

Monday, 9 June 2014

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Submission in Response to *A Strategy for Australia's Heritage Consultation*

1 *Author's Background:*

I serve on the Heritage Committee of Leichhardt Council in Sydney's inner west. This local government administration contains one of the nation's most diverse and culturally rich deposits of heritage, the contents of which include:

- a. disappearing remnants of Indigenous habitation;
- b. surviving pockets of indigenous edible plants;
- c. maritime activity (the Balmain peninsula serving as the 'Deptford of the colonial South Pacific');
- d. pioneering public health engineering;
- e. the site of Sydney's only harbour colliery;
- f. an impressive stock and array of architecture (commercial, industrial, public, residential, and religious), the age of which spans the early colonial period to modern times;
- g. heritage derived from Mediterranean migration history, and
- h. an outstanding mix of historical and modern landscapes (such as Callan Park and Broughton Hall), which are also uniquely expressive of historical innovation in psychiatric treatment and care.

I have particular interests in religious history, conservation of commercial architecture, and biography. I wish to add that the Leichhardt Public Library has developed a relatively short period of time, an extraordinary research collection of bibliographic and documentary resources, as well as online images and search tools. Library leadership has also formed links with local groups involved with local history and heritage.

2 *Need for a Strategy:*

The production of a draft strategy at this time implicitly suggests that national heritage recognition and conservation have reached a cross-roads or demise or crisis that requires a focused response. Best practice strategic planning in the corporate sphere is preceded usually by a multi-dimensional environmental scan, the results of which inform the basis and direction of the strategic plan.

Presumably, other than an implied desire on the part of a new government to provide some direction with regard to national heritage, the draft document contains no other hint or background information as to the factors or circumstances which have led to the development of the draft strategy and its ordered priorities. In my opinion, the impact of and efficacy of proposals embodied in the draft would have been strengthened had it included a background statement, reflective of the current state of national heritage, its management, and policy administration also been provided.

3 *The Burra Charter:*

I find it extraordinary that there is not a solitary reference to the Burra Charter in the entire draft strategy, even though, in most heritage circles, it is the objects and provisions of this Charter which serve as the standard by which heritage value – at any level (local, state and territory, and national) – is to be judged. Omission of the Charter's centrality to a national heritage strategy not only weakens the Commonwealth Government's aspirations as a national leader, it also impliedly devalues the Charter as an instrument which state, territory and local government authorities should use to the underpin their heritage recognition and conservation strategies and frameworks.

A concrete living example of the Charter's denigration can be readily viewed in Callan Park within the Leichhardt LGA which is a major heritage site of state significance which is in public ownership and has a land-use history dating back to the early colonial era. There, location of incompatible signage, a chronic lack of building and landscape maintenance, poor protection of Indigenous heritage, and encroachment of sporting activities have led to the provisions of the Burra Charter being applied less in the observance and more in the breach. If the Commonwealth Government seriously aspires to attain positive productive leadership in the heritage field, the place of the Burra Charter in strategic policy requires unambiguous clarification.

4 *Heritage Economics:*

Unfortunately, there has been, historically, an over-focus on the costs of heritage conservation and the negative financial imposts on recognition of items that are in private ownership. I consider that a major weakness of the draft is omission of the vital need to interlink, where practicable, heritage with economically sustainable activity, of which tourism is one.

Although I compliment the authors of the draft in promoting partnerships with the Green Army and local community groups, the development of strategic marketing of heritage for education and tourism (domestic and international), together with potential for economic returns, could be addressed more vigorously. As there must be models of best practice for heritage market analysis and planning available from Europe and the Americas, this is an area of potential that the Commonwealth should not only explore but also consider prioritising in its funding programs.

5 *Community Engagement:*

I comment from the experience of my immediate milieu. So far as the burden of practical guiding of heritage, community advocacy, and other promotional aspects of heritage is concerned, this appears to fall most heavily (though not exclusively) on older Australians. I sense that inter-generational engagement and focus on

heritage recognition, appreciation, conservation, and practical promotion remains a longer-term challenge.

It seems clear to me that engagement of younger Australians in heritage significance will fail unless internet communication technology can be harnessed to well-developed and user-friendly image and information apps and databases. The development of templates and modules that can be modified for local application and development would excite the minds and interests of the younger generation and enable intergenerational bridges to be built. The story of a group of grandmothers on the New South Wales Central Coast producing a searchable excel database of the 10,608 burials in the old Balmain cemetery (1864-1912) serves as inspirational illustration of this capacity.

It should not be overlooked that heritage often encapsulates the sublime and inexpressible. For example, former dockworkers who return to Cockatoo Island dockyards, a former major graving, repair and shipbuilding facility, reveal emotions and sense of nostalgia that it is impossible to capture in the formal stultified legalese of a published heritage assessment or in the colours and style of an artwork. It was also the case that the late Dr Morton Herman enriched his photographic and artistic output on Sydney's Victorian architecture with a captivating literary style and imagery which was as much as tribute to masons, plasterers, and carpenters of that era as it was the imagination of those who designed these buildings and their ebullient embellishment.

