

## ESSAY: WHAT IS HERITAGE?

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### INTRODUCTION

Heritage is a relatively new, catch-all term that in recent times has encompassed both the built and the natural world. The word has gained wide international acceptance and usage since 1972, when UNESCO created the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention, which Australia signed in 1974. For some decades now more and more countries have vied with each other to get their built and natural heritage sites on the World Heritage List.

But in another sense, there is nothing new about heritage, not least because almost everything designated to have heritage value is older than the present, from rock art and stone churches to the Great Barrier Reef. And while the European occupation of Australia might be just a tad over 220 years old, archaeologists and anthropologists date indigenous settlement back over forty thousand years.

In the 1950s and 1960s National Trusts in each state had little difficulty in identifying places they considered of state and national significance, from churches and sprawling pastoral mansions to the grand houses of the bourgeoisie in the cities. Likewise National Parks associations found it relatively easy to identify natural environments that could be regarded as 'pristine'.

With the rapid increase in scientific knowledge about ecological management and human impacts and with new techniques to measure both the longevity of Indigenous settlement and the impact of Indigenous land management – from hunting to the use of fire – scholars came to see that very few environments could be regarded as 'untouched' wilderness. In somewhat similar fashion, when scholars from a variety of disciplines came to study a building or a site, they would note changes to both the use of the place and its fabric over time. This meant that simplistic arguments for either built or natural heritage could no longer rest on claims that used words like 'pristine', 'untouched' or even un-altered.

### FROM CONVICT STRUCTURES TO ERECTING MONUMENTS

For most of the time since Captain Arthur Phillip claimed what we now call 'Australia' for the British Crown, this continent has been regarded and regarded itself as a 'new' society. The early British settlers, from the convicts to the naval and military, came to a landscape not only without

conventional buildings but without that hallmark of ownership in Great Britain and Europe, the fence. Here was a fenceless society, one in which Aboriginal tribes clearly congregated in particular places, but as contemporary observers noticed, did not recognize private land ownership, nor did they separate out landscapes by fixed boundaries. They appeared to live and move through the landscape.

Ironically, the early canvas structures that most of the new arrivals first lived in were less resilient than the wide variety of dwelling places created by indigenous people, but few remarked on this at the time<sup>1</sup>. The desire to create, in an orderly manner, European patterns of settlement, saw the early surveyors lay out street plans and building blocks in the port cities and allocate them to a variety of uses, from military barracks and commissariat stores, to stables and sites for churches.<sup>2</sup>

Those settlements first built by convict labor, including Hobart, Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle soon saw substantial stone buildings to house convicts and their jailers and to supply the needs of both the resident population and the transient population, especially sailors from many parts of the world. Sailors' accommodation houses and missions from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have survived in some of our port cities.

Being so far from home the new arrivals could not rely on produce from the 'mother country', so much effort went into early agriculture and livestock, not least to provide the basic food requirements from meat and dairy to wheat and a little later to wool, which soon emerged as the colonies' greatest export. Such was the demand and enthusiasm for agricultural production that riverine areas as far afield from Sydney as Wiseman's Ferry and St Albans were already being settled by the 1820s. As the wool export trade developed, warehouses and wharves were built, both on inland rivers and in the port cities.

Aside from prospective migrants, usually with an agricultural bent, from the British Isles, Australia hardly featured on the world stage until the discovery of gold in the 1850s in Victoria and New South Wales, in the 1860s and 1870s in Queensland and in the 1890s in Western Australia. Gold rushes received an enormous amount of coverage in the British and American press and in Chinese communities around the world. The sudden onset of great wealth saw tent cities turn into substantial towns and sometimes cities within a very short period of time. Bathurst, Bendigo, Ballarat, Gympie, Cooktown, Charters Towers and Kalgoorlie all thrived on gold. Other mining sites, including Broken Hill and Mt Isa, grew rich on silver, lead and zinc. Many of the grand structures built in these mining towns, from municipal edifices to hotels to elaborate private schools have now survived for well over century and almost all of those are prized for their historical importance and landscape setting.

