



THE REMAINS OF THE EARLY INDUSTRIALISATION OF SVALBARD AS CULTURAL HERITAGE

By the end of the 19th Century Svalbard was still No Man's land and there was no local population. In this empty polar area there was a sudden burst of activity connected to the exploitation of its mineral resources. The first decades of the 20th Century was a very busy period of prospecting and land occupation. Companies were founded and mines opened. Often the activity lasted just for a few years and the sites with buildings and much of the technical equipment were then abandoned.

According to the Cultural Heritage Regulations all traces of human activity older than 1946 are automatically protected. My subject is the protected industrial sites from this period. As inspector of historic monuments at the office of the Governor of Svalbard (Sysselmannen), my point of view is that of the administrator/manager of the cultural heritage.

During the relatively short period from the abandonment of the industrial sites to the present, a change of attitude towards these sites has taken place. The buildings always had a certain value as long as they could be used. However, the technical equipment as rails wagons, cranes etc. that were left lying about, used to be considered as heaps of scrap and eyesores in the landscape. Today these industrial sites are part of Svalbard's cultural heritage.

This change of attitude is a continuous process that concerns most of our built up environment. I shall not go into the interesting question of how and when this change took place for the industrial sites in Svalbard. For the present it is enough to note that the wish to protect the remains from the early industrialisation of Svalbard was one of several reasons why the time limit for automatic protection was changed with the new Cultural Heritage Regulations of 1992.

For the industrial sites the protection means that it is not allowed to damage buildings and technical equipment or remove any object from the site. It does not, however, necessarily mean that every building or site should be subject to active conservation/repair. My task, among others, is:

1) to make a survey of the cultural heritage. This work was begun in 1976 and is still going on.

2) to make an evaluation of the sites on the basis of the survey and other available sources.

3) to make decisions on the basis of the evaluation about which sites should be dealt with how and when.

At present I work together with Tromsø Museum on a plan for the management of the cultural heritage of Svalbard. This document will, hopefully, be the point of departure for the work in the future and it will include specific plans for the coming 3-4 years. The management plan will deal with all kinds of historic sites. The industrial sites will be an important part of the plan because many of them are in urgent need of repair to be saved.

THE 19th CENTURY BACKGROUND FOR THE EARLY INDUSTRIALISATION OF SVALBARD

During the 19th Century, and in particular during the last part of it, there was a great deal of attention directed towards the Arctic regions including Svalbard. The international scientific exploration of Svalbard had accelerated. The public interest in the expeditions of Fridtjof Nansen and the polar ship, „Fram”, in 1893-96, and expedition of Salomon Andree with the balloon, „Ørnen”, in 1896-97 was tremendous. The general interest was so great that there was a market for tourism to Svalbard. A hotel was built on Hotellneset in Adventfjorden in 1896. It did not last for long, but just the idea of a hotel in Svalbard, is an indication of the extent, or the expected extent, of the tourism at the time.

The geological expeditions to Svalbard had, besides purely scientific purposes, also aspects of search for minerals worth exploitation. Industrialists were often sponsors of the expeditions.

The first to make the connection between scientific and industrial interests was the Swedish (Finish-born) scientist A. E. Nordenskiöld. In 1864 he had found phosphorite on Kapp Thordsen in Isfjorden. A company was established and in 1872 a house was put up. This was meant to be the beginning of a colony of miners from the north of Norway. They were considered fit for living in such a cold climate. For several reasons the project was never realised.

The very first year of its existence the house was the scene of the tragic incident of 17 seamen who died of scurvy during an involuntary wintering.

Ten years later, in 1882, a Swedish scientific expedition wintered at Kapp Thordsen with great success. The leader of the expedition was Nils Ekholm and Salomon Andree was the engineer. The house was then extended to the south with a workshop and a new entrance. Several small buildings for storing and scientific instruments were erected near by and a railway, 900 m long, from the beach to the house was built for the transportation of goods.

