

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Skogskyrkogården (The Woodland Cemetery)
<i>Location</i>	Stockholm County
<i>State Party</i>	Sweden
<i>Date</i>	25 October 1989

Justification by State Party

The design of the Cemetery stands out for its intense romantic naturalism. It turned the existing, essentially untouched, Nordic forest into the dominant experience. It is the evocation of raw Nordic wilderness that constitutes a radical departure in landscape architecture as well as cemetery layout at this time. Buildings and surrounding landscape are conceived as an integral whole (criterion i).

(The nomination also proposes that the site be inscribed on the basis of criterion ii, but the lengthy justification does not refer to the essentials of this criterion.)

History and Description*History*

In 1912 Stockholm City Council acquired a 96 ha tract of pineclad sand and gravel for the purpose of creating a new cemetery. An international architectural competition was organized, with the following conditions: the basic plan must be clear, simple, and efficient without sacrificing any of its artistic merits and without undue alteration of the natural contours of the existing landscape; dignity must play an important part in the design; details should contribute to an attractive overall impression of artistic value; and the natural formation of the existing gravel pits should be used as far as possible to form valleys and glens.

The first prize was awarded to two 30-year old Swedish architects, Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz. Work began in 1917 and the formal consecration of the Woodland Cemetery and its first chapel, the Woodland Chapel (designed by Asplund), took place in 1920. The Stockholm Cemetery Board also introduced special restrictions regarding the size and form of gravestones in the new cemetery. The Woodland Chapel soon proved to be too small and so the Chapel of Resurrection (designed by Lewerentz) was added in 1925. In 1923-24 a service building designed by Asplund was erected.

In 1935 the City Council commissioned Asplund to draw up a plan for a chapel and crematorium complex just inside the main gate. The group of three chapels (the Chapels of Faith, Hope, and the Holy Cross), with common mortuary and crematorium facilities, were built in 1937-40. The huge granite cross on the lawn outside the chapels, also designed by Asplund, was a gift from an anonymous donor.

Description

Unlike most of its contemporaries, which are reminiscent of well disciplined English parks, Asplund and Lewerentz's cemetery design evokes a more primitive imagery. The intervention of footpaths, meandering freely

through the woodland, is minimal. Graves are laid out without excessive alignment or regimentation among the natural forest. Such interventions as the architects allowed themselves, such as the reshaping of the two old gravel pits and the layout of the area round the main chapel, are effectively concealed within the virgin forest around them, yet provide a vivid contrast to them.

Asplund and Lewerentz's sources were not "high" architecture or landscape design but rather ancient and medieval Nordic burial archetypes. Nonetheless, skilful use was made of elements from Mediterranean antiquity, such as the Via Sepulchra at Pompeii, but these are not allowed to dominate the essentially Nordic whole. The whole scheme is in strong contrast with continental European cemetery design at the turn of the century, which drew its inspiration from the Symbolist paintings of Arnold Böcklin, especially his "Island of the Dead", with their classical fragments and enigmatic figures.

The Woodland Chapel, built in wood with whitewashed walls and a shingled roof, represents both an intensification and a formal disciplining of the romantic naturalism of the competition scheme. Its severity reflects Asplund's increasing interest in classicism and classical composition methods. The point of departure for the chapel, which is set in a grove of mature fir trees surrounded by a wall, is nevertheless an indigenous vernacular landscape element, the country church surrounded by a walled graveyard. This is further evoked by the chapel's black shingle roof, but this is subtly shifted by isolating it on Tuscan columns, which give it the appearance from a distance of a wooden pyramid emerging from the surrounding trees.

The second group of chapels are designed to permit funerals to take place simultaneously. Each of the chapels has its own enclosed garden, and as a group they take full advantage of the natural landscape. The gentle slope is accentuated by the gradually descending height of the buildings to the open-air columbarium and the main gate. This slope is utilized by the siting of crematoria and other technical equipment in basements. The interior layouts have the catafalque as the main feature rather than the altar.

The largest of the chapels, that of the Holy Cross, has a monumental hall in front of it, and adjoining this is a lily-pond. Beyond the pond is the space for open-air ceremonies. The columbarium, with niches and graves for urns, lies to the north of the chapels. Decorations inside the three chapels resulted from a competition held in 1937. They maintain the austerity that is characteristic of the entire Skogskyrkogården complex.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The site is owned by the Cemetery Board of Stockholm City Council. It is protected by the Cultural Heritage Act 1988 (Chapter 4).

Management

Skogskyrkogården is managed by the City of Stockholm Cemetery Administration.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The cemetery has been maintained in good condition since its opening in 1920. There is continuous maintenance of the landscape and its vegetation, which are essential elements in the overall design. A special survey of the large pinery has recently been carried out, and this will be the subject of special works. All except one of the chapels have recently been restored internally.

Authenticity

No works have been carried out since 1920 that in any way affect the authenticity of Asplund and Lewerentz's original concept.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS mission visited this property in June 1993.

Qualities

Architects have always debated the problem of the relationship between architecture and the landscape within which it is located. During the present century the concept of architecture wholly integrated into its environment has been developed to a high degree by certain architects and designers.

Skogskyrkogården is an outstanding example of the successful application of this principle. The chapels and other buildings there would lose much of their meaning if isolated from the landscape for which they were conceived. The Woodland Chapel is intimately integrated into its setting, whilst the impact of the later group of chapels is heightened by the use of their landscape as a background. In both cases the architecture has a quality of austerity which is appropriate to its function and does not compete with the landscape.