The railway system, on a variety of gauges, developed in every colony. Passenger and freight stations were built to cater for demand from the gold rushes. Some, from the 1860s, were so substantial, that they rivaled the Town Halls and Cathedrals then being built. Colonies were proud of their railway architecture, so at Wallangarra, on the New South Wales/Queensland border, the railway station incorporates two different architectural styles, enshrining local distinctiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Memmott, *Gunyah, Goondie and Wurley: the architecture of Aboriginal Australia*, UQP, 2007

<sup>2</sup> See D.N.Jeans, *Historical Geography of NSW to 1901*, Reed, 1972

The Boer War, but more particularly the Great War, forced Australians to think about erecting lasting monuments. Before those wars most monuments celebrated local pioneers or the reigning monarch. Queen Victoria did particularly well with statues in Australia, not least because of her long reign. The trade union dominated town of Broken Hill caused a monument to the band on the Titanic to be erected. By the late 1920s every self-respecting town and many a suburb had erected a monument to its war dead, and with 60,000 dead, there were many to commemorate. The most elaborate war monuments were built in park settings in Melbourne and Sydney, and at the top of an axial boulevard in Canberra<sup>3</sup>. These memorials, taken together, constitute the single most important form of national memory, and all have been regarded as sacrosanct, long before heritage legislation came on the scene.

By the 1920s and the 1930s, when all of the states, bar Queensland, celebrated either their centenaries or their sesqui-centenaries, even the most substantial of convict structures were prime targets for demolition, to be replaced with new buildings more appropriate to the needs of modern port cities. Just a handful of members of the Royal Australian Historical Society, founded in 1901, opposed the demolition of the vast Commissariat store in Sydney in the early 1930s, to make way for new headquarters for the Maritime Services Board (now re-used for the Museum of Modern Art). A Macquarie St redevelopment committee planned to do away with the Hyde Park Barracks and the Mint and a Circular Quay Redevelopment Committee advocated the removal of Fort Bennelong, then serving as a tramway depot. Few in Sydney regretted getting rid of convict structures, even though the convict 'stain' in Sydney was much less redolent than in Hobart, where a stagnated local economy ensured that convict structures remained an obvious presence in Hobart, as they did in Fremantle and Brisbane, where there were few redevelopment pressures until the 1960s.

Just 80 years later, not only are convict-built structures revered by heritage professionals and celebrated in tourist brochures, they are embraced by governments: both the federal government and the state governments supported a serial nomination of convict places to the World Heritage List. While it is a truism to say that heritage is in the eye of the beholder, we can nonetheless discern broad changes in both public and professional attitudes to our past, from how we created and sometimes destroyed our built environment to how we use and view the natural environment. This essay briefly explores the evolution of both professional and public attitudes to both our indigenous and European past and how we have used, abused and sometimes attempted to conserve built and natural landscapes.

## **NATURE, NATIONAL PARKS AND INDIGENOUS HERITAGE**

The early European settlers came from societies where most of the forested landscape lay in private hands and the notion of public parks had been relatively late to develop. Nonetheless by 1637 London's Hyde Park, formally held by royalty and the church, opened its gates to the public. In Sydney Governor Macquarie, following British principles of town planning and public places, designed Hyde Park in 1810 for the 'recreation and amusement of the inhabitants'. Six years later he excised from the Domain an area to be known as the Royal Botanic Garden, and the following year appointed the first Colonial Botanist. In 1823 Commissioner Bigge pointed out that the Garden had the potential to diffuse 'throughout the colony the most valuable specimens of foreign grasses,

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<sup>3</sup> See K.S.Inglis, *Sacred Places: war memorials in the Australian landscape*, MUP, 1998

plants and trees'. Botanic Gardens gradually developed in all the colonies, designed as places of contemplation, experimentation and practical application. Hundreds of plants were tried out in Australia from all over the world, and in turn native Australian plants were exported not only to nearby New Zealand – where some created havoc – but as far afield as California, as gum trees there still attest.

In Australia, with its seemingly under-inhabited landscape, land did not appear to be a scarce commodity, nor did it appear so in the United States where the world's first conservation area, Yellowstone, was created in 1872 when the federal government put aside an enormous area of 898,318 hectares, crossing three states. Some of its proponents pointed to the desecration of Niagara Falls where the natural environment has been suborned by tawdry accommodation and commerce. Native Americans were more or less excluded from Yellowstone Park, administered by the US Army, until the creation of a federal National Parks Service in 1917.

The 15,000 hectare National Park south of Sydney, established by the NSW government in 1879, began, like Yellowstone, as a recreational and conservation facility. It was the first area in the world to be named a 'National Park' in an official proclamation. It only became 'Royal' in 1955, when the Queen, as the first reigning Monarch to visit Australia, graced it with her presence on the royal train the year before. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries bushwalkers and recreational users were the focus of the park. Areas were logged, ornamental trees were planted, while deer, foxes and rabbits were introduced for sport. It is only in the last thirty years that the Dharawal people, the original inhabitants of the region, have received practical recognition in both the interpretation and the management of the park.