Today the house is preserved almost unchanged. In the area around the house there are several remains from the smaller buildings and Andrees technical devices. Among other things one of the observatories is quite well preserved.

Svenskhuset, as it is now called, is one of the oldest houses in Spitsbergen and certainly the biggest of the 19th Century houses that are still standing. The house in itself and the history connected to it makes it a historic monument of primary importance in Svalbard. In 1982 it was on its way to total ruin, but it was repaired and saved. This summer, 11 years later, it is again necessary with repair work.

1900

The beginning of the industrial boom in Svalbard takes place just around the turn of the century. Coal was in the centre of attention. At the initiative of a sealing captain, Søren Zachariassen, the first Norwegian coal company was established in 1900. The company occupied land on Bohemaneset and, built a house for 16 people. Thereafter very little happened. Today the Russian Trust Arktikugol owns the three buildings on the site. One of them is the very first building connected to coal mining in Svalbard. It is well preserved, and together with the later houses and the other remains from the mining activity, it makes a site of great historic interest.

Several other companies were founded almost simultaneously. All these companies were so small that they did not really have the capital to start mining, but they sent expeditions to Svalbard and occupied land.

One of these expeditions was financed by the Norwegian ship owner Christian Michelsen. (In 1905 he became prime minister and he led the negotiations that resulted in the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden. This union had lasted since 1814). In 1901 his expedition to Svalbard put up a house in Van Mijenfjorden at what is now called Camp Morton. The Michelsen house is another building from the earliest period of prospecting.

Today the house is in a dilapidated state. Some years ago visitors to the place used parts of the wall for a camp fire. The damage was temporarily repaired, but the building is still in need of extensive repair work. In the near future simple repairs will be done to stop, or at least slow down, further decay.

Very soon the small Norwegian companies had to look abroad to find capital for mining. Often they sold their land occupations. At the same time an international period of prospecting and land occupation started. There was no proper procedure for land occupation and quite often the same area was occupied by several different people and companies. During the first two decades of this century the situation got quite confusing. Gradually it became obvious that with the expectations of a profitable mining industry, the international society had to reach an agreement on the administration of Svalbard. The result was the Svalbard Treaty of 1920 which gave the sovereignty, with certain limitations, to Norway.

THE FIRST MINES

The first to establish proper coal mines in Svalbard was The Spitsbergen Coal & Trading Company. This firm was founded in 1904 with English capital and the land occupations of two of the small Norwegian companies. In 1905 mines were opened at Revneset in Adventfjorden. A small mining „town” for 30-40 miners was built and called Advent City. In spite of large investments in buildings and technical equipment the company gave up mining after three years. These three years had been difficult with strikes and unrest among the miners.

Today the remains of Advent City, the oldest mining town in Svalbard, are just foundations of old buildings, a wreck of a barge which was used for fresh water supply, the entrance to the mines as a hole in the mountain above the „City” and some technical equipment lying around. All these ruins and objects are protected according to the cultural heritage regulations. The site needs a proper survey and identification of the different objects, but otherwise no conservation action will be taken.

In 1917 a new company had taken over Advent City and many of the buildings were moved further into the fiord where Hiorthamn was established. These buildings still exist today and some are used as holiday cabins by the population of Longyearbyen. Mining in Hiorthamn was never a success and went on with uneven intervals. In the last period, just before the Second World War, considerable investments were done. With the old buildings from Advent City and the never pre-war buildings and technical equipment Hiorthamn is one of the settlements with the largest number of protected historic buildings and other remains. Some repairs have been done and the site has a high priority for further repair in the future.

In 1905, when Advent City was being built, another of the small Norwegian companies was negotiating the sale of its land claims just across the Advent Fiord to the American John Munro Longyear and his partner Frederick Ayer. One year later they founded The Arctic Coal Company and started building Longyear City. The Americans had experience from mining and capital to buy the equipment and employ the number of people necessary for profitable mining. The Arctic Coal Company was the most serious and competent of the coal mining companies in Svalbard at this early stage. It was the predecessor of Store Norske Spitsbergen Kullkompani A/S which took over in 1916.

