

Dutch Developments in Documenting Built Heritage

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1. Introduction

The listing of cultural heritage has a long, but not always consistent history in the Netherlands. It was in 1860 that a special commission of the Royal Academy of Science made the first attempt to 'explore, conserve and publish the remains of national art and architecture from former times' as its title proclaimed. But it would take more than 100 years before a definitive legal protection of historic buildings, monuments and sites was realised (1961, *Monumentenwet*, now replaced by the *Monumentenwet 1988*). During this 'actless' age several initiatives took place with regard to the documentation and conservation of the 'Dutch Monuments of History and Art', initially by a State Commission of volunteering experts and from 1918 on also supported by a small professional staff of the *Rijksbureau voor de Monumentenzorg*, succeeded in 1947 by the current *Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg* (RDMZ, Netherlands Department for Conservation) and proving that the mere listing and documentation of valuable items of cultural heritage by an accredited scientific body could already help to recognize these historic artefacts and in some cases also to save them from demolition.¹

At the moment our department belongs to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, while there is a collaboration with the Ministry of Housing regarding the assignment of 'conservation areas' and other planological measures, as well as with the local authorities (provinces and municipalities) and many private organisations. Our department is mainly involved with the built heritage, in practice all constructions after 1000 A.D., including cultural landscapes and historic gardens as well as industrial heritage. Our main tasks are:

- Registering the built heritage (buildings and conservation areas) for legal protection by state
- Education and publication about the cultural historic values of the built heritage
- Consultancy to municipalities, private owners and eligible organisations about conservation
- Awarding subsidies for the restoration and maintenance of historic buildings and sites
- Promoting 'cultural planology'.

Movable objects and works of art belong to the domain of the museums and the Netherlands Collection Institute. For the archaeological heritage is the Netherlands Department for Archaeology (ROB) in Amersfoort responsible (with which we will collaborate more and more intensively). With regard to the recent heritage (after 1850, momentarily

¹ For the details of this 'prehistory of listing' I may refer to my article in the *Transactions of the Ancient Monumenten Society* Vol. 42, 1998, pp. 13-34).

especially the postwar period) we collaborate with the Netherlands Architecture Institute at Rotterdam (NAI). Besides, we need to exchange information with the cadastral offices, because it is required to indicate every protected monument on the cadastral maps by marking them with an 'M'.

2. Listing and Protection

In 1908-33 the *Preliminary List of Dutch Monuments of History and Art* was drawn up and published in twelve volumes (eleven provinces and Amsterdam) as a first step towards further documentation. These lists enumerated all valuable historic buildings per town in a thematical order and mentioned also valuable objects in churches, town halls and manors and they contained about 12,000 buildings in total. But a few historic houses, farms and windmills were included, and no illustrations. By then, a distance in time of fifty years was required for an objective evaluation, which was in practice around 1850.

After World War II (which had caused a great loss of preliminary listed monuments), a new list has been composed and then for the first time also the 'vernacular architecture' of the past was regarded worthwhile to document and to protect. Although the fifty years-rule would allow the protection of late nineteenth-century buildings, hardly any example was listed, due to a great lack of time - initially, all registration should be done within five years by a very small staff - but also because of a wide-spread dislike of the historicism. The first work to register the legally protected historic buildings, mainly dealing with the built heritage of pre-industrial times (till 1850) has been done in the '60s and '70s. This resulted in the assignment of:

- circa 40,000 protected monuments
- circa 350 conservation areas.

During the 80's additional surveys have been carried out by means of the Monuments Inventory Project (MIP) and Monumentens Selection Project (MSP), both with regard to the 'younger heritage' of the 1850-1940 period. As a result, our list of protected monuments will be augmented with:

- circa 10,000 protected monuments (out of circa 165,000 inventoried)
- circa 150 conservation areas (out of circa 350 'areas of special value').

Since the '90s, six sites of the Dutch cultural heritage are inscribed on the World Heritage List, representing several stages of the unique Dutch history (the former island of Schokland, an archaeological site; the circle of 45 fortresses around Amsterdam, the ensemble of 19 windmills near Kinderdijk, the steam-powered pumping house 'D.F. Wouda' near Lemmer, the reclamation area Beemsterpolder in North-Holland, the inner city of Willemstad, capital of Curaçao in the West Indies, and the Rietveld-Schröder house at Utrecht).

