

# Should the UK Be Nominating More World Heritage Sites?

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This article is an account of a challenge issued in a seminar at the Institute of Archaeology at UCL in October 2010. It looks at the changing political and economic context within which the UK nominates World Heritage Sites, and questions whether – practically, and even ethically – the UK should be continuing to submit sites to the World Heritage Committee for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

Over the last few years, my work has provided me with a series of insights into a range of aspects of the World Heritage question: an analysis of the Tentative List Review process for English Heritage, and of the responses to the “World Heritage for the Nation” consultation for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), followed by a year of work on the UK’s latest World Heritage Site nomination of the Twin Monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow, and on the management plan for the World Heritage Site of Ancient Merv (Turkmenistan). This “cocktail” of World Heritage research and practice has given me, like many, a respect for the concept and the ideals behind it, but doubts about the implementation. The conclusions of this article are personal and partial, and are intended to generate further discussion.

## World Heritage

World Heritage Sites (WHS) are places that have been formally inscribed by UNESCO as being of importance to all humanity, a significance that is expressed as Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). This concept was set out in the 1972 UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, known more usually as the *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO 1972).

Countries which have ratified the Convention are known as “States Parties” and become part of an international system, the intention of which is to cooperate to “identify, protect, manage, present and transmit to future generations” their World Heritage Sites. The Convention also encourages these States Parties to develop more general systems for inventorying and conserving both their natural and cultural heritage (DCMS 2011).

Inscription is intended to ensure that these unique and sometimes vulnerable Sites survive into the future, but there is also a recognition that they “can be important for social cohesion and can help to foster a sense of pride,” and that they “can also act as the focus for education, tourism and economic regeneration” (English Heritage 2009). In other words, they are intended to be used (as appropriate to their condition) and to have just as important a role for present peoples as for future ones. To date, 911 Sites have been inscribed.

## The UK’s World Heritage Sites

The United Kingdom ratified the World Heritage Convention in 1984 and currently has 28 World Heritage Sites:

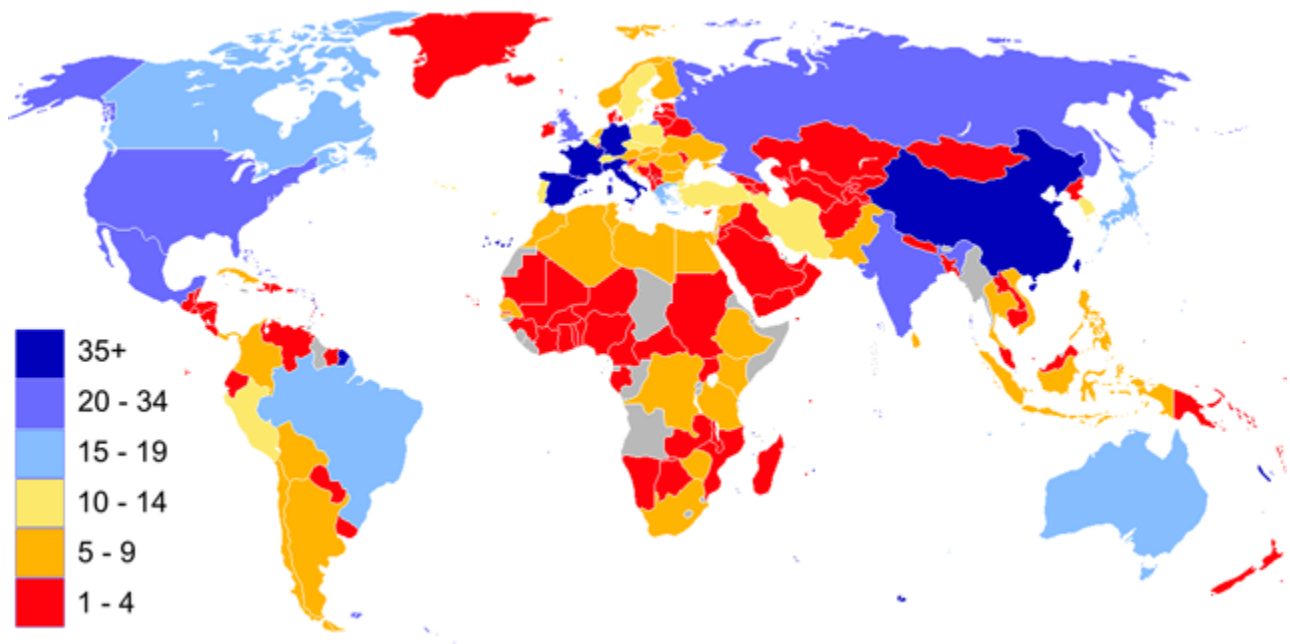
25 in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and three in the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories<sup>1</sup>: in Bermuda, the Pitcairn Islands, and Tristan da Cunha. In January 2011, the UK submitted a new nomination for the seventh century Twin Monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow, the home of the Venerable Bede, which will be considered by the World Heritage Committee in 2012.

