

ACT Historic Archaeology Workshop 23 May 2009

National Archaeology Week

The impetus behind holding this workshop came from concerns held by members of CAS for the disappearance of archaeological and historic sites and information from the Canberra scene through development and neglect. Single sites are known to or discovered by members of the public, some of whom report them to the Society.

CAS is keen to find the best way to advise the ACT Heritage Unit and the Heritage Council of these sites, particularly those in the path of current residential development. The workshop provides a forum to raise awareness of specific sites and aspects of their history and for the sponsoring groups to combine in providing information to the heritage authorities.

Introduction of the sponsors and the proceedings

Sandy Blair, the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts.

Sandy acknowledged the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people, traditional owners of this area. She also thanked the sponsors, Canberra Archaeological Society Inc (CAS), National Trust of Australia (ACT), the ACT Heritage Unit, the Donald Horne Institute for Cultural Heritage, the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts and the Centre for Archaeological Research, the National Trust (ACT), the ACT Heritage Unit, IPPHA, the Donald Horne Institute.

Unfortunately Louise Halsey was unable to attend as she was busy with conservation works at the Adelong Falls Gold Working Ruins and had to forgo telling us about them. CAS will organise a field trip later in the year.

Doug Williams also sent an apology and will be speak to CAS about local archaeology at Crace and the Combined Defence HQ in July.

Emeritus Professor Isabel McBryde attended for part of the day and expressed her thanks to the organisers for bringing such fine speakers together; she also gave her support to the intent to find ways to promote and protect local heritage.

The Manager of the ACT Heritage Unit apologised as he was unable to attend on this day and expected a member of the staff to make a presentation, but

12 Mile House

Trish Frei's research on a property near the Molonglo River in the area soon to be developed as North Weston was presented by Helen Cooke. Some archaeological evidence of a slab building and a hearth is surrounded by fragments of ceramics, glass and bricks. Aboriginal artefacts were also visible. Trish has collected and noted many other fragments from the site.

CAS wrote to the Chief Minister and Minister for Arts and Heritage to alert him to this site and recommend thorough archaeological investigation prior to some representation and interpretation within the new development. The response assured us that ACTPLA has ensured that heritage surveys were being undertaken.

Dr Michael Pearson, Chair of the ACT Heritage Council advised CAS to keep on writing to alert the ACT Heritage Unit, the Minister and the Council to threatened sites. Eric Martin Chair of the Council of the ACT National Trust said that cultural heritage surveys should be undertaken earlier in the planning process when there is more opportunity to address conservation or interpretation.

Conservation of Historical Archaeological Sites *In Situ*

Tracy Ireland presented examples of conservation of historic sites and artefacts in the Sydney area, including The Rocks, First Government House, a Walter Burley Griffin incinerator at Glebe, the first hospital and several drains.

It is clear that conservation presents many challenges and requires continuing vigilance and management forever. She wondered if these examples educated the public or were just sensory.

Tracey was also concerned about the security of artefacts displayed in cases in public places. And raised the need to track small collections of historic artefacts.

Celebrating the subtle signs of the past - archaeology, place and landscape

Mike Pearson showed more examples of sites with little evidence, which are not so well identified, conserved or presented to the community or seen as important. He tracked the older routes of the road past Lanyon to Tharwa over the Murrumbidgee, serving the many properties in the valleys beyond. Mike also showed an earlier alignment of one of the roads in the Parliamentary Triangle which had included several bends; the trees which were planted followed the proposed route although it had been constructed straight. Mike also showed the earlier alignment of St John's Church Reid which does not match the grid pattern for the later suburb of Reid and the alignment of the old railway line that ran past the church.

Mike summed up these subtle sites with: 'Not until you tell the story do people get excited' and 'there are compelling stories about our past rooted in places'.

Kowen, Charnwood and Palmerville; and two Good News stories: Rock Valley and Nil Desperandum

Marilyn Folger started with pictures of Palmerville as it is today and some of the lost buildings. She is hoping CAS gets an ACT Heritage Grant to revise the conservation plan and install signage to explain how important this site was to early settlers. She then told the story of Henry Hall, the first land holder to live on his estate in Ginninderra and his property Charnwood which also requires signage.

Marilyn presented some information compiled by Colin McAlister on the sites in Kowen forest. Several buildings have been conserved under ACT funding but the latest letter from the Chief Minister advises that there will be no further funds available. Conservation is a long term project, as evidenced by nearly 20 years of supported work on Crinigan's Hut ruin.

