

# Evaluating and Preserving the Intangible Value of Landscape: Exploring the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts

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## Abstract

What type of preservation can there be when the values of a landscape are not evident, but instead are created through human experience and retained in memory? When the cultural and historic value of a place is enhanced through human interaction *in* the landscape, how can one best identify the intangibles that accumulate in that place and preserve them for future generations? This paper explores such challenges at the site of the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts, a landscape rich in cultural values, rooted in legends, and enhanced by contemporary ritual and collective memory. To fully capture the legacy of this unique place, management strategies and techniques are needed. The boundaries of preservation must extend beyond the tangible landscape to incorporate the ephemeral, intangible qualities revealed through ethnographic research.

## Key Words

Preservation, cultural landscape, intangible value, collective memory

## Introduction

There are many types of events that touch only briefly the surface of a landscape, but then become forever part of its history and identity. As we interact with our surroundings, we enhance the human value of a place by adding to its story. Often, these interactions leave a permanent or enduring physical record of human presence in the landscape. However, even when such evidence is lacking, people nonetheless may derive meaning and identity from their surroundings through the associations they bring to a site. Thus, ephemeral or transitory human occupancy may create lasting, intangible effects on landscapes that serve to define the spaces. While preservationists have methods for many of the material challenges involved in historic landscape preservation, additional tactics are needed to address the challenge of protecting important ephemeral attributes and intangible qualities.

Worthy Farm, the site of the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts (GFCPA), in the county of Somerset, England, is a prime example of the need to expand beyond the boundaries of conventional landscape preservation's

primary focus on material, tangible features. The farm landscape where the festival occurs is a context where rich history is woven into the cultural values of contemporary activity. The landscape of Worthy Farm presents a challenge to identify, extract, evaluate, and perpetuate the intangible values that are integrated into this setting during the annual festival. The surrounding landscape has many characteristics of an internationally significant cultural landscape, and the festival that takes place there contributes significant intangible values. Yet the continuity of these ephemeral attributes and their setting are threatened by a management system lacking in vision. Preserving the values and heritage of this event requires examination of the bonds between the land, people, and event management in order to sustain these precarious relationships. To capture the inseparable connection of identity and memory between humans and the landscape, historic landscape preservation must stretch beyond its current fixation with the physical to include analyses of the formation of social spaces and how inhabitants interpret them.

### **Intangible Associations in a Cultural Landscape**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS) are recognized international organizations working to preserve outstanding landscapes throughout the world. In recent years these organizations increasingly have sought to move beyond a Eurocentric focus and develop an understanding of cultural landscapes that stresses the importance of associative and intangible cultural qualities rather than material qualities. UNESCO has defined

cultural landscapes as properties that represent “the combined works of nature and of man,” which also illustrate “the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal” (UNESCO 2008, 14). UNESCO has further defined cultural landscapes according to three categories: (1) “clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man;” (2) “organically evolved landscape” and (3) “associative cultural landscape” (UNESCO 2008, 96). The latter category specifically applies to landscapes that are significant “by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent” (UNESCO 2008, 96). This definition clearly emphasizes a landscape’s intangible cultural values over its material qualities.

In the United Kingdom, ICOMOS UK has adopted an approach to recognizing cultural qualities in landscapes that closely parallels the framework developed by UNESCO. The organization defines cultural landscapes as “particular landscapes that reflect interaction over time, between people and their surroundings,” and it specifically recognizes “associative landscapes,” which are defined as “landscapes associated with historic people or events, irrespective of other cultural qualities, and where they [sic] may be little material evidence of this association” (ICOMOS UK 2004, 3). Like the UNESCO category of associative cultural landscape, this definition is especially adaptable to the concept of intangible values. According to ICOMOS UK, some of these values may be manifested in landscapes that possess qualities



**Figure 1.** The Glastonbury Tor, a 500-foot mound described as a natural topographic feature with a maze of seven terraces built into its banks. (Photo by G. W. Wade and J. H. Wade, 1907)

including: (1) “Associations with myth, folklore, historical events or traditions;” (2) “Spiritual and/or religious associations, sometimes connected with remarkable topography;” (3) “Expression of aesthetic ideas/ideals/design skills;” (4) “Association with works of art, literary, pictorial or musical, that enhance appreciation and understanding of the landscape;” and (5) “Association with individual or group memory or remembrance” (ICOMOS UK 2004, 4).

The UNESCO and ICOMOS UK concepts of associative cultural landscapes acknowledge the significant non-material relationships between humans and landscapes. In the realm of landscape preservation, the importance of such qualities was recognized twenty-three years earlier in the Florence Charter for Historic Gardens, which was drafted by the ICOMOS-IFLA International Committee for Historic Gardens on 21 May 1981. This document recognized that historic gardens often express “the cosmic significance of an idealized image of the world,” and it likewise defined a historic site as “a specific landscape with a memo-

orable act, as, for example, a major historic event; a well-known myth; an epic combat; or the subject of a famous picture” (ICOMOS 1982). This was a noteworthy acknowledgement that not all valuable landscape features are constructed or designed. Some are enacted and remembered.

