

ACT Symposium

Heritage and Planning – Partners in Development?

The inaugural ACT Symposium 2011 was held on Saturday 23 July. The Canberra Archaeological Society (CAS) and the National Trust of Australia (ACT) collaborated in organising this event and achieving the aim to attract speakers on topics including heritage and planning in new areas, archaeological techniques, conservation projects and priorities, and the significance of local heritage places. In particular, discussion was invited on what works well, what hasn't been a success and what has fallen through the cracks.

The day was a great success with 75 attending and some lively discussion. Our colleagues from Sydney were very impressed with the event and hope we will have more in the series. This was a first collaboration with other sponsors including the Institute of Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts, ANU; Centre for Archaeological Research, ANU; Donald Horne Institute for Cultural Heritage UC; Canberra and District Historical Society; Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc, Bosis Research; Godden Mackay Logan Heritage Consultants; Navin Officer Heritage Consultants; and Significance International. Sincere thanks go to Dianne Dowling and Belinda Bentley who worked hard all day providing hospitality to support the intense program.

The program can be seen on the CAS website at: <http://www.cas.asn.au/Documents/ACT-2011-symposium-programme.pdf>. The presentations will be available on the National Trust (ACT) website soon.

Although there were some heart rending examples of lost and threatened heritage, there were also examples of good practice. Speakers shared stories of good and bad planning examples from around Australia and the Pacific. Only when heritage is given equal weight with density, good transport and environmental considerations will they be equal partners.

We were reminded that many people who don't live in our city feel ownership of our national Capital and are concerned for its heritage.. In particular 'Greenfields' cultural heritage surveys need to be robust and early in the planning process, with agreement between the planning authorities, clear systems and guidelines and a common approach. These should include a role for all community parties, not just the Registered Aboriginal Organisations. Studies over decades have identified gaps in heritage identification although fine grained cultural heritage studies have been completed and hundreds of Indigenous sites assessed as highly significant and retained.

There is a need for a strategic plan to consider which all heritage places, including archaeological sites, should be conserved or interpreted to provide an understanding of the past so that people and visitors may be able to appreciate the history of the ACT.

The question: 'Is it possible to achieve heritage and planning aims at the same time?' raised the effectiveness of adaptive reuse, a valuable tool in sustainable urban design, which helps achieve heritage as well as planning, economic and environmental goals. Sydney's iconic area of The Rocks is an example of reasonable compromises, where tall development has been allowed in area of less significance, allowing tourist accommodation nearby through which the Sydney Harbour Authority receives income from leases which can be invested in conservation, but not interfering with the interpretation of the historic area.

Several good examples of a 'brownfields' sites with previous functions, are the former Prince Henry hospital site and Kanahooka, the site of the 1895 Dapto smelter in Sydney. Archaeological studies preceded final planning and contributed to retention of the structure of the site and relationships like roads and landscapes, using the footprint and form of the earlier use of the site in the residential development.

Some presentations were from other professionals such as landscape architects, who often hold the cards for how heritage is handled at the end of the planning process. These professionals have some heritage training but need to take a broad outlook and include everyone's views and needs. The heritage framework is overlaid on the site plan, including retention, recreating and interpreting. The landscape planners have to work hard to win the respect of construction crews so the heritage values are not eroded.

The high level of skills and passion contributed by archaeologists, historians, landscape designers and other professionals into cultural heritage surveys, heritage reports and master plans shone clearly in the excellent presentations. Sadly once these professionals deliver their reports to the client, the outcomes usually are out of their hands. Hopefully the next symposiums will attract more planners to see how the professional research and the community views can enhance their developments. The best results are achieved where designers and developers can work together and robust plan to start with, inclusion of people.

Closer to home, concerns have been raised by CAS and the National Trust (ACT) on the retention of cultural sites of significance in the new Molonglo development stages. The linear park designs appear to be very focussed on natural habitat values. Both organisations will continue to monitor the situation and support retention and interpretation of the history of the area.

The Friends of Glenburn homestead have conserved a range of structures and the graves of two little Colverwell girls who drowned 1837, now resting in the oldest marked immigrant graves in the ACT. Federal and ACT government grants were received in former years but as no further funding is forthcoming the Friends have put in rabbit proofing themselves to protect buildings.

The Blandforia 5 Heritage Precinct is hard to find on the ACT heritage website so perhaps not all those planning structural changes to houses are aware of the heritage significance of this area of the suburb of Griffith. Here and in other

suburban heritage areas, real estate sale notices and development applications should note that properties are within a heritage precinct. Audits should be required to check compliance and why the heritage system is not protecting listed places.

A snapshot of how our neighbours in the NSW Shires employ Heritage Advisers showed mixed results, depending on the will of the Council. As the original owners move on from established heritage areas, there is a new wave of occupants who have chosen to live in a heritage area and are keen to keep its values.

A consultant capturing Indigenous people's views on the heritage and significance of places noted that theirs is a lived landscape, a set of relationships with themes of interpretation of nested, overlapping landscapes. The heritage professional must convey the aspects of culture that Indigenous people value themselves, rather than the opinions of the recorders. The Indigenous landscape shows intergenerational equity and sustainable use, such as traditional men's and women's tracks through the landscape, the creek where they fish, the hearth where fish are cooked and hunting grounds.

Next steps

The National Trust Heritage and Grants committee will consider the recommendations in the report on the consultation process on the ACT Heritage Act, especially responding to the resident groups assertions that there is a lot of development pressure in the residential precincts of ACT such as Corroboree Park, Reid, Blandfordia 5. The committee will draft a plan of actions, including heritage audits, for a collaborative project with the Heritage Unit and the Trust which will include input from residents groups.

One way to unite all the causes and efforts of the heritage groups would be to nominate Canberra for World Heritage listing, especially as the centenary is imminent. This would also give politicians and others in authority a focus for conversation on many levels. Inclusion on the National Heritage List is the first step, and this is currently under consideration and due for a decision within 12 months.