

THE CONFERENCES OF INTERNATIONAL NATIONAL TRUSTS - A
MEMORANDUM by William S. Zuill, Sr.

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I would like to call this a history but unfortunately my notes from past years have disappeared. So these are in the nature of fleeting memories, but I hope they will give an idea of the consistency of our gatherings and the value so many National Trust and allied organisations have found in continuing to support the international movement.

The first meeting of National trusts was held in Scotland and lasted, I believe for two weeks. The Scottish National Trust and Mr. Findlay Macquarrie deserve great credit for making it happen at all. I had just started at the Bermuda National Trust and it was felt that I should not attend - one of the many hard decisions small Trusts have to make.

The second conference was held in the United States under the auspices of the Scottish National Trust, Scottish Heritage (which raises funds in the United States), and the Trustees of Reservations of Massachusetts. Sadly the Trustees have not sent representatives to many conferences, for it was their constitution which inspired the constitution of the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland - which in turn inspired the constitutions of most organisations which call themselves "National Trust." The conference ran for some two weeks, and we visited many interesting historic homes and nature reserves in Massachusetts and New York State, travelling on a chartered bus which was a good way of getting to know one another. Bermuda and the Bahamas were well represented and vied with one another to host the next conference - but neither were successful. Instead, the Australian Trusts' invitation was accepted, setting up what is now the traditional arrangement of a conference in Europe, followed by one in the Americas, followed by one in the Asia-Pacific region. Arranging to put up a group such as ours (somewhere between 20 and 30, I think) is a difficult problem if the conference is to move from place to place, and most of us who attended remember a couple of grim nights in a church "Retreat Centre" in Waltham, Massachusetts - rooms with bare concrete block walls and beds which were a slight cut above camp cots .

. . a contrast with the comfortable accommodation elsewhere. Much credit for the success of this conference went to Findlay Macquarrie and Gordon Abbott of the Trustees.

The third conference (March 6 to March 18, 1983) was hosted by the National Trust of Australia (New South Wales), the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and by the National Trust of Australia (Australian Capital Territory - i.e., Canberra). My recollection is that the Australian National Trusts federation was not officially involved. Again, the conference ran for a couple of weeks and travelled quite a bit, but this was the last conference to be run on these lines. Once again Findlay Macquarrie (rejoicing in the same surname as the notable Governor Macquarrie of New south Wales) played a major role in organising the conference, which started in Sydney, moved to Canberra seeing much of the countryside (terribly dry thanks to a drought) and so through the Snowy Mountains and the National Park into Victoria, where we visited the old gold-mining town of Beechworth before making our way to Melbourne, where the conference ended. I was the lone representative from Bermuda, only being able to attend thanks to a "scholarship" from Scottish Heritage, for which I remain grateful.

The next conference returned to Europe and was held in England, at Bournemouth. We viewed the work of the National Trust both in preserving land and through visiting some of their splendid old buildings. We had an excellent gathering, which included several organisations from Europe invited by the National Trust. This set an important example of trying to widen the net of groups who could be asked to attend the conference - and, inter alia, bringing the question of "What is a National Trust?" to the forefront. At this conference delegates were invited out to meals by neighbouring National Trust groups. Bermuda had a good representation, though some of our group shivered a bit in the English summer weather, and we had another try at inviting the conference to come to us. As the conference once again lasted more than a week (as I remember it) we were able to host a cocktail party. This seemed to persuade the delegates and the following conference was held November 13 to 19, 1989, in Bermuda.

The Bermuda conference was the first one at which I remember there being a discussion of the Trusts keeping in closer touch between conferences, and England and Scotland vied, with utmost politeness, to become the holder of files and the place to which questions might be referred. I am not aware that matters progressed beyond this. At this conference, which lasted a week, we in Bermuda were helped by donations from the community, and followed the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland by sharing our visitors with our members through invitations to meals, which gave an interesting interplay between individuals.

Again it was the turn of the Asia-Pacific area to host the next conference, and an invitation from New Zealand was accepted. We met in March, 1992, for about a week, starting in Auckland and moving on to the beautiful Bay of Islands. The conference introduced us to the question of the role of Trusts in nations with both indigenous and settler populations, and we learned a good deal about the Treaty of Waitangi between the British and the Maoris (who, in a sense, were a settler population themselves, but who were there first). One interesting talk introduced us to the rapid growth of wealth in China, which was expected to affect world tourism in the coming decades.

The European conference took place in Gelderland, the Netherlands, which has been a faithful member of most conferences - despite the Director of the Gelderland Trust, Cyp von Ufford, losing his luggage en route to Bermuda. As occurred at the English conference, a number of European organisations attended. The question of the conference's making a public declaration came up again, and the Trusts seemed more interested in expressing their joint views. Previously there had been reluctance to make a statement which might injure individual trusts back home rather than be helpful, but the viewpoint was swinging and a statement was made after a good deal of debate. Regrettably I don't remember what the statement said.

It was the turn of the Americas once more, and a bid by Puerto Rico, St. Lucia and Barbados was accepted. It was hoped that the conference might take place on a ship travelling between the islands, but in the end a suitable vessel at a suitable price could not be found, and the

conference met in historic San Juan, the centre of a larger city which is a metropolis for many of the smaller islands, and the terminus for many cruise ships travelling in the eastern Caribbean. It was an enjoyable conference under the leadership of Sr. Javier Blanco of the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico in a setting which was quite different for many of the participants. Once again the hosts persuaded some of its members to play host for a dinner away from the hotel, and we also enjoyed a beach picnic. Resolutions were passed regarding the menace of ever-larger cruise ships whose brief visits to small islands were causing economic problems, and a plea to save the old Government House on Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. More importantly, however, it provided an opportunity to discuss world-wide unity, and it was suggested that the three Trust regions might have conferences between the main gatherings. I know that this was done at least once for the Americas.

The quest for unity was now running stronger, and I understand this was an important element in the next conference, which took place in Alice Springs in the centre of Australia. Unfortunately I could not attend the conference because, just after my wife and I arrived in Sydney prior to the conference we had a telephone call from Bermuda to say that my only brother had died suddenly. So we had to hurry back half around the world, regretting we could not be at what sounded like an excellent conference and regretting the reason which took us away. I feel sure that Rodney Davidson was a prime promoter of an international national trusts organisation, for he has strong feelings about the role trusts should play in nations and the world.

The desire to develop some form of unity found much greater expression at the tenth conference, which appropriately was held in Scotland where the first one had taken place. Under the leadership of Robin Pellew the Edinburgh Declaration was put before the delegates and acclaimed. The Declaration stressed the importance of the preservation of open spaces and culturally important buildings, and gave it the full value of the world's national trusts and allied organisations speaking in unity, providing the Trusts and allied organisations the opportunity to help each other fight against deleterious developments.

The eleventh conference was held in Washington, D. C. Washington is as close as anywhere to being the capital of the world, so it was an appropriate place for the formation of "INTO" - the International National Trusts Organisation. Again, INTO has reason to thank Robin Pellew for his leadership in bringing us to the point where we are today - on the verge of launching the organisation at the coming conference in India.

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I apologise for the many omissions in this paper, which has been written almost entirely by memory. I hope Simon can fill in a bit more about the Alice Springs conference, which I suspect paved the way for the progress made in Edinburgh and Washington, and for what we hope will happen in New Delhi. Please let me know about any corrections or additions.

Respectfully submitted

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