The first inscriptions of UK Sites were approved in 1986, and 14 of the 28 Sites were inscribed in the first three years. Since then, the rate has slowed considerably: since 2001, only three Sites have been inscribed, and one has been extended, necessitating re-nomination.

There is no doubt that it is becoming harder for the UK to succeed in having sites inscribed. To some extent, it is because the UK is setting itself very high standards: having worked on the nomination of Wearmouth and Jarrow, I have seen how demanding both English Heritage and ICOMOS-UK are of applications, in terms of detail, scope and adherence to the requirements laid down by UNESCO, before they are willing to recommend them to the UK government, let alone to UNESCO. This in turn is the result, in part, of the growing insistence from UNESCO that candidate sites show solid evidence that there is a system of identification, protection and management already in place, and stricter guidelines on the demonstration of OUV. However, on the whole, the UK does this well.

A further and perhaps more significant reason is the consequence of the embarrassing imbalance of the World Heritage List. Despite the efforts made under UNESCO’s Global Strategy over the last 10 years and more, this imbalance is still shockingly heavily weighted towards Europe. For example, to cite some current WHS statistics, nearly half of the 911 inscribed World Heritage Sites are

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**Fig. 1:** World Heritage Sites mapped, 2010<sup>2</sup>

in Europe, and not surprisingly therefore, seven out of the 10 best-represented countries in the world are also in Europe. Italy has 45 World Heritage Sites: more than half the number of World Heritage Sites in the whole of Africa. Africa's 78 World Heritage Sites compare in number to 198 in Asia and the Pacific, and 446 in Europe and North America.

The imbalance is not only regional, but also thematic. The ratio of cultural to natural Sites in the world is almost 4:1, although the World Heritage Convention's purpose is to ensure the "protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage" (UNESCO 1972).

With 28 World Heritage Sites, the UK has the seventh highest number of Sites per country in the world, and an imbalance of cultural to natural Sites of 24:4, with one "mixed" cultural/natural Site (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/stat>).

UNESCO had noted an imbalance in cultural/natural, regional, chronological and thematic terms as early as 1984. In 1989, a Global Study Working Group was formed, and work continued to find ways in which under-represented countries and types of sites could be encouraged onto the List. Conclusions of ICOMOS' "Gap Study" (ICOMOS 2005:20) commissioned by the World Heritage Committee were particularly relevant to European nominations:

- *historic towns and religious buildings were over-represented in relation to other types of property*
- *Christianity was over-represented in relation to other religions and beliefs*

- *historical periods were over-represented in relation to prehistory and the 20th century, and*
- *"elitist" architecture was over-represented in relation to vernacular architecture.*

The study identified two major problems with regard to creating a more balanced List. The first was qualitative, in that there was a need to identify new themes for cultural nominations to allow countries to reflect the true range of their assets; in effect, moving the List away from an earlier emphasis on monumentality which had favoured Europe.

The creation of new categories of Site, such as designed, organically evolved, evolving, relict and/or associative "cultural landscapes," in 1992 had been intended in part to widen the scope for nominations (Fowler 2003:24), and yet 10 years on, in 2002, 21 of the 30 inscribed cultural landscapes were in Europe. Today, 39 of 65 Sites are in Europe, so the balance is shifting, but the pace of change is slow.<sup>3</sup>

The second was structural: many countries did not have the experience or technical capacity to assess their heritage sites, to prepare nominations, or to manage sites adequately. Countries such as the UK are in an enormously privileged position in this respect, and hence, have sped ahead of others that have had no such benefits.

UNESCO has encouraged States Parties, but particularly those in Europe, to slow the pace of their nominations: one option specified being "deciding, on a voluntary basis, to suspend the presentation of new nominations" (UNESCO 2005, para 59), but this having failed to stem

the flow, in 2005 the organisation felt it necessary to take formal action and decided that it could process only 30 nominations in the next year (UNESCO 2005).

