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John Ruskin was years ahead of his time in providing a definition of what we now call a holistic approach and the appearance of Environmental Coordinators in construction in the early 21st century.

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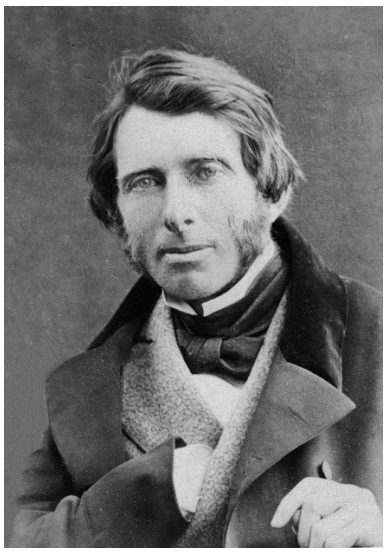

"Not only is there one way of doing things rightly,
but there is only one way of seeing them,
and that is seeing the whole of them."

John Ruskin, 1818-1900

As with so many topics John Ruskin was able to find words to describe an idea in a way that was simple, to the point and readily understood. Ruskin's advice on 'seeing the whole' was ignored by civil engineers for about 100 years. In the 1970s some engineers were dissatisfied with the 'mess' that they created in what had been green field sites. As the 1970s progressed new demands were being made by an increasingly aware public for 'better' results, even in difficult environments. It became increasingly clear by the 1980s that if individual engineers and companies did not begin to understand how contributions from other disciplines could improve their performance, then their careers would be short-lived.

In the intervening 30 or 40 years a revolution has occurred in the construction industry.

Writing in 2014, it seems so obvious now that civil engineering projects must involve a multi-disciplined approach if they are to reduce and ameliorate the impacts which construction inevitably generates. It is equally well understood that site assessments and after-care management are important elements in achieving approval of the work. Cross-country pipelines are a good case in point, some early pipelines left disasters of poorly drained, poorly restored land that demanded repeated and embarrassing visits to attend to defects; at least the route was easily identified on the surface. By way of contrast a new approach involving soil and vegetation specialists working alongside engineers enabled a 213km pipeline which traversed across a large part of lowland England to be completed in

nine months during the 1980s with little or no ‘come back’ from landowners and to the evident delight of the consulting engineer and the client.

Clients are obliged to pay such a great deal of attention to environmental issues in so many fields that someone who can ‘see the whole’, as Ruskin suggested, has become a key member of our project teams. We call them Environmental Coordinators. The Coordinator is required to provide overall control of environmental studies, reports, progress in the work and representation at meetings where ‘process and procedure’ can dominate discussions; frequently his/her role is to bridge the gap between these two issues and good practice.

Experience tells us that the Coordinator’s role calls for wide experience, first and foremost, in design. Design experience is most important since involvement in design fosters an ability to understand and solve other people’s problems; not a bad attribute for a team member to demonstrate. Secondly landscape architects seem to fit the bill perfectly provided they have a good understanding of and long experience of working with civil engineers. Landscape Architects are equipped to provide depth and breadth of understanding of the environment and this understanding is the essence of a holistic view. This welding of the essence of an environment and the need to disturb and reinstate/repair it, in order to create a satisfying result, relies a great deal more on marrying diverse practices than on scientific knowledge.