I would claim, as a generalization, that younger Australians are empowered with soft skills and, for them, an emotional connection with a heritage object or site is significant. I would contend that the reported popularity of Anzac Day and the British monarchy in the minds of younger Australians reinforces this contention. I suggest therefore that, so far as this segment of population is concerned, some consideration should be given to the emotional dimension of heritage value and its presentation for this audience.

6 *Religious Heritage:*

I am attaching a copy of a piece of mine which the Balmain Association Incorporated published in its newsletter of February 2008. While my comments focus primarily on the surviving churches on the Balmain peninsula, they apply equally to other equally impressive ecclesiastical structures in other parts of the Leichhardt LGA, (of which one is Hunter Baillie Memorial Presbyterian Church, Annandale, that Brian Andrews in his *Australian Gothic* has acclaimed as the Australian Gothic church which is the "most mediaeval in feel"). My impression that national leadership should be encouraging then trustees of these buildings to take a hard realistic assessment of the long-term viability of conserving sites and building fabric, with a view to developing equally realistic management plans where possible with state and local authorities – these plans being mandatory as a condition of public funding assistance.

7 *Education and Training:*

In company with tourism marketing, heritage-related education and training needs should be accorded greater prominence in strategic prioritization. I totally agree that a viable buoyant independent cadre of professionals and practitioners across the whole spectrum of heritage specialties needs to be sustained and developed on a continuing basis. I would wish to recommend and encourage an independent

professional institute which can not only foster, benchmark, administer, and regulate practitioner standards but also enhance the nation-wide profile and status of accredited heritage experts.

Similarly, the Commonwealth should take the lead in ensuring that, in addition to the nation's corps of heritage specialists staying viable and vibrant, there is also a developed corps of crafts and trades people (*e.g.* stonemasons, horticulturists, tilers, organ-builders, carpenters, joiners, and slaters) who are competent to execute practical skilled conservation projects, train volunteer workers, and supervise, for the next generation of practitioners, apprentices and trainees.

So far as the edification of the general public is concerned, it should be technically feasible and timely to enable the online publication of sterling heritage resources such as Apperly, Irving, & Reynolds' *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*.

8 ***Modern Heritage:***

My experience has been that "heritage" and "history" are synonymous terms in the popular mind, *i.e.* heritage significance of a particular item is dependent on its historical significance and age. The Sydney Opera House is perhaps a special exception. My view is that greater promotion of the idea that outstanding contemporary buildings can qualify as authentic heritage should be pursued at national level.

9 ***Suburban and Regional Museums:***

I would endorse the views of organizations supporting local museums, especially in regional Australia that neither government encouragement (at any level) nor current funding arrangements (at any level) is assisting the preservation, access, display, and use of the many irreplaceable collections which communities have accumulated, in their eagerness to retain and *share*, for wider enjoyment and edification, materials of bygone eras, sometimes resorting to pilferage. The draft strategy does not address the limbo into which these institutions have dropped and my preferred option would be to encompass them within heritage policy and administration.

10 ***Intergovernmental and Intra-governmental Coordination and Consistency:***

While there is variation among public entities in the approach to heritage and its management at state level (the confused fitful administration of Sydney's Callan Park and Broughton Hall sites being a prime example). Authorities related to the Commonwealth jurisdiction have had a poor recent history of stable management, especially in the disposal of heritage assets in periods of frequent volatile technological change.

From observations I have made in metropolitan Sydney and Melbourne, the fire-sale of historic imposing post-offices (often equipped with clock-towers having working analogue dials), for example, has had a mix of outcomes, some conducive to successful adaptive reuse of a former post-office and some irremediably transformed. The disposal of industrial heritage belonging to Sydney's Cockatoo Island dockyards, as well as the flooding of the docks, was officially sanctioned vandalism at its worst.

These developments suggest to me that awareness of heritage discovery and recognition is a value that needs as much promotion at Commonwealth level as it

does state. Unless the Commonwealth is seen to value existing heritage within its control, its aspiration to a national leadership role in heritage recognition and conservation becomes vacuous.

Balmain Observer – Balmain Association Newsletter (February 2008)

BALMAIN'S RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

John Williams

Several Christian churches and their adjunct buildings collectively form a large portion of the Balmain peninsula's historical "buildings of public assembly". When viewed from Sydney's North Shore, it's the tapered roof of the tower of St Augustine of Hippo's Catholic Church, together with the steeples of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches, which makes the skyline of the eastern peninsula unique. These landmarks distinguish Balmain's townscape from those of other suburbs and their removal would annihilate the peninsula's Victorian character.

There are prominent names associated with the architecture of a number of churches. Edmund Thomas Blacket (1817 - 83) is linked to two Anglican churches (St Mary's, Balmain East - including the former parochial school hall and St Thomas's, Rozelle - including the rectory), as well as to Jane Street's former Convent of the Immaculate Conception. Next to the present St Augustine's, there stands the original church (without its steeple), likely built from a design of Augustus Welby Northbourne Pugin (1812-52), who led 19th century England's Gothic revival.

