

# FINLAND

## Verla Groundwood and Board Mill

### Brief description

The Verla groundwood and board mill and its associated residential area is an outstanding, remarkably well-preserved example of the small-scale rural industrial settlements associated with pulp, paper and board production that flourished in northern Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Only a handful of such settlements survives to the present day.

### 1. Introduction

**Year(s) of Inscription**

1996

**Agency responsible for site management**

- Verla Site Commission  
45700 Kuusankoski  
e-mail: [eero.niinikoski@upm-kymmene.com](mailto:eero.niinikoski@upm-kymmene.com)  
website: [www.verla.fi](http://www.verla.fi)

### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria**

C (iv)

### Justification provided by the State Party

The heritage criteria applicable to Verla are IV (“be among the most characteristic examples of a type of structure, the type representing an important cultural, social, artistic, scientific, technological or industrial development”) and V (“be a characteristic example of a traditional style of architecture, method of construction, or human settlement that is fragile by nature or has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible socio-cultural or economic change”).

Justification

The Verla groundwood and board mill is a typical example of a wood-processing mill built in Finland in the latter half of the 19th century. It is typical in its location, buildings, technical installations, the factors leading to its establishment, and its history. Verla provides an excellent picture of the type of wood-processing mill to be found throughout the coniferous zone of the Nordic countries and also in Northern Russia.

But whereas Verla was typical at the beginning of the century, it has now become unique. Exploitation of the forest resources, especially at sawmills and

wood-processing mills, has long been a focal branch of the export industries of Finland, Sweden and Norway and will continue to form the backbone of their economic prosperity. The frequent replacement and modification of the old industrial premises and installations have therefore been a natural consequence of this. The majority of the mills built in the 19th century have already been demolished, they have been swallowed up by the bigger mills growing up around them, their obsolete machines have been scrapped or their buildings abandoned. As a result, there are only few industrial heritage sites to the early stages in the history of the wood-processing industry still in existence in the Nordic countries. Along with Verla these include the Frövifors paper mill in Sweden and the Klevfos pulp and paper mill in Norway. Together with Verla these mills, now converted into museums, are able to create an overall picture of the early stages in the history of the groundwood, board and paper industry in the Nordic countries from the closing decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

When the Verla mill, by then out-of-date but spared modernisation, closed down in 1964, it immediately took on a new lease of life as an industrial heritage museum. All the machines, raw materials, tools and accounts needed for the manual production of board, along with semi-produced and finished boards are there in the museum just as they were left in 1964. Only the workers have gone; it would have been impossible to preserve them for future generations! The Verla groundwood and board mill could, however, go into production again at any time.

As a piece of architectural history and as a built-up environment Verla is very typical. It observes the compact layout of the old Nordic factory communities, with a residence surrounded by a park in a dominant position on the banks of a river commanding the factory buildings. The workers' dwellings tend to be in regular rows on the opposite bank of the river. The decorative architecture of the red-brick factory buildings and the wooden residence of the mill owner is in keeping with international trends, chiefly from Central Europe, and characteristic of contemporary industrial architecture in the Nordic countries. The workers' dwellings are in the traditional vernacular idiom.

Verla provides an excellent opportunity for gaining an insight into the lives and living environments of industrial workers and their families, both at work and at home, in a smallish, tight mill community surrounded by forests and lakes. The mill museum has left untouched the patina and wear imposed on the environment by decades of board making; it

bears all the traces of work. The workers' homes of various types well illustrate the social structure of the mill community of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the way of life of the mill owner, the office staff and the people employed in various occupations at the mill. As a built environment, Verla further reflects the interaction between the mill and the surrounding countryside in Finland at the turn of the century.

The Verlankoski rapids illustrate one era in the history of hydroelectric power and its various manifestations. Before the mill was founded, the rapids had for centuries been used to turn the peasants' water mills. One of the factors contributing to the establishment of the groundwood and board mill was the potential for harnessing the water by means of a dam to turn the turbines producing the necessary energy.

The waterway was also an important means of transporting the raw materials and ready products. Floating equipment and wood flumes were built at the rapids to allow logs to be floated to mills further down the river.

Verla still has three hydro power plants of different ages, the most recent dating from 1995. These plants and their equipment reflect the development of electricity generation in the course of this century. The picture of the exploitation of hydro power at the Verlankoski rapids is given further depth by the prehistoric rock paintings on the sheer rock face rising out of the water only a couple of hundred metres from the mill area. These, too, were probably designed to bring luck in harvesting the rapids with their rich stock of fish, and the surrounding hunting grounds.