Marilyn also showed the conservation of Rock Valley and the excellent reconstruction of Nil Desperandum, both pise houses in Tidbinbilla after they were damaged in the 2003

Canberra bush fires. A camellia nursery was also protected by kangaroo-proof fencing and the burnt bushes are shooting again from the stumps.

Tracy was excited to hear of these sites which could provide projects for her students in conservation – those assembled were just as thrilled to think that there might be some opportunities to harness supervised student studies.

The Conservation of the Cumberland Street Dig Site in the Rocks and the Sydney Harbour Youth Hostel Development

Wayne Johnson of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority took us through the history of the 1960s campaign to save the Rocks and allow the people who had lived in the area of generations to continue to live there and the subsequent archaeological excavations. The Rocks Discovery Centre presents some of the artefact collection and provides facilities for further research.

Wayne told stories of the colourful characters who lived in the Rocks in the early days; there was a Blundell who had been a convict and may be related to those settling in the region that became Canberra. GT Palmer, absentee owner of Ginninderra estate also had an estate at Woolloomooloo.

Some of the significance of the Rocks community is as a rare example of a community of convicts and exconvicts, similar to Ginninderra.

Emily Shumack & Isaac Blundell's House Ruin

Brian Blundell presented research also compiled by Sandra Whichelo, a Shumack descendant. The remains of Emily and Joseph Blundell's house, called Riverside or Eastern Corner, are on the south side of the Molonglo River near the Coppins Crossing Road. Brian shared details of the lives of the residents here, including convict origins and legal battles with the Federal Capital Commission on resumption of the land.

The descendants of these people would like to see the site conserved in public open space so that others can learn and understand the lives of the former residents. This site is threatened by the same residential development as 12 Mile House and part of the history of the Molonglo Valley.

Orroral Valley & Honeysuckle Creek Space Tracking Stations – From Space Research to Space Archaeology

Peter Dowling showed us the remains of these tracking stations and explained their pivotal role in the NASA moon landing project and echoes of the Cold War politics of the 60s. Peter spoke of the human side: the logistics of working long hours in these remote locations and the networks which still bind the former workers. The subsequent removal of most of the technical and industrial stock in the early 1990s has left building footprints, roads and 'smug marsupials'.

From Stone Tools to Squatters and Beyond to Outer Space

Faye Powell followed and complemented Peter's talk with her special research on visitor trails and signage, including pictures of the remaining historic properties in the Orroral Valley. None of the signs are in good condition, well maintained or very informative. Although removed in time and location from the first settlements and Canberra planning,

these Indigenous, rural and space sites are part of the wide history of Canberra and its role in the twentieth century.

Conclusions

The sites presented ranged from early settlement sites, some of which are in areas also rich in Aboriginal artefacts, to landscape elements relating to the Walter Burley Griffin plan for Canberra which were altered during construction to sites important in world politics and technological development in the twentieth century.

All assembled agreed that these stories are important for residents and visitors to understand and appreciate the history and culture of this area. Not all people may be attracted to exploring history themselves, but signage and interpretation will encourage interest in each site and tell a bit more of the roots of Canberra; it is not a just a new bubble blown in the early 1900s.

It may not be possible to preserve all these sites in their physical entirety – some are too ephemeral or subtle to survive conservation in the midst of development and some are already reduced to footprints.

However the forum expressed concern that these sites are not just forgotten as they add a rich history of early settlement, convicts and ex-convicts, social networks and cultural development in the world scene.

Full and detailed study, historic and archaeological, well before detailed planning in areas due for development is essential to collate the fabric and the history of the generations of people associated with the land and the developing social system. Informed choices can then be made on how to conserve and/or commemorate the sites, retain the archaeological collections and materials and present interpretations of these in a way that encourages and educates all visitors to the significance of these sites which led to them standing today in a landscape full of history.

We agreed to:

1 maintain this informal forum and to write to the ACT Heritage Unit, the Minister for Heritage and the Heritage Council of the ACT with suggestions and examples.

2 meet once more this year and at regular intervals thereafter.

Tracy Ireland offered to host the next forum through the Donald Horne Institute at the University of Canberra in mid to late October and to invite someone from Chief Minister's Department Celebrate 100 Canberra Centenary Project Team – possibly Karen Stewart-Moore or Dr David Headon to enlighten us on what is currently planned and where we might target for things on our wish list.

3 Write to the Chief Minister on behalf of this forum about the Molonglo sites. While heritage legislation and involvement in the planning process is a good first step, active conservation and interpretation outcomes require a more targeted approach, such as could be developed by the cultural collective of CAS, CDHS, NT ICOMOS etc getting together at biannual meetings. This will be critical to get good outcomes from the Molonglo structural planning/heritage surveys etc.