Most protected monuments are privately owned, which implies a lot of administration and communication. All owners need to be informed about the protection measures, while we (RDMZ) need to be informed about their names and addresses, which change frequently.

Today all protected monuments are registered in a computerised database, which is (misleadingly) called 'Objects Data Base' (ODB) and – after a great conversion - based on Oracle software. Although it is still intended to expand the uses of this database for scientific research, the current opportunities for combining data (such as building types, materials, styles periods) are very limited, not to speak of illustrations. The main use is juridical: to give information about the protected buildings (address, description, motivation, ownership, cadastral data). In some cases a supplementary information field is added with data about recent restorations or the technical state.

In contrast to the ODB the computerised MIP-data base can provide far easier selected lists of all sorts of interesting data, but it is not kept up-to-date and it also lacks the images. These can be found in the copied reports, which have all the same thematically organised contents (circa 60 regional descriptions, circa 650 municipal descriptions, including various typologies and circa 350 acknowledged 'areas of special value' and circa 165 completed inventory forms of documented buildings and complexes).

At the moment a pilot project is going on to digitalise our huge collection of over 400,000 photographs (black and white), which might allow a connection with the ODB in the future. It is also intended to connect both the bibliographical information of our (MS-DOS based) AdLib system of our well-provided library (where it operates now on stand-alone computers) and the terminology of the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (in Dutch, but essentially derived from the Getty Institute) with the ODB, via internet. In the Dutch AAT version over 5,000 descriptors have been added to all translated terms.

Since 2000, the current AMR Project (Actualisation of the Monuments Register) has been started to update the 'sleeping' information in the ODB and to integrate the alphanumeric data with cadastral maps on which digital contours indicate the location and outlines of the protected buildings (more than 50,000 items). This immense task is being executed in close collaboration with the Netherlands Department for Archaeology by front- and backoffice teams, which are accommodated nearby our office building. They combine traditional methods like screening paper dossiers and books as deskresearch with more advanced techniques like GIS and tools like GPS and pen computers to locate the registered objects in the field and to revise quickly the descriptive texts. While the majority of the 'old' monuments are often described with just one line and seldom elements of the interiors are mentioned, experiments are being carried out with pre-coded fields which can generate 'automatic descriptions'. Also the newly added 'MSP-monuments' of the 'younger heritage' will be checked and if necessary the information will be amended.

The Actualisation Project will mainly deal with the registered objects of the architectural and archaeological heritage, but it is not meant for an all-over review of the selection, although apparently disappeared buildings will be deleted from the register. It is intended that this project will be finished before 2005. However, in our dynamic country it is very likely that new updates will be needed in the future, but by then we will be provided with a very useful digital database with many links and a greater accuracy than at the moment.

So, information technology will influence, and support, our work more and more, although both scientific research and fieldwork will remain essential as well.

3. Education and Publication

The RDMZ is on its way to become the national 'centre of knowledge' for the built heritage in the Netherlands, both for the general public and the scientific researchers. As indicated already, our department has an impressive collection of books, magazines, drawings, photographs, slides, maps, letters and reports, which can be consulted all working days (for free). Besides, we have a website (www.monumentenzorg.nl) which has several links with related institutes, but it is only in Dutch. Last but not least we have more than 170 employees, who can be addressed for various questions.

In the past period, we have increased our education and communication activities with regard to the 'lay' public (often including owners of protected buildings) and the conservationists of the lower authorities, because our current *Monuments Act* has transferred the authorisation of the necessary 'monument permits' to the municipalities, even if it regards stately protected monuments. For these ends we do not only produce newsletters, booklets, leaflets and popular publications and organise courses, but we collaborate also with private organisations on cultural heritage and with the massmedia. Especially the so-called 'Open Monument Days', every first or second Saturday in September, attract a lot of people (over 800,000 visitors) and they can only be successful when the current cooperation will be continued.

As for the scientific research, the contacts with the universities and academies have become more two-sided. We have already each year a couple of students doing various sorts of practical research within our department, but now we have also five parttime professors teaching and promoting specialised scientific research on the built and cultural heritage at different universities (I happen to be one of them, at the Faculty of Arts and Culture of the Maastricht University), while our department also supports Ph.D. publications, both by our own experts and external scholars.

These new developments might perhaps affect the traditional scientific research of our department regarding the *Geïllustreerde Beschrijving van de Nederlandsche Monumenten van Geschiedenis en Kunst*, which can be compared with the French *Inventaire*. This topographically organised series started in 1912 with the publication of Jan Kalfs volume on the Baronie van Breda and it is still being continued, but reorganised several times and at the moment the formula is being discussed again while budget and research teams remain limited.