The Verla cultural landscape as a whole possesses not only landscape-ethical values but also a rich and chequered history. An environmental entity, it has won itself an established position in the service of culture, housing, recreation and electricity generation.

#### As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

That this property be inscribed on the world Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iv*:

The Verla groundwood and board mill and its associated habitation area is an outstanding and remarkably well preserved example of the small-scale rural industrial settlement associated with pulp, paper, and board production that flourished in northern Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, of which only a handful survives to the present day.

#### Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1996): ICOMOS proposed the extension of the nominated area to include significant buildings and structures relating in particular to the social unit associated with the Mill. The Bureau recognized that this property fulfilled criterion (iv) for inscription, but however, decided to refer it back to the State Party, to await an official written confirmation regarding the extension of the site and the land planning regulations. The Finnish Observer informed the Bureau that the Finnish authorities had agreed upon the extension of the nominated area and that land planning regulations are being prepared.

Committee (1996): the Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criterion (iv) considering that the Groundwood and Board Mill and its associated habitation is an outstanding and remarkably well preserved example of the small-scale rural industrial settlement associated with pulp, paper, and board production that flourished in northern Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, of which only a handful survives to the present day. The Committee congratulated Finland on the inscription of this site which is the most representative example of this type of industrial heritage.

- Statement of significance does adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site

#### Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone has been defined

#### Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- No foreseen threats

### 3. Protection

#### Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- UPM-Kymmene Corporation runs the Mill Museum and is the biggest landowner of Verla. The responsibility of Verla within the company, is shared between the department of administration, who runs the Museum and the department of real estate, who is responsible for the other historic buildings on the site. The target is to integrate the responsibilities into one effective unit
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

#### 4. Management

##### Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction (entrance fee); village, with some 10-20 families living there permanently, the rest of the houses are used as summer cottages

##### Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group: The Site Commission of Verla approves the annual budget and plan of action, including also repairs and conservation work. The Site Commission is also responsible for the development of Verla as a public attraction according to the provisions of Verla as a World Heritage site
- Formally constituted
- Management under protective legislation; Consensual management
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national; local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

#### 5. Management Plan

- No management plan
- A management plan will be completed and adopted: December 2008
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Site Commission of Verla

#### 6. Financial Resources

##### Financial situation

- No information on the annual operating budget for the site
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status
- Verla has been allocated state funding from The Ministry of Education/National Board of Antiquities (special grants for World Heritage sites) in years 2004 and 2005; Regional Environment Centre of Southeast Finland
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: insufficient

#### 7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 2

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: promotion; interpretation; education; visitor management
- Average: conservation; management

#### 8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- No information provided

#### 9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 21,766 in 2004 - tendency increasing; the number of visitors is doubled since Verla became a World Heritage site
- Visitor facilities: Visitors centre; café and restaurant; accomodation; Mill Museum; shops
- No tourism/visitor management plan

#### 10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, condition surveys, visitor management

#### 11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors; local communities; businesses
- Verla takes yearly part, together with the other Finnish World Heritage sites, in the International Travel Fares in Helsinki; the Director of the Mill Museum gives lecturers to students and groups on the World Heritage Convention
- Web site available
- No local participation

#### 12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

##### Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

##### Conservation interventions

- There have been a number of severe damages caused by humidity in the old industrial buildings (brick buildings). These have been repaired and the technical conditions have been improved to prevent future damages
- Present state of conservation: adequate

**Threats and Risks to site**

- Natural disaster(s); visitor/tourism pressure
- Specific issues if mentioned: The most urgent threats to Verla are fire and the impact of tourism

**Actions taken**

- As pro-active actions all the old electric wires have been replaced by new equipment. In addition sprinklers will be installed for fire protection. In addition an alarm system to prevent burglary will also be installed in the museum area

**13. Monitoring**

- No monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: not provided

**14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: Conservation; the interest towards industrial heritage in general has increased thanks to Verla
- Strength: If Verla had not been a World Heritage site it might have been foreseen that the interest of the owner (UPM-Kymmene Corporation) had not been as high as it is in the present situation. Due to the World Heritage status the Mill Museum, historic workers houses and other constructions as well as the environment have been preserved and repaired with high professional knowledge and skills (planning, technical solutions and conservation work)
- Weaknesses of management: the challenge and weakness of the site are, that the historic buildings and constructions of Verla need continuous repair and maintenance

**Future actions**

- The owner seeks to find in near future a model of administration (management) to guarantee long-term comprehensive management actions and economic resources
- Activity does not require funding from the World Heritage Fund