Scenic and bushland areas were put aside in all the colonies and states, from King's Park in Perth (1872), to Ferntree Gully (1882) and Wilsons Promontory in Victoria (1898), to the Mount Lofty Rangers in South Australia (1891), Tambourine and Bunya Mountains in Queensland (1908) and the Mount Field and Freycinet Parks in Tasmania (1916). Many of the parks created in the 1920s and 1930s had strong bushwalker advocates, from Dunphy in the Blue Mountains to the Lahey family in the Lamington Plateau. All states passed state-wide park legislation between the 1950s and the 1970s, and the number and size of parks increased markedly. Marine Parks often had separate legislation. The federal government entered this territory in a spectacular manner between 1979 and 1983, creating a vast Great Barrier Reef Marine Park with a statutory authority to administer it, preventing both oil drilling and mining.

By the 1970s and 1980s the increase in the size of national parks and the coming of professional management coincided with the development of the Aboriginal Land rights movement. Park rangers and state museum staff had long been conscious of the rich variety of Indigenous sites in the parks, first formally recognised by South Australia in its Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act 1967. Other states either had separate acts (see table 1) and/or incorporated Indigenous heritage issues in their National Parks and Heritage Acts. Popular perceptions of Aboriginal sites in National Parks were usually confined to specifically marked sites (many, sensibly, were not and are still not identified for the public) until the 1990s, when it became more and more common for Parks to be re-named after their traditional inhabitants.

The long and complex history of Uluru provides an intriguing case of changing legislation, attitudes and practices. In 1920 the Petterman Reserve was declared, incorporating Ayers Rock and Mount

Olga, to 'the Aboriginal may...continue his normal existence until the time is ripe for his further development.' The Anangu people had no say when Ayers Rock became a National Park in 1950 and a site of tourist promotion. The federal government returned the title on the national park to the traditional owners in 1983 on condition that it was immediately leased back to the Australian Parks and Wildlife Service. In recent years the Anangu have requested that visitors not climb the rock, and the numbers have fallen from 74 per cent of all visitors in 1990 to 38 per cent in 2010. More and more Australian and international visitors are respecting the call for this site to be experienced in its landscape and spiritual setting, but not climbed<sup>4</sup>.

From the 1970s to the 1990s well-organised conservation groups faced off with a series of opponents to protect environments in every state and territory. In Tasmania they faced the government-owned Electricity Commission, forestry unions and forestry companies. This battle took to the national stage in 1983 when the 'South-west coalition' placed the first full colour political advertisement in Australia history, with a photo of a river and forest landscape and the bold question 'Would you vote for a party that would destroy this?'. In Queensland, sand mining, which had been phased out of NSW in the 1970s, continued apace, especially on the sand islands of Fraser and Stradbroke. The former was saved by federal intervention, while the Queensland government has only belatedly announced that it will no longer extend mining leases on the latter. In the rainforests of northern NSW newly resident conservationists battled it out with loggers and saw mills, with some sites entering the national conservation vocabulary, including Terania Creek.

### **THE GREAT AGE OF DEMOLITION: out with the old, in with the new**

In the decade after the end of World War Two, Australia and Australians committed to modernity. Architects advised clients and governments to site new, single storey houses, to catch the sun. Owner builders, responsible for about half of all new houses at the time, took the advice. At a time when even working class families could afford to buy a block of land in the outer suburbs, 19th century terrace house in inner suburbs – already pronounced to be slums in the 1930s - got more and more run down, and many were slated for demolition, to be replaced by high rise tower blocks and walk-up blocks of flats.

Cities and towns on the itinerary for the Royal Visit of 1954 felt obliged to modernize, and many removed verandah posts and replaced the old tin verandah roofs with modern steel awnings. In the capital cities height limits of between 130 and 150 feet had kept office blocks in check, but these limits were overturned in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Suddenly buildings twenty stories and more emerged on the city skylines of Sydney and Melbourne. These giant new structures required large sites and necessitated the demolition of many buildings, as in the case of Harry Seidler's signature Australia Square Tower Building (1965c). Parts of the Central Business Districts of Sydney and Melbourne, and slightly later of Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, were almost obliterated. In Sydney pubs, cinemas, arcades and even huge emporia gave way to the new high rise towers. In more conservative Melbourne, many of the shopping arcades remained, along with most of the old money clubs, including the Melbourne Club, and even art deco office blocks. The Exhibition Buildings, Flinders St Station, St Paul's and St Patrick's Cathedral retained enough curtilage to maintain dignity in the urban landscape, as did the Sydney Town Hall, St Mary's Cathedral and North

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<sup>4</sup> See J. Davidson and P. Spearritt *Holiday Business: tourism in Australia since 1870*, MUP, 2000, chapter 9 'Packaging Heritage'

Terrace in Adelaide. But in Brisbane, the only capital city with a metropolitan government, the City Hall (1930) became boxed in by office towers, leaving the city's once dominant symbol robbed of its commanding setting.