The fact is, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre is under increasing pressure as the List grows (there are now 187 countries signed up to the Convention and therefore able to nominate sites), particularly as the need for site monitoring is taken on board. Part of the problem is the speed of development versus the slow pace of reaction from UNESCO. Even if a State Party notifies the World Heritage Centre of a threat to a Site that becomes apparent, for instance, at the planning stage of a development, the plans are likely to have changed by the time they are finalised, in which case, UNESCO cannot then consider them. Countries can request an advisory mission, but likewise this takes time, and, the State Party must pay.

The Centre employs fewer than 100 staff, and its annual revenue is about US\$20 million (Lee 2010). By comparison, the 1964 campaign to move the temples at Abu Simbel in Egypt above the reach of the floodwaters of the Aswan High Dam (Berg 1974), which was one of the catalysts for the creation of the World Heritage Convention (O'Keefe and Prott 2011:77), cost \$80 million.

*Underfunded and armed with little more than moral authority, UNESCO can't do much to help the swelling number of sites ... it singles out for distinction.*  
(Underhill 2009)

### **Should the UK therefore stop nominating sites, on ethical grounds?**

Given that it is already very well represented (at least in terms of numbers), should the UK in fact be setting an example by abstinence? Should it accept that the country has had its shot at World Heritage, and stand aside to let others in, at least for a period of time?

What about taking this a step further? Even in these hard economic times, the UK has not cut its international aid budget: should heritage professionals be making the case to the Government for using the UK's undoubted skills and experience to help other countries to nominate, rather than putting forward more UK sites?

### **No to nomination! The pragmatic case**

UNESCO is now actively discouraging well-represented countries from nominating. In 2005, the organisation announced in what became known as the "Cairns Decisions" that it would now limit the number of nominations permitted from each State Party, and limit the number it will review during each session. The document, which was based on a report by the World Heritage Reform Groups presented to the World Heritage Committee, specifically stated that a priority system was now to be introduced (UNESCO 2005, para 3.3), where preference would now be given in the following order:

1. *Nominations of sites submitted by a State Party with no sites inscribed on the List;*

2. *Nominations of sites from any State Party that illustrate un-represented or less represented categories of natural and cultural properties, as determined by analyses prepared by the Secretariat and the Advisory Bodies and reviewed and approved by the Committee;*
3. *Other nominations.*

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport in the UK has recently published a Review Panel Report making recommendations for a new Tentative List (DCMS 2011). The Review Panel has worked hard to find sites for the final recommended List, which would put the UK's selection of candidate sites into the second category above (see Appendix 2 for the List), but one must wonder what now happens if the UK and a much more poorly represented country both submit sites in the same category, both with reasonable claims to OUV. Is it possible that preference might be given to that other country, in terms of granting its site a place on the list of those to be assessed? How else is the List to be balanced?

The Tentative List Review Panel report in fact suggests that the new List is not even as strong as it could be (DCMS 2011: para 7.3):

*Having chosen not to guide nominations by using the thematic approach used in the last review, the UK has probably missed out on being able to make nominations which would fit with current UNESCO criteria, e.g.,*

- *Early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture and architects*
- *The physical remains of the Cold War*
- *The representation of Sport on the World Heritage List.*

If our sites do make it onto the future lists of those to be nominated, not all of those will be inscribed: in 2010, a total of 21 out of 45 nominated sites were accepted for inscription. The UK's 2009 nomination (*Darwin's home and workplace: Down House and environs*) was in fact deferred pending further studies (UNESCO 2010), the nomination having already been withdrawn once at the request of ICOMOS-UK (UNESCO 2007). There is a feeling that western European sites are being tested to higher standards. Perhaps this is true, and perhaps it is only right, given our greater experience and resources?

If that is indeed the case, however, the UK must think hard about whether the exercise is worthwhile. The development of a nomination is a very costly business; it normally takes several years, and responsibility – and funding – falls largely on the local authorities and funding agencies that administer the area in which the candidate site sits. According to the 2011 Tentative List Review report, this is a message that still has not got through to potential bidders:

*The Panel ... noted with some concern that a number of applications had not fully grasped the likely costs of either the initial nomination or of ongoing*

*management once a property was inscribed on the List. It is essential that adequate resources are provided from the outset and these can be considerable. Costs do not end with inscription as there is then a commitment to ongoing management.* (DCMS 2011: para 6.6)

A 2007 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers commissioned by DCMS estimated these as follows, although they may by now be too low, and there is strong feeling in the profession that the funding of a Coordinator is not an option, but a necessity (Norman 2009:15):