Meanwhile, other series have been started, mainly with less scientific pretensions and involving private authors. Since 1912 the following publications have been brought out by our department, besides many occasional publications:

47 volumes Inventory ('Illustrated Description of the Monuments of History and Art')

6 volumes of the public-private series *Monumenten in Nederland* (per province)

16 volumes of the MIP series *Architectuur en Stedebouw 1850-1940*

6 volumes of the additional MIP series per town

11 volumes of the *Monuments Yearbook* (since 1994 thematic)

3 volumes of the 'Cultural historic series' (specific themes of Dutch built heritage)

4 volumes of the so-called 'grey' series (precursor of the Cultural historic series).

4. New study fields and new documentation tools

As mentioned before, the present legislation and the present dynamism within our built environment urge our department to develop new policies and new documentation tools.

One new study field which we have recently entered, regards the wartime and postwar heritage of the 1940-1965 period, which cannot yet be protected, but deserves our immediate attention because a huge and radical urban renewal plan has been developed by the Ministry of Housing, especially for the early post-war housing schemes. Although the intention was expressed several times by our department to continue with surveys of the recent heritage after the MIP and the MSP would have been completed, the present State Secretary of Culture (the economist Rick van der Ploeg) preferred to support the current Actualisation Project with a similar budget and to allow just a few smaller projects concerning the heritage built after 1940. On the one hand we have particularly invested in a strategy to raise public awareness concerning the cultural historic values of post-war housing schemes and on the other hand we have decided to shift from a mainly geographical approach to smaller thematic studies.

These projects are carried out by a small team and supported by apprentices and some external experts. In brief we have started the following projects:

- Atlantikwall inventory project
- Quick Scan military airbases 1910-1950
- developing an evaluation model for post-war extensions 1940-65
- testing this model in three municipalities (Leeuwarden, the Hague SW, Venlo)
- thematic survey of post-war schools in one province (Flevoland)

- thematical survey of post-war churches in one province (North-Brabant)
- thematical survey of post-war townhalls in one province (Gelderland)
- other thematical surveys of post-war building types
- documentation of about 100 selected examples of wartime and post-war heritage, to be published in a book.

Moreover, special platforms on post-war heritage are organised with invited municipalities, in combination with regional excursions. Although we have partly changed our organisation and our approach, we still take advantage of our previous MIP methods and the continuation of our professional contacts.

Not only the recent heritage has become a new field of interest for our department, but also our involvement in 'cultural planology' has increased, requiring new tools to transfer cultural historic knowledge to physical planners, politicians and private owners. One instrument is the so-called *Cultuurhistorische verkenning* (CV, 'cultural-historic reconnaissance'), which has no legal base but seems to be rather effective to influence decisions about future changes with regard to specific buildings or larger ensembles. These CVs consist of copied reports with analytical texts, photographs and coloured maps, indicating the cultural historic values, opportunities and risks for future developments.

Recently, several provinces have initiated, in consultation with our department, the production of their own surveys, called 'cultural historic atlas/map/structure' and using cd-roms. Most advanced and most triggering is the 'cookery book' of the province of North-Brabant, which does not only contain intriguing recipes how to deal with cultural historic values in utopic scenario's but also two CD-roms, one indicating all sorts of values in all sorts of selections and one allowing all sorts of animations related to the recipes.

Also within our department more and more use is being made of the new GIS techniques (ArcView and MapGuide), both for the legal registration work (e.g. indication of the protected zones of the conservation areas, like the inner city of Amsterdam, or the historic parks) and the Actualisation Project (digital contours) and special research projects (e.g. historic development of Ootmarsum), besides support for planological consultancy (e.g. Marken and surveys for the Belvédère project, in which four ministries are involved). We can also consult the digital map 'The Netherlands in Plans' produced by the Physical Planning Department, which gives insight in the actual state of physical planning (i.e. the valid plans).

In short, the current Dutch documentation activities on the cultural heritage are tending to widen their scope as broad as possible and to integrate both traditional and modern techniques. At the same time we need more and more cooperation with other partners (of other disciplines and other organisations). In some cases a quick and practical implementation and a well-understanding of the documentation prevails above scientific profoundness and preciseness, while the pressure to change our built environment is enormous.