### **Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts as an Associative Cultural Landscape**

The landscape evaluated in this study exhibits several of the qualities of an associative cultural landscape as described by ICOMOS/UNESCO, drawing its greatest values from the intangible identity imbued by generations of ritual and pilgrimage. In 1970, farmer Michael Eavis organized a small music festival on Worthy Farm, his dairy farm located near a legendary national landmark, Glastonbury. His first gathering of 2,500 people began with music, art, free expression and free milk. In the thirty-eight years since the event has grown to become the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts (GFCPA), an annual affair attracting hundreds of thousands of international visitors and performers, raising millions of pounds for local and international charities, and establishing itself as a cultural icon and one of the top music festivals in the world (Knight, 2006).

The region has gained much in associative value, amassed from its rich history and annual stream of visitors. The adjacent town of Glastonbury and landmark Glastonbury Tor (Figure 1) was the destination of legendary pilgrimages by King Arthur and Joseph of Arimathea (McKay 2000, 125-6). Numerous sites in the area are protected by

England's National Trust (Figure 2). This ancient history is part of its allure. This convergence of the spiritual associations with the Torr, the links to legendary figures, the sacred geography, and the difficulty of accessibility, create a palpable spiritual magnetism (Scarre 2001, 12). Today's festival participants reenact the ritual of the journey to Glastonbury, ebbing and flowing from the site in a rhythm and momentum of their own as they return year after year (Aubrey 2005, 146).

An additional intangible aspect is the cachet the festival has garnered with its multitude of highly renowned music and arts performances—it is a highly coveted venue. “Glastonbury stood, still stands, for everything bands wanted to do. It was the cool festival to play, the only one left standing, and playing on the Pyramid Stage was the absolute pinnacle” (Aubrey 2005, 92). Participants build a memorable relationship with the land and the festival events. Their experiences and “collective memory materialize[s] in the landscape” (Sheldrake 2001, 16), leaving an indelible impression in the minds of participants. As they share the same experiences together in a common setting, their impressions meld together into a series of memories and recollections of the landscape. While people are forming memories of time and place, *their* impact on the land is just as significant—even though it may be just as intangible. Communally, their accounts of events and the stories they recall become integrated into the history and identity of the landscape (Burgin 1996, 36).

At Worthy Farm, the ancient meets the modern and they converge, creating a space for social exchange with the characteristics of a cultural associative landscape (Figures 3 and 4). Each of these elements contributes to the individuality and valu-



**Figure 2.** Summit of Glastonbury Torr, a pilgrimage site managed by England's National Trust. (Photo by Jim Champion, 2006)

able identity of the GFCPA. Intangible components and festival participants have combined in a special place and time to create a cultural ritual enjoyed by thousands and recognized by many more. They are the foundation for what the festival was, what it is, and will help determine what it will become.

These intangible values are unseen by the eye but felt by generations. They are components of a nation's heritage. These values may not be manifested in physical form, but they become intangible parts of the landscape. Yet, without the proper vessel for sharing these values or a venue for their future, these intangible attributes run the



**Figure 3.** Worthy Farm, Somerset County, England pictured as a tranquil dairy farm awaiting the summer crowds. This pastoral canvas, contrasted with Figure 4, illustrates the ephemeral nature of a cultural flux that disappears as quickly as it appears. (Photo by Nigel Freeman, 2005)

risk of fading into the past. Each year, the growing number of festival attendees and associated logistical complications threaten both the continuation of this summer ritual and the survival of Worthy Farm itself. Without an appropriate plan of preservation, the festival could leave the hills of Worthy Farm, to linger only in the memories of those who experienced it. Opportunities for cultural expression, philanthropy, age-old ritual and national identity may be lost if no efforts are undertaken to capture the residue of those memories. If the festival moved to a different site, its essence would be lost as well. A replication elsewhere would severely lack the foundation of time and culture accumulated at Worthy Farm as “any activity developed over time engenders a space, and can only attain practical ‘reality’ or concrete existence within that space” (Lefebvre 1991, 115). A proper solution must sustain the farm, festival, and the intangibles they share.