Ongoing management costs, UK WH Sites	
Average site (with or without full time Coordinator)	£100-215k per annum
Smaller, largely self-contained sites with special ownership arrangements, for example where the owner(s) are the Church or the Crown	£13-26k per annum
Large sites with very complex ownership (e.g. Edinburgh Old and New Towns or the Dorset and East Devon coast)	£190-615k per annum

**Fig. 2** Ongoing management costs for World Heritage Sites in the UK (PwC 2007)

On a similar theme, the report states that:

*The Panel noted that in some cases, enthusiasm for World Heritage can fade once inscription on the List is achieved. This should be avoidable if all stakeholders, including the planning authorities, clearly understand from the outset of the nomination process the need to maintain OUV and the implications of this for management. If the UK is to maintain its credibility and reputation for good heritage management standards, then this is a key area in which to invest.* (DCMS 2011: para 6.4)

This need for investment in terms of skills, funds and long-term commitment was borne out very strongly in the report on DCMS’s 2008 consultation, *World Heritage for the nation: identifying, protecting and promoting our World Heritage* (Norman 2009). This found that a significant number of respondents working on or are involved with World Heritage in the UK felt that much more effort should be put into improving the management and funding of the Sites already inscribed: resolving issues over boundaries (which in themselves could necessitate re-nominations), and developing better systems for exchange of information and training. English Heritage, which has over the years provided enormous support in terms of advice on and input into nominations, has had its £136 million total grant cut by a massive 32%: considerably higher than the 25% cut to DCMS overall (English

Heritage website). Their 2011-2015 Corporate Plan states that:

*It is likely that changes will continue to be made to the way the planning system works, but whatever the effects of this English Heritage will need to continue to support decision-makers in ensuring that the best of England’s heritage is protected and sustained.* (English Heritage 2011:6)

This is not quite the same as saying that they will be able to do so, or to do so as well as they might have been able to before the announced loss of 200 jobs, and what will in effect be the loss of £51 million in funding over the next 4 years. The Corporate Plan admits, “some cuts will have to be made to our expert and public services” (ibid: 14). Would it not be better if English Heritage used its limited time on advice, coordination and management training for the Sites already inscribed?

**Are nominations being made for the wrong reasons?**

In its research, PricewaterhouseCoopers found that nominations are actively being pursued with the purpose of producing regeneration:

*An increasing local and regional focus on culture and heritage as a tool for regeneration has created an atmosphere where WHS status is more likely to be supported for economic and social reasons that are not directly linked to its primary conservation objective. This hypothesis is also supported by the types of site currently coming forward and by the increasing involvement of RDAs in the nomination process. ... This will affect the motivations and the achievement of benefits.* (PwC 2007, para 45)

It is certainly true that the nomination of Wearmouth and Jarrow was generously supported by ONE NorthEast, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) for that area, as part of its Regional Economic Strategy to use culture as a tool to regenerate the North East (ONE NE website). But this is a problem for those nominating, not one for the List: however much a council may want to use a site to spur on regeneration, it will still have to prove the site’s Outstanding Universal Value, first and foremost. If OUV is proven, and economic gain can be organised without damaging the OUV, all is well.

Hadrian’s Wall Heritage Ltd, the not-for-profit company with funding from the two local RDAs which coordinates the Hadrian’s Wall Management Plan and its marketing and tourism work, claims that its current activities and investments have the capacity to generate an extra £304 million in the future. This would be on top of the £880 million estimated income for Hadrian’s Wall Country in 2010 (HWHL 2011:21). However impressive these figures are, though, the fact is that they do not (and in this case, have not) come about without major effort and considerable financial investment (Rebanks 2009), and it is still

too early to assess the real long-term benefit for less well-known Sites.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers report investigated the possible economic advantage for Sites gaining World Heritage status, and concluded that:

*WHS status is suggested to provide a promotional advantage and a 'branding effect' which encourages additional visitors. The evidence indicates that this is likely to have a marginal effect (c.0-3%) and this will be stronger for less 'famous' sites. (PwC 2007:5)*

Not all agree with this, and some respondents commented that the results were skewed by the choice of case studies, in that they were mostly those very Sites that were well known already before inscription (Blaenavon is the clear exception), and therefore were less likely to benefit. The Sites chosen were:

- The Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd (inscribed in 1986);
- The Dorset and East Devon Coast (inscribed in 2001 and sometimes termed the "Jurassic Coast");
- Blaenavon Industrial Landscape (inscribed in 2000);
- Studley Royal Park and Fountains Abbey Ruins (inscribed in 1986);
- The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh (inscribed in 1995); and
- The Tower of London (inscribed in 1988).