Very little is left of the American Longyear City. However, if one looks closely there are interesting remains to be seen in Longyearbyen: The entrance to mine 1, with a few trestles for the cable way, the entrance to mine 2 high up in Sukkertoppen and other small remains. We are planning to make these remains more visible as a part of Longyearbyen's early history by sign posting and other means.

„KLONDYKE” IN SVALBARD

I shall now leave the more or less chronological account of early mining in Svalbard and show some of the industrial sites which are interesting today not because any of them was particularly important in their time, but more because they all together constitute a group which tells the story of the „Klondyke” period in Svalbard. These sites are situated in Kongsfjorden, the Bellsund area and Isfjorden.

Coal was the point of departure for the exploitation of the mineral resources in Svalbard, and in the end it turned out to be the only profitable mineral. Many of the smaller settlements, however, were built to mine other minerals. There was a wide range of minerals. People tried mining gold, iron, lead, marble, copper, zinc, gypsum and phosphorite besides coal. There was an almost frantic building of houses, railways etc. Often the mining never really started, and the sites were left soon after the construction work had finished. Looking back today, much of this construction work seems founded on very insufficient analysis of the respective mineral. May be lack of technology is one of the explanations, but it is difficult not to see this hectic activity as a search for quick profits.

NY-LONDON

Ny-London in Kongsfjorden is the most magnificent symbol of the „Klondyke” in Svalbard. An Englishman, Ernest Mansfield, discovered the marbles on Blomstrandhalvøya in 1906 and made claims for the land. Mansfield's main interest, however, was gold. He had an earlier career as gold digger and prospector in New Zealand and later in Klondyke (!), Canada. In Svalbard he prospected many different minerals.

To exploit the minerals The Northern Exploration Company Ltd. (NEC) was founded in 1910. Mansfield was a shareholder and became the leader of the Spitsbergen expeditions up to 1913. He made large land occupations on behalf of the company, especially in Kongsfjorden and the Bellsund area. Of all the occupations the development of the marble quarries on Blomstrand was considered particularly promising. The incredible optimism of the company was backed by marble experts. Blomstrandhalvøya was „Marble Island” and was going to be the new Carrara supplying the world with a large variety of exquisite marbles.

In 1911 NEC started a period of construction which lasted for several years. Living quarters for about 50 people were built. Workshops, storehouses, railroads, a crane by the harbour etc. were erected. Heavy machinery for the quarries was landed, but very little marble was quarried. The first load of large marble blocks arrived in England in crumbles. The marble turned out to be so brittle that it could not stand the transportation.

The doubtful quality of the marble was known before World War I, but this did not prevent the company from increasing its capital and starting up again after a break during the war. The first expeditions after the war were so busy repairing houses and machinery that they did not have time for quarrying.

After the signing of the Treaty of Spitsbergen in 1920 the activity of the company gradually stopped and in 1932 all its properties were sold to the Norwegian government.

The great expectations, the energetic period of building and construction and the poor results were typical of many of the companies working in Svalbard before 1920. NEC's activity was, however, more extensive and wide spread than that of most of the other companies.

In the period from the 1920s up to now Ny-London has gradually deteriorated. Some of the technical equipment was sold and some just removed. Kings Bay Kull Comp. A/S just across the fiord used Ny-London as a material resource and as late as the 1950s most of the houses were moved to Ny-Ålesund.

In Ny-London today two of the smaller houses are still standing and the foundations of the other buildings are lying in the ground. The crane at the harbour is still in place. The large machinery hall has been burnt down, but a lot of the machinery is still kept, and among this is a locomobile of particular interest. All these remains make Ny-London one of the most interesting of the early industrial sites in Svalbard. Because of this the Governor of Svalbard had the two houses restored last summer.