Comparative analysis

At its 15th Meeting in Paris in June 1991, the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee deferred examination of this property pending the results of a comparative study of this type of property (ie cemeteries). The Polish National Committee of ICOMOS organized an international colloquium in Wroclaw (Poland) in October 1993. A working group was charged with drawing up a list of the most important cemeteries in the world, which were worthy of consideration for inclusion on the World Heritage List. This list includes Skogskyrkogården, which is considered to be of the highest artistic quality.

ICOMOS also consulted the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Friedhof und Denkmal E.V., Kassel (Germany). The Director of the AFD and the associated Zentralinstitut und Museum für Sepulkralkultur, Dr Reiner Sörries, compared Skogskyrkogården with the cemetery in Munich (Germany), which was opened in 1907 and could therefore be justifiably described as the first woodland cemetery. However, in his opinion the Stockholm cemetery improved upon the Munich concept by integrating natural with artistic and architectural values. The success with which Asplund and Lewerentz achieved this combination, in his opinion, gives Skogskyrkogården an outstanding independent cultural value which justifies its inclusion on the World Heritage List.

It is relevant to add that, in the opinion of ICOMOS, Skogskyrkogården also qualifies for inclusion on the List as a "clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man" (*Operational Guidelines*, para 39 (i)).

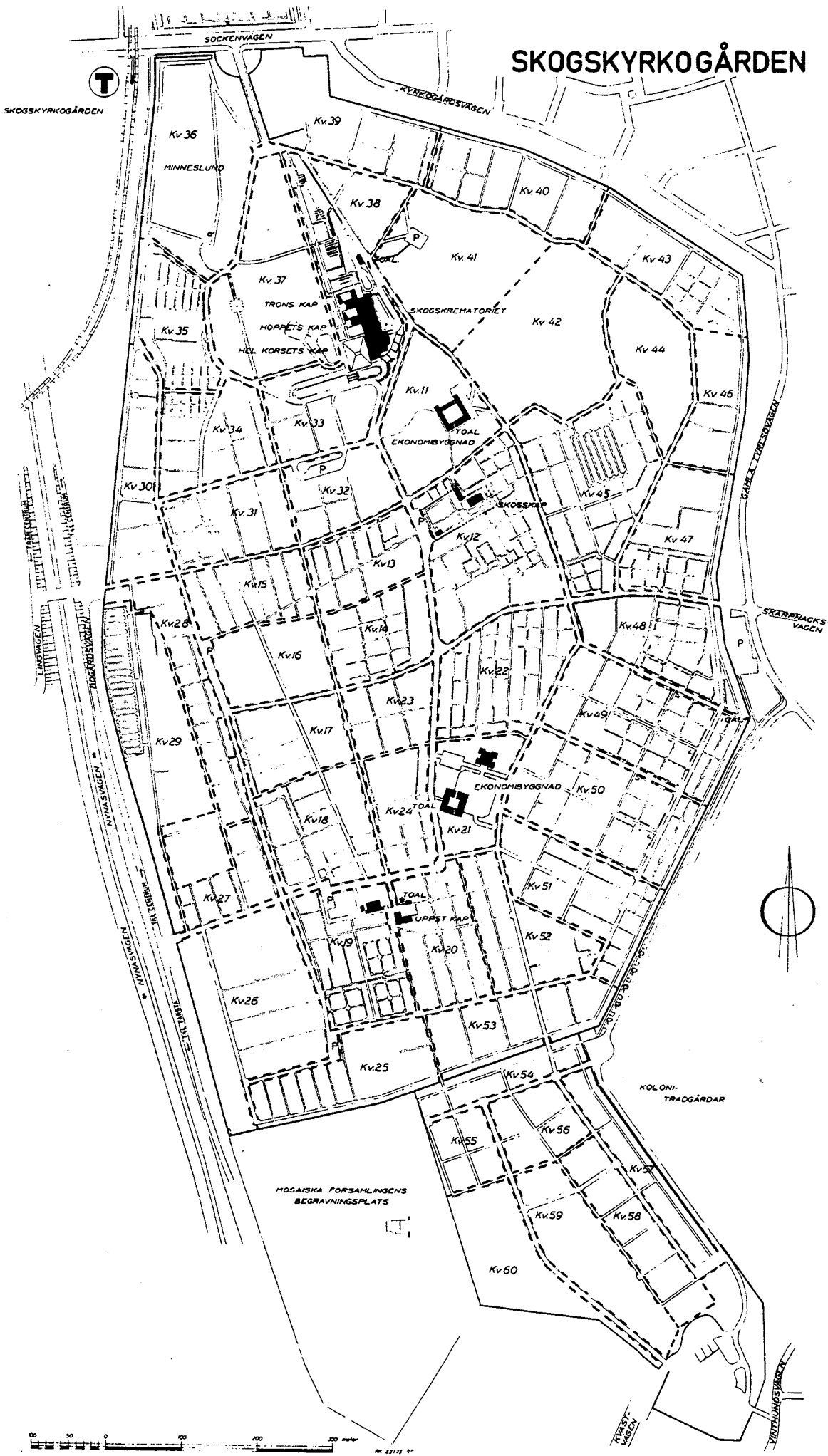
Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria i and ii:

- ***Criterion i*** Skogskyrkogården is an outstandingly successful example of a designed cultural landscape which blends landform and natural vegetation with architectural features to create a landscape that is ideally suited to its purpose as a cemetery.
- ***Criterion ii*** The creation of Asplund and Lewerentz at Skogskyrkogården established a new form of cemetery that has exerted a profound influence on cemetery design throughout the world.

ICOMOS, October 1994

SKOGSKYRKOGRÅDEN



Skogskyrkogården : plan / map