## Preservation Actions

The survey and analysis of intangible assets for a historic landscape challenge preservation techniques aimed primarily at the treatment of physical landscape. Preservation techniques that focus on the physical characteristics of a landscape, such as the treatment approaches outlined in the *U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, may prove helpful in preserving some physical aspects of Worthy Farm’s cultural value. However, a preservation approach that addresses only tangible resources cannot fully address or sustain the richness of meanings and associations that are part of the site’s role as a contemporary place of pilgrimage, ritual, and legend. Intangible attributes are not physical attributes to be *rehabilitated* or *reconstructed*. Nor are they visible designs to *restore* or emulate. Intangible elements create identity and character of place primarily through the beliefs, memories, and ideas of inhabitants (Figure 5). Conventional preservation tactics must be stretched and modified because the conservation efforts at Worthy Farm should address both the physical landscape and these intangible values. Alternative methodologies are needed for sustainable management and interpretation.

Preservation of intangible values at Worthy Farm begins by interpreting information gathered from the landscape’s greatest resource—its inhabitants. “Involvement of associated people and communities in the identification of cultural landscapes, and the description of their values, is fundamental to an effective process for both the short- and the long-term management of these places” (Mitchell and Buggey 2000, 44). Conservation of both the legendary Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts and its site, Worthy Farm, must be

undertaken in tandem, and the central approach must address the interactions between human experience, memory, and place. First, information should be gathered from historic texts, oral accounts, existing publications and participant surveys to uncover the multiple resources of the site. Second, the compilation of such data into an accessible archive would help to centralize and store the festival's history. Finally, to ensure the survival of the festival, reorganization of the festival structure and land ownership should be implemented. Such reorganization could help alleviate the threat of the festival terminating because of the land owner's discretion or personal circumstances. Specific techniques and measures to accomplish these objectives are discussed below.

## Survey

As a first step, an extensive survey of all available information on the history of the area and festival should be collected including maps, deeds, historic documents, photographs, legends and written accounts of the area myths. This research should follow established methodologies for documenting a cultural landscape's character-defining features, origins and subsequent development, regional and national context, and associations with important persons or events (Robinson 2005, 6). Such documentation creates the context of the site and establishes a foundation for exploring the "magic of Glastonbury." While this research of the historic setting and context



**Figure 4.** Worthy Farm, showing thousands of attendees and the Pyramid Stage during the GFCPA 2005. (Photo by author)



**Figure 5.** Festival attendees fly their flags illustrating a gathering of many nations sharing space and experience. Preservation of the cultural landscape at Worthy Farm depends not only on maintaining its tangible attributes, but also on acknowledging and perpetuating these kinds of ephemeral experiences. (Photo by author, 2005)

can be undertaken in a conventional manner, not all cultural assets of the site may be physically present. These may need to be captured through other means that are more adept at capturing the cultural landscape's ephemeral qualities.

Other resources should be added to the historical records of the festival, including oral and written histories of those who have experienced the GFCPA, as well as film and sound recordings of festival performances. One recent publication, *Glastonbury: An Oral History of the Music, Mud & Magic* (Aubrey and Shearlaw 2005), is a collection of oral histories gathered from festival organizers and performers. It assembles many stories of the production and logistics of the festival during its thirty-five year history. This book is an excellent example of a compilation of GFCPA experiences, but it only represents the perspectives of festival

producers. A similar resource could be created from the perspectives of festival attendees. This knowledge would also help preservationists understand the values, experiences, and memories of the people experiencing the festival in its historic landscape.

Recordings and films of the GFCPA performances are another significant resource. They represent the artistic presence at the GFCPA and demonstrate changing musical styles and trends. While the existing Glastonbury Festivals, Ltd., and the British Broadcasting Corporation produce films, recordings, and newspaper articles from each year's event, they are not located in a central depository. To assemble a chronological sample of performances and works of artists who played GFCPA would be to capture the essence of the festival throughout time.

Much of the information about the site and its history resides within its greatest resource—people. Thus, it will be necessary to gather evidence from these individuals rather than seeking material evidence from the site. “Places embody their history, and it is [the inhabitants] who have been, and will be, their stewards . . . They know [places] from close observation as well as from cultural transmittal from one generation to the next” (Mitchell and Buggey 2000, 44). The knowledge, memories, and values associated with those who know and create the festival should be extracted through surveys. Engaging past and present festival attendees, organizers, and performers through Internet technology and festival questionnaires could collect data on festival participants’ demographics, motives, sense of place, opinions, preconceptions, and experiences. All of this data may help festival organizers better understand the attendees, their festival experiences and what they consider significant. Understanding the relationship between the festival and those who know it best can illuminate this cultural experience from the inside and help preservationists focus on the most valued assets of the festival and the site.

## Reveal

The actions suggested above could help capture the essence of the festival from the perspective of the people who made it what it is today. However, additional measures are needed to reveal that essence, and to translate it into a valuable resource capable of providing entertainment, historical knowledge and useful suggestions for the festival’s future. Hence, another step in conserving the knowledge and history of the site should be to gather and organize all of the relevant data in one geographically centralized archive. This archive

would provide a comprehensive learning resource not only for festival organizers and attendees, but also for anyone interested in the festival culture that has developed at Worthy Farm. An accessible archive at future festivals, such as a festival history exhibit or interpretive center, would provide the opportunity to witness the decades of preceding festivals, learn the Glastonbury legacy, and contribute one’s own interpretation of the event.