SOME MINING SITES IN THE BELLSUND AREA

In the Bellsund area NEC erected several settlements connected to prospecting and mining. In 1908-09, before the company had been founded, Mansfield wintered in Camp Bell looking primarily for gold. The house is still there.

Near by is Camp Millar. It was erected in 1911 to mine gold. Today two houses still survive together with the entrance to the mine and some wagons for the inevitable railway.

Towards the end of World War I there was an increasing demand for coal. NEC opened coal mines in Calypsobyen and reopened the mines in Camp Morton. Several new buildings were erected — the same kind of large barracks in both places. This kind of barracks is also found in Iron Mountain Camp, Recherchefjorden. In Camp Morton these barracks have fallen down. In Iron Mountain Camp one of them has fallen down and the other is on its way. In Calypsobyen two of these barracks are preserved. Their good condition is mainly due to the work of the Polish expeditions which has used the site since 1986. As the only well preserved examples of a building type which has been widely used, their continued conservation is of great importance and this summer hopefully more repair work will be done.

Asbestos was also mined in the same area. Here NEC met with competition. The Norwegian company A/S Kulspids occupied parts of Asbestodden in 1907. NEC erected Camp Asbestos near by and the two companies did what they could to create difficulties for each other. The mining of asbestos never became profitable for any of them. Today the remains of the house of A/S Kulspids are still there, but in a condition passed restoration.

SOME MINING SITES IN ISFJORDEN

In Isfjorden and connected fiords there are rich coal seams which are the basis for coal mining in Svalbard even today. One of the smaller sites in Brucebyen, Billefjorden, named after the Scottish scientist William Speirs Bruce. The first two buildings were erected in 1919 by The Scottish Spitsbergen Syndicate Ltd. founded at the initiative of Bruce in 1909. Later two more buildings were erected. Very little coal was mined and the company was finally dissolved in 1950. The buildings and the railway remain today.

In Skansebukta and at Kapp Schoultz two different Norwegian companies tried mining gypsum in the 1920s and 30s. This was on a small scale and never profitable. Today houses and railways are preserved in both places.

The industrial sites in Svalbard which are protected according to the cultural heritage regulations, constitute a group of historic monuments of unique value. They are unique as industrial sites in a high Arctic region. As remains from an international Klondyke period, they have no parallels on the Norwegian mainland. In many ways their history after abandonment is also unusual compared to the Norwegian mainland. There is no pressure on the land in Svalbard and as soon as the sites went out of use they were just left. There were no demands to demolish buildings and remove technical installations. Over the years, however, trappers wintered in many of the buildings and objects were removed by those who could find any use for them. All the same, the industrial heritage of Svalbard is still surprisingly rich.

Against this background the Governor considers it important to take different kinds of conservation action to save as much as possible of this part of Svalbard's cultural heritage.

The industrial sites from the period after World War II are not protected in anyway today. Among these there are sites and equipment which has been abandoned. Many of them are of unquestionable historic interest and the Central Office of historic Monuments may make decisions on their protection. However, these sites, such as Grumant and Colesbukta, represent special problems just by their size. This is also the case with some technical equipment as for instance the cable ways in Longyearbyen. Because of the size of the industrial remains from

this period the economic consequences of protection is so serious that conservation is only possible for a limited number of monuments.

The subject of this conference is man's impact on the Arctic. The impact of the early industrialisation has an almost innocent character compared to the far more complex situation today when even activities outside the Arctic regions have an impact. For the industrial activities in Svalbard the time when a company can just leave buildings and equipment is passed. The conditions for permission to start any kind of activity is that everything is removed and the landscape restored when the work is finished. One of the basic elements in Norwegian Svalbard policy is the maintenance of Svalbard as a wilderness. This is widely accepted. For an inspector of historic monuments, however, it is a puzzling thought that in this way there will be no historic remains of the industrial activity of our time outside the present settlements.

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