

Figure 6.1 The Castle Rock, Nottingham

in creating a memorable urban landscape. The use of the landmark offers to the designer an opportunity to embellish the city with an intricate system of civic ornament. It is the landmark's decorative role in building the image of a place that is the chief concern of this chapter.

TYPOLOGY OF LANDMARKS

In physical terms there are two broad categories of landmarks: those that are natural - trees, hills and cliffs - and those that are constructed as part of the built environment. The second category of landmark divides quite naturally into buildings or parts of buildings and non-buildings or civic furniture. Both sub-categories of landmark again divide. Buildings can be attached or detached. Civic furniture can be singular, one-off elements - such as a great piece of sculpture - or it can be repetitive - that is multiple elements such as distinctive street lighting or a particular style and type of sign associated with a town or city quarter.

NATURAL FEATURES AS DECORATIVE ELEMENTS

In the rural or natural landscape distinctly shaped features - rocky outcrops, the single large tree or the hillside reminiscent of a human form - act as landmarks and reference points for orientation. On the smaller more intimate scale, natural local features such as a spring, change of vegetation type, or pronounced variation in geological structure, may provide important clues for image building. More often such local landmarks show evidence of man's intervention in nature - a crossroads, ruined cottage or ancient stone circle. The city, a largely man-made landscape, while no longer structured by ancient countryside lore, nevertheless retains, in man's perceptual organization and image building, an element of an older system of orientation. The landmark is possibly the most important of these memories from the past. The street map, diagram of the underground or metro system may be essential



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for efficient modern movement in the city, nevertheless, more ancient clues remain important for a satisfactory relationship with the environment. Where natural landmarks appear in the urban fabric they perform the task of relating man to his contemporary environment but, possibly more importantly, to his deep roots in history. Such features are rare and should be protected. Nottingham is privileged to possess a massive rocky outcrop on which sits an architecturally uninspired castle (Figure 6.1). The rock on which the castle stands is riddled with caves and dungeons; it has a long history of settlement associated with the now culverted River Leen. Because of its long association with Nottingham's growth and development, it remains an important symbol, a historic landmark in the life of the city. However, from a visual point of view, it is the castle which from a distance announces the presence of the rock below. The same effect is attained in other cities, castles in Prague and Budapest being prime examples (Figure 6.2). The rocky outcrop from which Edinburgh Castle springs is probably a better

known example of a natural landmark. Visitors to the city of Edinburgh walk down Prince's Street fully prepared for the sight of the castle but perhaps unaware of its sheer dominance in the urban landscape. A further example of the natural landmark is the rock of Mont St Michel in France, though in this case, the landmark has been significantly transformed by man's building activities which have stretched and extended nature's rocky form.

Natural features which are used for local landmarks and by which we structure the immediate neighbourhood include rivers, trees, local open space and scrubland. A great loss to the urban environment has been the culverting of the many smaller streams that once ran through the landscape which has now been colonized for urban land uses. The process of culverting arose because of the heavy pollution of streams in urban areas. It may now be apposite to consider de-culverting and naturalizing some of the many lost rivers running beneath city streets in concrete channels. A procedure such as this would return to the environment some of its lost visual and perceptual richness. It would also assist in reversing the process whereby the wasteful run-off of surface water in cities lowers the water table, damages underground aquifers and adds to the volume and therefore the cost of sewage treatment.

Natural vegetation, because of its rarity in cities, is often important in the perceptual image of the resident, particularly for children and young teenagers. Even the most derelict of wasteland can be a treasured landmark. In Nottingham, the arboretum, a narrow sliver of nineteenth century parkland that meanders across the main arteries of the city as they progress northwards, is both a highly decorative feature and an important natural landmark. Another natural landmark is to be found in Bath: the great trees at the centre of the Circus may not have been part of Wood's design but it is the trees, not the fine Circus, which constitutes the landmark. Any proposal to remove the trees and restore the



Circus to its eighteenth-century magnificence would not only cause great public outcry but would result in the loss of a highly decorative landmark.

Figure 6.2 The Castle, Budapest

BUILDINGS AS DECORATIVE ELEMENTS

The most usual type of landmark is a building or the upper part of a building such as a dome or steeple. For the building to impress itself as a landmark upon the urban scene and therefore upon the eye of the beholder, it must dominate the surrounding built forms or contrast sharply with them. By virtue of their size and scale such landmarks are the principal decorative element of a city. Particular buildings often provide the memorable image by which some cities are recognized, for example: St Paul's, London; St Peter's, Rome, and the Opera House, Sydney (Figure 6.3). Such buildings are thus civic monuments, performing a decorative and functional role in the city rather than being merely decorative in themselves; they are the chief monuments in a city and by virtue of this quality, they also act as the main landmarks. The building as landmark, may however, be no more than merely decorative.