

## The Monumentenwacht concept

There are now in some European countries organisations working that specialise in the field of monument inspection.

This development began in the 1970s in the Netherlands, when Walter Kramer, an architect for the Dutch National Department for Cultural Heritage, came to the conclusion that there was a restoration cycle for monumental buildings, particularly the larger ones, of between twenty-five to fifty years.

If a monument, he reasoned, can be kept in good technical condition through regular maintenance once it has been restored, then a new restoration, while it remains an inevitability, can be postponed for a significant amount of time, and this would save a lot of funds. He started a small organisation, which inspected monuments and advised the owners how they should maintain their valuable property.

This concept, though simple in nature, turned out to be a masterstroke in practice. Not long after that, interest in the Monumentenwacht formula began to arise in other countries as well. Today there are more or less comparable organisations working in Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Hungary, Denmark and England. A growing number of European countries, for instance France, Italy, Spain and Scotland, are interested in starting up similar organisations.



*From the top of the tower till the foundation, every part of the monument must be examined thoroughly.*



*International cooperation: inspection of the Abbey of Fontevraud in Saumur (France) by the Dutch Monumentenwacht.*

From its very inception, three concepts have been central to the Monumentenwacht: expertise, impartiality and independence. Over the years, no concessions have been made to these three key concepts. The Dutch Monumentenwacht is an organisation that primarily works for the owner of a monument. Its activities are collectively financed in the Netherlands by both the national and provincial authorities as well as the owners of the monuments themselves.

The inspection of a monument should be seen as the first step in a maintenance, improvement process, the preservation of a monument. Regular inspection and small scale maintenance works can help prevent major disasters, for instance as a result of long-term leakages; such difficulties are quickly identified and remedied during an inspection.

The deterioration of a monument actually begins the day after the restoration is completed; a tennis ball blocking up a gutter may result in substantial damage. In this context, the adage 'prevention is better than cure' is definitely applicable.

The outcome of an inspection consists in an observation report containing recommendations for further steps to be taken and improvements to the monument. An added advantage is that minor maintenance tasks can be carried out in situ during the inspection itself, naturally

on the condition that those performing the inspection have been adequately trained for this. The observation report may also include directions for carrying out well-considered maintenance or restoration work on the monument.

Monumentenwacht is at the moment the largest organisation in the field of the maintenance of cultural heritage in the Netherlands. The concept received several international awards, for instance the European Union / Europa Nostra prize for cultural heritage.