Of the three peninsular churches that local alderman and architect James McDonald (*ob.* 1902) designed, only the Presbyterian in Campbell Street survives. Edward John Bowen (1866-1926), also a local alderman and architect, oversaw the design and construction of Rozelle's second St Paul's Presbyterian Church. A third local alderman and architect, Edward Harman Buchanan (1859-1943), designed St John's Anglican Church.

The abundance of memorial inscription in and around these buildings narrates the depth to which religious beliefs and institutions once influenced and enlivened the everyday individual, domestic and communal experiences of earlier generations. Splendid organs housed in some churches display the centrality of music to formal worship of those eras.

The contemporary religious scene is immeasurably different. The 2006 census counted 21,584 persons resident on the Balmain peninsula. Of these, almost 43 percent either ignored the religious question or stated "no religion". This figure was an eight percent increase over that of 2001.

Faltering attendances at Sunday worship, compounded by progressive aging of parishioners and clergy, have economic corollaries. Thus, in 2007, a professional property consultant to Sydney Anglican Diocese made a commercial analysis of properties held by 16 parishes sampled in Sydney's older suburbs. This revealed that maintenance and repair costs, together with heritage protection, generally rendered churches as liabilities, with their actual realizable value, in almost all instances, being significantly below insurance value. The consultant calculated that, first, the more a church is designed for special use, the greater is the loss of the capital spent on its

The abundance of memorial inscription in and around these buildings narrates the depth to which religious beliefs and institutions once influenced and enlivened the everyday

individual, domestic and communal experiences of earlier generations. Splendid organs housed in some churches display the centrality of music to formal worship of those eras.

The contemporary religious scene is immeasurably different. The 2006 census counted 21,584 persons resident on the Balmain peninsula. Of these, almost 43 percent either ignored the religious question or stated “no religion”. This figure was an eight percent increase over that of 2001.

Faltering attendances at Sunday worship, compounded by progressive aging of parishioners and clergy, have economic corollaries. Thus, in 2007, a professional property consultant to Sydney Anglican Diocese made a commercial analysis of properties held by 16 parishes sampled in Sydney’s older suburbs. This revealed that maintenance and repair costs, together with heritage protection, generally rendered churches as liabilities, with their actual realizable value, in almost all instances, being significantly below insurance value. The consultant calculated that, first, the more a church is designed for special use, the greater is the loss of the capital spent on its construction. Secondly, past and present generations of parishioners are unlikely to have contributed anywhere near the costs of adequate property maintenance, repair and replacement. Significantly, the analysis ignored climate change and the consequential costs of upgraded weatherproofing, improved lightning conduction, and flood-plan implementation.

Conservation of religious heritage in Australia has evolved as an issue that is no less pastorally complex as it is commercially and politically volatile. Exactly a decade ago, sensing that religious heritage conservation in New South Wales is approaching crisis, a perspicacious Heritage Council hosted an excellent conference on the subject (appositely at Manly’s former St Patrick’s seminary). In a keynote address to that conference, Jennifer Clark, scholar of religious history at New England University, candidly described the transformation that Australia’s historical Christian denominations face:

Congregations belonging to mainstream Protestant denominations in the inner cities and rural areas of Australia are dwindling in size. When this process continues to the point where maintenance of the building and the servicing of the congregation can no longer be financially justified, the building is usually sold and the congregation disbanded. What was often a distinctive church building is then used for a different purpose, perhaps a restaurant, commercial offices or a private home. In the transfer from religious to secular use, ecclesiastical features associated with the building also shift ownership. No longer being the prerogative of the church, these features become secularised into the vocabulary of popular culture through the appeal of preserving national heritage.

Dr Clark’s research indicates that, overall, the response of Australian Churches to the impact which demographic and other social change continues to make on the utility and upkeep of their heritage deposits has been pitifully confused. This is in contrast to the United Kingdom, where comprehensive and sophisticated policies, in combination with organizational structures and procedures, have evolved within mainstream denominations, especially the Church of England. In combination, these guide and regulate not only redundancy, but also widespread adaptation and reuse of heritage church buildings.

For widely canvassed and debated doctrinal reasons, the Church of England’s initiatives have ensured that key elements of conservation policy and practice are firmly under ecclesiastical control. The Church of England manages some 900 pastorally redundant churches in any given year, many of these being landmark buildings. In formulating its macro-policy on redundancy, the Church of England has considered issues such as:

- the range of alternative uses that can be considered for these churches;

- if continuation as places of worship is appropriate, should the worship be Christian or non-Christian;
- priority of public ownership and use of these churches over private.

According to Dr Clark, “Unless well-managed, [church] closure can [and continues to] be a divisive and bitter experience”. This is to be expected in an age of rapid demographic change, in which a local church may survive as the sole icon of a community’s identity and sole repository of its memory.

While the provisions of Leichhardt Environmental Plan 2000 are the key administrative framework for the conservation of peninsular churches, no LEP can guarantee their adequate upkeep for the purpose for which they were originally constructed. Unless trustees of these sites begin generating their own contingency plans, it may be timely for the Balmain Association to appraise needs and formulate strategies to secure not only proper conservation of these sites but, where possible, continued public access and enjoyment.

The author is a local resident, a parishioner of St John’s Anglican Church, Balmain, and an enthusiast of religious history.