Nineteenth and early 20th century churches tended to survive in most of the cities, but even some of those survivors are now simply foyer areas for new apartment blocks. The same fate has befallen the grand banking chambers of most of the big banks. A combination of amalgamations and land values has seen only a few of these survive, and even some of those have been turned into apartments. The Sydney GPO, disgracefully abandoned by Australia Post, has been turned into an up-market food court for a five star hotel. Melbourne's GPO is now a shopping centre, but has retained a modicum of its former dignity. Post Offices in cities and suburbs, from Townsville to the suburb of Kew in Melbourne, have suffered similar fates. The wave of urban demolitions in the 1960s and 1970s wasn't restricted to corporations. The NSW state government, having decided to close its tramway system, offered up the Bennelong Point Tram Depot (the former Fort Macquarie) for an international competition to build an Opera House. Bjelke Peterson's Queensland government ruined Australia's most notable colonial intersection with the demolition of the Bellevue Hotel (the pastoralists' Queensland Club remains diagonally opposite the colonial Parliament) and built a freeway on the northern side of the Brisbane River, while Perth attempted to encircle all its urban waterways with freeways.

Some of the most representative buildings of the 1960s boom – Leslie Perrott's gas and fuel buildings in Melbourne being a prime example – soon fell from grace, to eventually provide the site for Federation Square, Melbourne's low-key answer to the Opera House forecourt. In Sydney the much-applauded, 32 storey State Government Office Block designed by Ken Woolley (1967) gave way, just three decades later, to Renzo Piano's Aurora Place office block. Despite the size and might of many such office block buildings in the 1960s and 1970s, many have since been demolished or converted to apartments as the real estate market changed course and inner city apartment dwelling suddenly became fashionable for both owner occupiers and investors.

## **THE COMING OF FORMAL HERITAGE LEGISLATION**

We can now say, with the benefit of hindsight, that the 1960s saw more 'historic' buildings demolished than in any decade before or since. Both Labor and non Labor governments courted the development industry, encouraged insurance companies and banks to build new headquarters, and vie with each other to build Australia's tallest building. The AMP and the MLC and their well-remunerated architects and engineers relished this competition.

The most spectacular redevelopment proposals were in Sydney, where the Askin Liberal/Country party government, with the backing of overseas banks, proposed to demolish and redevelop most of the Rocks and Woolloomooloo. At the same time a handful of businessmen could see some mileage in using historic structures for new purposes. Sam McMahon, brother of William McMahon opened an Arts Centre in the Argyle Bond buildings in the Rocks in 1965. Askin, a former Rural Bank manager, was so out of touch with public opinion, that it took an unlikely alliance of middle class professionals, especially architects, and 'green bans' imposed by the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), under the leadership of Jack Mundey, to force a pause in the plans of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, designed by Askin's government to raze the Rocks and hand the sites over to international hoteliers, bankers and insurance brokers.

Some other states, most notably WA and Queensland, awash with mining boom funds, were in the hands of development at any cost regimes, but in Victoria, under the civilized leadership of Premier Dick Hamer, whose adult children had re-discovered the charms of Carlton terrace houses, intervention took very particular forms. Hamer even intervened to stop the sale and redevelopment of Erskine House at Lorne, with a more intact coastal curtilage than any other guest house in the nation. Queenscliff in Victoria, with about as many grand guest houses as Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, saw the advantages of the conservation of such notable structures in their landscape setting. Both these sites have variably survived on decades of honeymooners and holiday makers.

Sites abutting surf beaches have come under much more pressure. From the late 1950s a stretch of land in southern Queensland marketed as the Gold Coast, gave up on sand mining and turned to canal estates on the Florida model. The wooden guest houses that once dotted the coastline, from Southport to Coolangatta, were raised for new hotels, motels and blocks of flats.<sup>5</sup>

In the suburbs and country towns havoc had already manifested itself in the petrol station building boom of the 1950s and 1960s, where no corner block on an arterial road was safe from the petrol companies. Thousands of houses were lost in an orgy of service station building, over two thirds of which have long since closed. But it was the car-based suburban shopping centre that posed the greatest challenge to the architecture and ambience of traditional high street shops. Brisbane, with its metropolitan-wide council, led off with Chermiside in 1957. Similar proposals in Sydney and Melbourne were delayed by local council rivalry, but Chadstone and Warringah Mall soon came on the scene. These new centres usually appropriated market gardens or under-utilised industrial land, because of the amount of space required, not for the shops as much but for the free parking. The malls undermined the traditional shopping streets, many of which never recovered. The malls also concentrated ownership, first in the hands of the big retailers (Myers, David Jones and others) and latterly with the rise of corporate owners, most notable Westfield. Distinctive shop fronts, long associated with milk bars, pharmacies, shoe shops, mercers and the like have given way to branded floor to ceiling glass entry ways, redone every few years to keep up both shopping throughput, retail income and rents. Many have attacked the blandness of these centres.

