and for those of a religious bent, worship)

Personal (usually ephemeral relationships with places, objects and events).

This is the small scale of heritage ; at the largest scale, the U.N. recognises tangible natural and cultural heritage, and intangible cultural heritage.*

* 'Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' at www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention

(ii). Faced with the question of what the future of the Forest of Dean – a classic heritage forest, though radically changed several times down the centuries – would / should be, a public meeting a few years ago heard arguments that the Forest should be:

- a timber resource *and* recreation area, as now
- a biofuel resource
- a building material resource
- an extensive nature reserve
- a wilderness.

or, it might be cut down and become some other type(s) of landscape.*

* This has been suggested, in 1794. The proposed land-use was agriculture.

32 Julian Agyeman, Black people – White landscape *New Ground* nr. 2: 6-8, 1989.

33 W.H. Auden 'Amor loci' [Love of place].

Martin Spray is a retired lecturer in landscape ecology and environmental philosophy. He is a longstanding member of the Landscape & Arts Network.