Examination of the full list of UK World Heritage Sites (see Appendix 1), however, shows that many have long been well known and well visited: Stonehenge and Avebury, Blenheim, Durham, Westminster Abbey, Bath, Hadrian's Wall. Do Sites such as these need or benefit from further "branding"?

#### **Can or should development that affects OUV in and around an increasing number of World Heritage Sites always be stopped?**

This is the hardest conundrum, because there is no doubt that World Heritage status can contribute to protection, despite this status being no more than a "material consideration" in UK planning law. But should development be stopped?

The value of World Heritage has resulted in a challenge to an application by Tesco to put a huge supermarket on the floodplain just below Belper, in the Derwent Valley World Heritage Site; in the controversy and warnings from UNESCO over proposed tall buildings in the setting of the Tower of London; and in the removal of a road and filter beds from the site of Cresswell Crags in preparation for an application to be put on the Tentative List. The buffer zones of the sites at Wearmouth and Jarrow are now far better protected for being included in local area action plans.

But do proponents of World Heritage have the right to hold their values above those of others?

In March 2007, an administrative court ruled that a €160 million bridge project across the Elbe within the Dresden Elbe Valley World Heritage Site should proceed, in spite of urgings by the World Heritage Committee that a tunnel should be built instead, and warnings that otherwise the Site would be struck off the World Heritage List. Local people supported the bridge plan in two referenda, preferring a solution to traffic congestion over an accolade from UNESCO. Dresden city councillor Jan Mücke said:

*In a democracy, we cannot have a dictatorship of a minority that, acting out of aesthetic grounds, thinks they know more than the overwhelming majority of citizens. (Underhill 2009)*

The bridge was built, and in 2009 the Dresden Elbe Valley became the second World Heritage Site to be de-listed.<sup>4</sup>

#### **The argument "for"?**

Nothing is straightforward. As may be apparent, the conclusion that this article will draw is that the UK should stop putting more Sites forward: yet, having been involved in the development of the UK's most recent nomination over a period of nearly a year, it was clear to the author quite how much a Site can benefit from the process. The Twin Monastery Site of Wearmouth and Jarrow has gained from research, development of governance, and investment in infrastructure, interpretation and publicity, which would perhaps not have been funded were it not for the allure of the World Heritage prize. The two churches and their buffer zones now have an important place in local and regional planning; contacts have been made across disciplines and departments, and between previously unlikely combinations of stakeholders; working groups are working (WJ website 2011). This is exactly as it should be, and it is a great achievement. Most importantly, even if the nomination does not succeed, much of this work is done and in place, and there is every chance that the Site will flourish nevertheless.

Natural sites present a slightly different issue. The UK has more limited scope here, as so much of the country would actually be categorised as a cultural landscape, but there are several possible candidates in the UK's Overseas Territories. Although the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified suitable candidates (DCMS 2011: para 5:21), this possibility has not been exploited because expertise to put the case for the sites does not exist in those territories, and/or legislative protection and management is not always at a sufficient standard (DCMS 2011: para 6.9). These nominations would serve both to balance the national List, and could aid conservation and capacity building where help is most needed. There is surely an important opportunity here.

It could also be argued that, because money comes from the authorities nominating and not from central government, stopping (largely cultural) nominations will not free up those funds for use in management, or renominating Sites in order to clarify boundaries.

However, if it becomes any more difficult and expensive to achieve nomination, the money may not be there at all, particularly in a weak economy.

### Conclusions

Ultimately, the argument seems to be an ethical one; it is time that the UK looked at its World Heritage policy in a wider context. At the risk of labouring the point, we are after all, talking about a system of world heritage.

There are now 911 World Heritage Sites, and there are a further 1,514 properties on the Tentative Lists currently on the UNESCO website,<sup>5</sup> and concerns have been expressed that the size of the List will affect the value of World Heritage: "The longer [the list] becomes, the more it dilutes the brand," says Jonathan Foyle of the World Monuments Fund (Underhill 2009).

This is not really the issue, and it is perhaps even a slightly churlish view; certainly a western one. The value of whose heritage will be devalued? Why, the heritage of the countries already fortunate enough to be well represented on the List. Not that of countries in Central Asia, for example, where extraordinary sites are as yet hardly known, are not being nominated because of a lack of local capacity, and may not become known if the List closes.