Post-war Australians, whether locally born or migrants, had seen their city centres transformed. In Sydney and Melbourne they had also seen thousands of terrace houses demolished to make way for high rise and walk-up blocks of Housing Commission flats. In the suburbs most of the new development took place on market gardens, race courses, dairies and unutilized land zoned for industry.

The key political actors of the time lived through this transformation of environments. The architects and town planners had got to E.G. Whitlam, the Canberra-educated member for the western suburbs of Sydney federal electorate of Werriwa. They had also got to Tom Uren, who became the first minister for Urban and Regional Development in the nation's history. They didn't need to get to Neville Wran, leader of the NSW Labor opposition, because as a city-based lawyer he mixed with them on a daily basis.

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<sup>5</sup> See J.Davidson and P.Spearritt *Holiday Business: tourism in Australia since 1870*, MUP, 2000, chapter 9 'Packaging Heritage'

In May 1973 the Whitlam government appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate. The composition of the committee is illuminated. Chaired by Justice R.M.Hope, it included the poet Judith Wright, David Yencken, an urban developer with a strong interest in architecture and design, and the architect and environmentalist Milo Dunphy. The frontispiece included quotations from J.F.Kennedy about the 'national estate' helping to recover 'the relationship between man and nature' and E.G. Whitlam's comment that the Australian government 'should see itself as the curator and not the liquidator of the national estate'.

This influential report led to the creation of the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC), two years later, taking up residence in historic Casey House in Canberra, a marvelous symbol of independence for a new statutory authority, because it was not simply lumped in with other portfolios in a standard Canberra office block. The AHC soon established its mark, with seminars, publications and its Register of the National Estate, which drew on and attempted to add much more rigour to the registers of the National Trusts.

Victoria, with the nation's most urbane Premier, Rupert Hamer, enacted an Historic Buildings Preservation Act in 1974, setting up an Historic Buildings Council. The year before young professionals had campaigned to save the Union Bank in Collins St.<sup>6</sup> With its grand inner city buildings and suburban mansions from the 1880s boom, Melbourne became a heritage battleground as banks and insurance companies eyed off CBD sites and home unit developers devoured as many large suburban sites as they could get their hands on.

New South Wales was next of the mark. Neville Wran, a worldly lawyer, defeated the coalition government in 1976 and just a year later NSW had a Heritage Act and a Heritage Council to administer it. The coalition government had taken an interest in creating new national parks and in Aboriginal heritage, which figured prominently in its 1974 National Parks and Wildlife Act, including specific provisions to preserve Aboriginal sites. The South Australian government had been first in this field in 1967, proclaiming its Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act in this year. The year before South Australia had become the first Australian state to outlaw racial discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

Those states with strong architecture, town planning and even history lobbies followed NSW promptly. South Australia passed its Heritage Act in 1978 and Victoria a 'Historic Buildings Act' in 1981. The mining states, where political corruption and real estate bribery were endemic, namely WA and Queensland, took another decade to act, WA in 1990 and Queensland in 1992. Ironically, the state with the most palpable evidence of convict heritage, Tasmania, didn't pass a heritage act until 1995. But redevelopment pressures there were very modest and Port Arthur had long been protected from unsympathetic tourist proposals, having by that time already had a long a varied history of tourist promotion and exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

## **IDENTIFYING HERITAGE: CRITERIA AND CURTILAGE**

Ever since the state National Trusts embraced the idea of registers of historic buildings, heritage has been associated with taxonomies and lists. The Venice Charter, the Burra Charter, and the acts of

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<sup>6</sup> See G.Davison, 'Heritage' in G.Davison, Hirst, J and Macintyre S.eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, OUP, 1998

<sup>7</sup> See Wilfred Prest et.al.eds., *The Wakefield Companion to South Australian History*, Wakefield, Adelaide, 2001

<sup>8</sup> See David Young *Making Crime Pay: the evolution of convict tourism in Tasmania*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1996.



each state heritage council, along with legislation for the Australian Heritage Commission, all note the importance of identifying heritage places, from European buildings and natural landscapes to indigenous sites. There has been a plethora of state and federal legislation on these matters over the past thirty-five years, with both brief and prolix definitions of what constitutes heritage.