New forms of education, interpretation, appreciation, and entertainment at the festival and its setting can yield a better understanding of the site’s history and the evolving relationship between the people and the landscape. These may include presentations of archived performances, or opportunities for participants to share their personal stories in a Glastonbury experience database. Such measures would create vehicles for festivalgoers to ponder and understand the festival’s relationship to the land, themselves, and a nation’s history. From this reflection, a greater appreciation of the festival and its roots could be gained and communicated throughout the festival’s community. Armed with this awareness, the desire to promote sustainability for the festival may be more readily achieved.

Another positive action that could help reveal the cultural significance of the GFCPA and its landscape—as well as provide additional support for their protection—would be national or international heritage listing of the Worthy Farm. When weighed against the aforementioned ICOMOS/ UNESCO cultural landscape criteria, the cultural associations that have accumulated at the farm make it a place worthy of such designation. Also, with *The English Heritage* reorganizing its listing system into one condensed inventory of heritage

properties that includes both buildings and landscapes (English Heritage 2007), Worthy Farm may be an exceptional candidate for designation as a heritage resource at the national level. Official designation, combined with the interpretive and educational activities mentioned above, would help reveal the site's evolving cultural significance in collective memory.

## Reorganization

Although it is necessary to research and reveal the full breadth of cultural values—both tangible and intangible—that have accrued at Worthy Farm, these activities alone will not be enough to perpetuate this unique landscape's life in historical and contemporary culture. In addition, a change in the structure of the festival site's ownership, management, and status could assist in protecting its future. The GFCPA is currently subject to the desires and energies of the landowner, a situation with an uncertain outlook. Michael Eavis and his family, the creators of this festival, have had a series of doubts about the coming years of the GFCPA. With some changes to the current festival arrangement, a more certain outcome could be established.

Because the site of Worthy Farm is integral to the GFCPA, it should remain as the festival setting. The Eavis family is also integral to both the festival and the land, and therefore the family should maintain control as the visionaries behind the event. However, the scale, cost, and logistics of the festival may have outgrown the capabilities of this single family. Thus, it may be beneficial to relieve the Eavis family of sole responsibility for maintaining the GFCPA and safeguarding its future. With most of the festival proceeds coming

to the farm and then redistributed to charities, it is amazing that Eavis is quoted in 2004 as still having “a million-pound overdraft on [Worthy Farm]” (Aubrey 2005, 273). While it is important to him to ensure that charitable donations are substantial, failure to secure the financial future of the farm could one day halt those contributions entirely.

Establishing a GFCPA Trust to acquire Worthy Farm could be a beneficial solution. With a portion of profits from the festival designated to an acquisition fund, Worthy Farm could be purchased from the Eavis family and become the property of a trust. The trust would then be managed by a board, chaired by Eavis, and the family could continue to use the land as a dairy farm during the year. This would allow the Eavis family to maintain a primary role in the management of the festival and farm, while also attaining the financial security necessary to sustain charitable income from the festival for years to come. Understanding that the festival is an ever-changing event is essential to its success. However, a more structured management organization, such as a nonprofit trust, could fulfill a shared vision of sustaining the festival into the future with respect to its past.

The suggestions described above provide a framework for conserving the GFCPA's two essential components—the site and the people's history. With these two elements intact, the festival will fare a greater chance of surviving the decades to come. If no attempt is made to record these values and preserve the site of the festival, the possible loss of the GFCPA will be mourned by many. It is important to acknowledge the benefits that the GFCPA phenomenon brings to contemporary culture and to the land that supports it. A passive approach

to conservation of this valuable resource would be an opportunity missed. However, the positive measures discussed above could help protect the future of a cultural icon and the landscape in which it resides. With the implementation of these conservation actions, the GFCPA may survive the years to come.

### **Challenging Boundaries**

Using established preservation protocols have proven useful in recognizing the cultural significance of landscapes, particularly with respect to their tangible assets. Certainly, landscape preservation will necessarily depend upon the careful execution of historical research, existing conditions inventory, site analysis and evaluation of historical significance, development of a cultural landscape preservation and treatment plan, development of a management plan and philosophy, and the development of a maintenance strategy and preparation of appropriate treatment records (Birnbaum 1994). However, the full amalgamation of values at complex landscapes like Worthy Farm may be better illuminated by incorporating into the preservation process an ethnographic approach that extracts data about intangible human values and associations. Surveyed data of the festival and land may not be easily quantified, and the methods utilized may not be currently practiced in a landscape conservation context. Yet these techniques will help preservationists to better understand the festival's associated values and expand preservation practices to include analyses of the intangible values of landscapes.

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