Even if all 1,514 Sites on the Tentative Lists were inscribed (which is highly unlikely), added to the current 911 Sites, this would give an average of only 13 Sites per State Party. In terms of representation at least, the problem is not really one of numbers. The real problems, as UNESCO knows, lie in regional and continental distribution; in an imbalance between cultural and natural sites; and in funding, capacity, and long-term management. Looked at from the UK's point of view, yes, perhaps there is a danger of dilution if many more UK or European cultural sites are inscribed.

Firstly, then, let there be a voluntary moratorium on new cultural site nominations in the UK. This would allow time to concentrate on the nomination of suitable natural sites, and to put our house in order in terms of the delineation and management of the Sites we already have.

Secondly, the UK should use its experience and expertise to help others, where this is wanted. UNESCO's gradual raising of the bar in terms of standards of nomination, management and monitoring has been the necessary result of a system which has grown well beyond original expectations. However, for some, it has created a receding target, harder to hit year by year. Having stopped nominating sites, the UK could, funded from its international aid budget, offer its expertise to help those countries, which as yet lack the resources and trained staff to meet the increasing demands of the UNESCO World Heritage system.

### Notes

1 The Crown Dependencies (The Channel Island Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey in the English Channel, and the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea) are possessions of the Crown, and not sovereign nations in their own right as is the case with the Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom.

2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:World\\_Heritage\\_Sites\\_by\\_country.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:World_Heritage_Sites_by_country.png)

3 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape#1>

4 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/1786>

5 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>

### Appendix 1: World Heritage Sites in the UK, as of December 2010.

#### Cultural

Durham Castle and Cathedral (1986)

Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites (1986)

Studley Royal Park including the Ruins of Fountains Abbey (1986)

Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd (1986)

Ironbridge Gorge (1986)

Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and Saint Margaret's Church (1987)

Hadrian's Wall (1987; became part of the serial transnational site Frontiers of the Roman Empire in 2005, joined by the Upper German-Raetian Limes; joined by the Antonine Wall in Scotland in 2008)

Blenheim Palace (1987)

City of Bath (1987)

Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church (1988)

Tower of London (1988)

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh (1995)

Maritime Greenwich (1997)

Heart of Neolithic Orkney (1999)

Historic Town of St George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda (2000)

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape (2000)

Derwent Valley Mills (2001)

Saltaire (2001)

New Lanark (2001)

Liverpool – Maritime Mercantile City (2004)

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (2003)

Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape (2006)

Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal (2009)

#### Natural

Dorset and East Devon Coast (2001)

Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast (1986)

Gough and Inaccessible Islands (1995)

Henderson Island (1988)

#### Mixed

St Kilda (1986; extended 2004, 2005)



## Appendix 2: Sites recommended for inclusion on the new UK Tentative List

Extract from *The United Kingdom's Heritage: Review of the Tentative List of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Independent Expert Panel Report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, March 2011*:

5.4 There are 11 sites recommended for consideration for inclusion in the new Tentative List:

- Chatham Dockyard and its Defences
- Creswell Crags
- England's Lake District
- Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar
- the Island of St Helena
- Jodrell Bank Observatory
- Mousa, Old Scatness & Jarlshof: the Crucible of Iron Age Scotland
- the Slate Industry of North Wales
- the Flow Country
- the Forth Bridge (Rail)
- the Turks & Caicos Islands

5.5 As recommended by the Panel the sites comprise eight cultural sites and three natural sites. Four sites are in England, three in Scotland, one in Wales and three in the Overseas Territories. The natural sites are in Scotland, St Helena and the Turks and Caicos Islands. All sites in England and Wales are cultural sites, including two cultural landscapes – England's Lake District and the Slate Industry of North Wales. The remaining Scottish sites are all cultural sites, and one Overseas Territory is also recommended for inclusion as a cultural site: Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar.

5.6 Themes represented by the cultural sites include:

- Early humans - both Neanderthal man and Late Palaeolithic modern humans - artistic values and exploitation of their landscapes (Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar and Creswell Crags, England)
- Early architecture and society (Mousa, Old Scatness and Jarlshof)
- Naval power at a time of European expansion and technological advancement (Chatham Dockyard)
- Industrialisation and social change (Chatham Dockyard, Slate Industry of North Wales)
- Science, technology, engineering (Chatham Dockyard, Forth Bridge, Jodrell Bank)

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