Scarcity, representativeness, architectural excellence, scientific, economic and historical importance feature in most assessment criteria. A widely varied regime of protection emerged, from National Trust listings, which had no legislative authority, to the development, in some states, of permanent conservation orders administered by statutory authorities. Many of these authorities, proudly proclaimed when first set up, have had their powers curtailed, often by being subsumed within a wider planning and/or environmental bureaucracy. In the 21st century terms like protection and conservation have been replaced by the dominant catch-word of the era, 'sustainability'.

Heritage and/or historic buildings registers were produced by the National Trusts in the 1960s and 1970s, and by the time the state government heritage councils came along, early versions of heritage databases began to develop, many of which have now been re-configured for the web. The culmination of the listings approach and the bible of this period of heritage assessment and appreciation appeared as *The Illustrated Register of the National Estate*, a vast volume of over 1000 pages, published by Macmillan in 1981. This volume had enormous professional influence, not just on the immediate professional groups – historians, archeologists, architects, anthropologists – but on those cognate professions that operated more explicitly in the market economy, namely town and environmental planners.

Critics of listings invariably accused the compilers of being too property or site specific, of taking too narrow a view about significance, or being under the influence of a particular disciplinary paradigm (be it history, architecture or archaeology), or of flabby notions of social and cultural significance. Natural site conservation drew on other disciplines, literatures and measurement techniques – ecology, taxonomy, geomorphology, and carbon dating – and rarely interacted with the cultural mob. The identification of indigenous sites and artefacts came primarily from archaeologists and anthropologists, who had a variable track record of consultation with local indigenous communities,<sup>9</sup> but at least most appreciated the need to consult with local communities. In assessing European structures, the local interest groups were often deliberately ignored, either because they were regarded as financially partisan – owners of buildings, prospective developers – or lacking the appropriate professional expertise or save our suburbs groups, community groups, unless they incorporated, and sometimes employed, heritage professionals from architects to historians.

Multi-disciplinary firms were set up to undertake heritage assessments, and some actually made a better fist of this than the universities. Here expertise remained split between public history programs, concentrating on the built environment, environmental assessment groups which stuck with ecology, town planners and architects who embraced the remunerative activity of being 'expert witnesses' in semi-judicial hearings for either developers or government heritage/conservation bodies attempting to curb the developers.

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<sup>9</sup> See Hilary Du Cros, *Much more than Stones and Bones*, MUP, 2002. See Background Reading in end notes.

Leading heritage advocates, most notably James Semple Kerr, developed the notion of conservation management plans, which when combined with the regularly reviewed Burra Charter, gave consultants a sound basis for preparing such plans. Most major heritage sites in Australia now have such plans, which also address issues of interpretation and public access. These plans all analyse the 'curtilage' of a site – its landscape setting, whether built or natural – and whether proposed new developments will compromise the curtilage as to distract from the heritage importance of the site.

Over the past two decades many sites have benefitted from such plans, while others have been so compromised that their importance is much diminished. The 1880s Yungaba migration depot on the Brisbane River has been given over to Australand, a Singapore-government owned development company, to be turned into upper middle class apartments. It will be open to the public once a year. Erskine House at Lorne now houses new apartment blocks, its curtilage irredeemably compromised. The Abbotsford convent, on a spectacular bend in the Yarra River, has retained most of its landscape dignity, unlike the Brisbane City Hall, long crowded out by office blocks. The guest houses at Mount Buffalo and Mt Kosciusko national parks and at Jenolan Caves remain redolent with their history while the Gold Coast struggles to find any sense of continuity in a landscape where almost all pre 1950 structures have now been demolished.

### **POPULARITY, SCARCITY AND SURVIVAL**

In the realm of built heritage, particular types of buildings, especially when they have relatively restricted purposes, can flourish and then fall into disuse within just a few generations. Throughout the 19th century colonial governments granted most major religions land and thousands of structures of worship were built, from Cathedrals in the cities to a simple Mosque and a modest Synagogue in Broken Hill. Since the 1960s many of these religious structures have fallen into disuse, through a combination of falling congregations and sometimes – as in the case of the Uniting church – subsuming churches belonging to three different religious groups and then rationalizing those that remained in active service. With the collapse of Catholic teaching orders, sources of Catholic schools, especially in the smaller country towns, were turned over to other uses, as were convents and orphanages. Sometimes the school survived, but the abutting convent, as happened with the three storey sandstone convent at Warwick, Queensland, became a bed and breakfast establishment. Religious sites in the inner city have only been subject to heritage contestation. When La Trobe University sold the Abbotsford convent site to Australand, the Singapore-government owned development company, outraged locals and heritage professionals, with the notable support of Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, managed to save the site and the structures for more appropriate uses.

Churches, along with notable houses of pastoral and urban capitalists, were among the first properties to attract the attention of National Trusts. They were usually well built, invariably architect designed and often sat within their original curtilage, commanding notable sites in both cities and the country side. Since the 1970s hundreds of churches have been converted to bars, pharmacies, dwellings and all manner of retail uses. Other churches have been allowed, under heritage regulations and supervision, to make major changes to their internal or external structure for practical purposes, such as shifting the grave of Mother Mary McKillop from one side of the chapel in North Sydney to the other, to better facilitate the movement of pilgrims past her grave.

Gas plants and electric powerhouses were among the largest land holders in most of our cities. With the notable exception of Melbourne, where power plants were located amid the Gippsland coal

supply, powerhouses in the other cities were located with their consumers. Brisbane's tramway powerhouse, at New Farm, has since been converted for cultural purposes, with some sense of the original purpose and fabric retained, unlike the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney where most of the fabric was painted grey. Most of Sydney's other powerhouses have given away to port facilities (Bunnerong, on Botany Bay) or apartments, including the Balmain Powerhouse. Coal-fired gas plants followed suit. One of the few remaining urban gasometers in Australia, to be found at Newstead in Brisbane, retains its external steel structure, but not its storage cylinder.

Other major landholders, from munitions plants to breweries, have given way to new housing estates or in city areas, apartment blocks. Central Sydney and central Perth have seen all of their major breweries demolished and rebuilt in the suburbs. Sometimes remnant fabric on the original brewery sites has been retained, including pseudo-historical entrance ways for new apartment blocks. Only Melbourne (Carlton United at Abbotsford), Adelaide (West End brewery) and Brisbane (Castlemaine Perkins Brewery at Milton) retain any inner city breweries, though in every case many of the older structures have been replaced by new plants and huge parking bays to cater for the voracious demands of delivery trucks.

Historic port facilities in Australia have taken a battering, not least with the move to containerization. Brisbane has rid itself of almost all its port heritage, with hardly any evidence left that it was once a major river port. All the action is now with containers near the mouth of the river. Sydney, amazingly, has retained some of its great early 20th century wooden wharves, most notably the Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf and the Walsh Bay wharves. While they have been given over to apartment living, hotels and cultural pursuits, the overall form of buildings still remains. Of all of Australia's great urban ports, only Sydney, Hobart and Fremantle retain much sense of their history. Melbourne's docklands development has seen many wharves demolished to make way for apartments in one of the most wind-swept landscapes to be found in any Australian city.

More plebian structures rarely get the attention of heritage advocates, unless they are housed in historic premises. So poker machine installations in pubs and clubs, central to the expansion of gambling since the 1960s, have had little attention from heritage experts unless their insertion threatened historical fabric. Major car-based shopping centres, which are regularly re-fitted and even completely re-configured – from Chermiside to Chadstone – are also unlikely to find themselves listed as items of heritage value. But unchanged shop fronts, especially from the art nouveau and art deco eras- including the Paragon Café in Katoomba – get a lot of attention, and few if any dispute those heritage listings.

## **DEVELOPMENT, REDEVELOPMENT AND WHAT CAN BE SAVED IN THE NAME OF HERITAGE**

In a property-owning democracy, where over two thirds of households own or are buying their residence, which is not subject to capital gains tax, the temptation for constant redevelopment is hard to resist. It is even harder to resist in the city centres, where new structures and new land uses can produce a much greater return on many sites. Beyond the urban areas, the biggest challenges have come from land clearing, open cut mining, coal-seam gas extraction and logging, either for hardwood or wood chipping. While some activities deemed destructive of the natural environment have long been banned, including whaling and the use of toxic aerial sprays, emerging industries raise new issues for heritage conservation.

The challenge is to maintain a sense of place in our cities and suburbs and towns, to preserve what is left of relatively undisturbed natural environments, including the more successful examples of regrowth, while allowing agriculture to flourish and mining, which underpins the economies of Queensland and Western Australia, to proceed subject to environmental controls and a deep awareness of impacts on both Indigenous sites and established farms and pastoral leases. Such ambitions inevitably throw up choices, compromises and stand offs, especially at a time in world history where technological advances no longer provide guaranteed solutions to the world's ills, from mass starvation to climate change. Many of these contradictions are now simply masked by slogans such as 'sustainable living'. Advocates for built heritage and the preservation of natural environments are fighting for recognition and resources for their causes, just as advocates are lobbying for more funds for medical research or the performing arts.

What both built heritage and environmental advocates can plausibly claim is an interest in our past, our present and our future. Sometimes governments take these issues up with gusto, as they did in the 1970s and early 1980s, but just as often governments lose interest, not least when there are more electorally saleable issues and causes. Prime Minister John Howard's government took more interest in the heritage of Gallipoli and cricket than it did in either the built or the natural environment. If Australia had not been a signatory to the World Heritage Property Conservation Act it is quite possible that the federal government might have vacated the territory completely. Instead its analytical heritage capacity was gutted and replaced by an idiosyncratic and implausible small register of sites of 'national significance'.

Labor governments in Queensland and New South Wales in the new century, and governments from both sides of politics in WA, almost always sided with the development industry when it came to redeveloping lucrative inner city sites or creating more holiday accommodation capacity on the coast. Some local governments have staunchly defended their built and natural environments from grandiose developers, often with very little support or even outright opposition from their respective state governments. Byron Bay has resisted the blandishments of the high rise development industry which has so cruelled much of the landscape from the Sunshine Coast to the Tweed Shire.

Heritage preservation will always involve contestation – whether it is competing land uses, redevelopment proposals, or restoration after mining. Even Byron Bay cannot hide the terrible devastation caused by sand mining there, whereas on the Gold Coast the evidence is hidden under apartments, shopping centres and casinos. But the Gold Coast is now seeking its past in an impressive local history collection at the Southport Library and attempting to create a museum of coastal development. Contestation may also be generational. Members of National Parks and National Trust organisations tend to be older, often retired, and hark back to less complex, more predictable environments. The reason that so many of these organizations take their public and educational roles so seriously is that they are concerned to instill in coming generations an appreciation of our landscapes and the sense of place that goes with them.

## ESTABLISHMENT DATE OF NATIONAL TRUSTS AND KEY HERITAGE LEGISLATION, 1945-2011

Jurisdiction	National Trusts	Heritage legislation	Archaeology/Indigenous heritage
New South Wales	1945	NSW Heritage Act 1977 Historic Houses Act, 1980	National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974
South Australia	1955	South Australian Heritage Act 1978	Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act 1967 Aboriginal Heritage Act, 1988
Western Australia	1959	Heritage Act of WA, 1990	Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972
Victoria	1956	Historic Buildings Preservation Act 1974 Victorian Heritage Act 1995	Archaeology and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972 Aboriginal Heritage Act, 2006
Tasmania	1960	Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995	
Queensland	1963	Queensland Heritage Act, 1992	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003
Commonwealth	1965	Australian Heritage Commission Act, 1975 Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Heritage Protection Act 1984
Northern Territory	1976	Heritage Conservation Act, 1991	Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act, 1989
ACT	1976	Heritage Objects Act, 1991 ACT Heritage Act, 2004	
		World Heritage Property Conservation Act 1983	

### Notes

Many town planning and environmental acts have had heritage provisions since the 1970s. They are beyond the remit of this paper, which concentrates on formal heritage and related acts, rather than the inclusion of clauses in planning instruments or environmental regulation.

Sources: B. Boer and G. Wiffen, *Heritage Law in Australia*, OUP, 2006. See also chapter 2 in Pearson and Sullivan, *Looking After Heritage Places*, MUP 1995

## BACKGROUND READING

There is a vast literature on both built and natural heritage in Australia. All branches of the National Trust publish magazines or newsletters, as do Heritage Councils or their equivalents in each state. National Parks associations in each state also publish newsletters, and the government departments that are responsible for built, 'natural' and Indigenous heritage regularly produce annual reports and publish reports on particular sites, buildings or places.

Studies of particular heritage places are to be found in both public repositories and in the libraries of some of our largest consultancy firms, from specialists in engineering, ecology, archaeology and history. Increasingly these resources are to be found on the web, but many remain inaccessible. Every local council in Australia has a website, but only one Australian state has thus far produced a guide to its major settlements, [queenslandplaces.com.au](http://queenslandplaces.com.au). The heritage databases held by the federal government and the state governments are yet to be combined, so the sense of ambitious comprehensiveness first anticipated by the Australian Heritage Commission in the late 1970s and 1980s, has faded and been replaced by a panoply of heritage websites that are often more concerned with marketing than with presenting useful information. Most of the government guides to our national parks have more to say about camping fees than they do about the history of the parks or the changing attitude to the environment that can be deduced from this history.

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