Foundations of an oral history project: The writing of the *Burra Charter*

Bronwyn Hanna
Abstract

The short statement of heritage principles in the Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter*, although little known outside the heritage field, is a major contribution to cultural heritage management nationally and internationally. This paper introduces an independent research project entitled ‘An oral history of the writing of the *Burra Charter*’, which addresses the question of how and why Australians developed this innovative approach to heritage management. The research project examines the establishment of Australia ICOMOS in 1976, its development of the *Burra Charter* as an Australian adaptation of the *Venice Charter* in 1979 and the development of the *Burra Charter* approach now also known as ‘values based heritage management’. In its initial stages the research has focused on conducting formal, recorded oral history interviews for the National Library of Australia with 18 senior members of the heritage profession in Australia who contributed to the collective writing of the *Burra Charter* and its off-shoots (such as the *Guidelines to the Burra Charter* and the *Illustrated Burra Charter*). Five interviews have also been undertaken with senior members of ICOMOS New Zealand /Te Mana O Nga Pouwhenua O Te Ao as a case example of the international influence of the Burra Charter. This paper, a revised version of a paper given to the 2013 Australia ICOMOS national conference in Canberra, outlines the research project so far.

Introduction

This paper offers an introduction to my independent oral history project, underway since 2010, which investigates the writing and development since the mid-1970s of the *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (Burra Charter)*. The project explores how the influential statement of principles for heritage practice in the *Burra Charter*, first endorsed in August 1979, was developed collectively – as an unsung but important aspect of Australian cultural history. Truscott and Young stated in 2000:

[Australia ICOMOS’] major achievement has been the *Burra Charter* (formerly the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance) which has become the Australian standard for conservation practice. The Charter has also achieved widespread international acclaim... The *Burra Charter* has had a profound influence on the philosophy and practice of conservation in Australia and found ready acceptance not only among members of Australia ICOMOS, but at all levels of government, private owners and community heritage groups.

This article consists of four parts: first, an explanation of the *Burra Charter* and why it is important; second, an outline of the rationale and conduct of the 23 oral history interviews conducted for the National Library of Australia; third, some ideas for how the information...
might be written up into a history of the Burra Charter; and fourth, an example quotation from one of the oral history interviews – by Max Bourke, the original Director of the Australian Heritage Commission.

Although the Burra Charter has been implicated in recent critiques of contemporary western heritage practice (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013; Winter, 2014), these critiques beg for more detailed analysis than can be presented in this introductory outline. I hope they may be addressed in later stages of the research project.

**Venice Charter, Burra Charter – why are these important?**

The Burra Charter was first endorsed at a meeting of Australia ICOMOS members in 1979 in Burra, South Australia. It is an Australian adaptation of the Venice Charter, the authoritative statement of heritage principles resolved at an international conference of heritage professionals sponsored by UNESCO in Venice in 1964. The same conference also resolved to found an organisation called ICOMOS, the International Council of Monuments and Sites, ‘to coordinate international effort for the preservation and the appreciation of the world heritage of historic monuments’ (International Congress, 1964; Zaryn, 1995). When the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) was adopted in 1972, ICOMOS was one of several non-government organisations which would provide independent, expert advice. The Whitlam Government signed Australia to the World Heritage Convention in 1974 and passed the Australian Heritage Commission Act in 1975; its inaugural chair, David Yencken, called the first meeting of Australia ICOMOS in Melbourne, in November 1976. Australia ICOMOS quickly prepared and endorsed an Australian adaptation of the Venice Charter to make it more appropriate to Australian conditions, which would become known as the Burra Charter of 1979. Thus both ICOMOS International and Australia ICOMOS were prompted into life by organisations funded by national governments with an eye on the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO and the Australian Heritage Commission respectively). Both were founded with a very similar set of heritage principles at the heart of their functioning and identity (the Venice Charter and the Burra Charter).

The Venice Charter remains the most influential heritage guideline internationally and is respected by heritage practitioners for its brief but profound guidelines for looking after monuments and sites. Its fundamental premise is that heritage conservation should maintain the physical fabric of a monument and respect its historical layers rather than creatively restore or imaginatively reconstruct it. As Jukka Jokilehto explains succinctly in his world history of architectural conservation, ‘The emphasis was laid on the necessity to respect and maintain authenticity of historic monuments as well as to safeguard them in appropriate use, ‘no less as works of art than as historical evidence’ (Art.3)’ (Jokilehto 1986: 422 quoting Article 3 of the Venice Charter).

The Venice Charter can be seen to be a thoughtful compromise between ‘stylistic restoration’ versus ‘purist preservation’ – the two main opposing camps of nineteenth century European thought about how the conservation of buildings should be undertaken. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) represents the position that stylistic restoration of a building could improve on the past. This is still perhaps the prevalent view amongst contemporary home renovators. Even when working on ancient public buildings, Viollet-le-Duc understood that his work could be a means ‘to re-establish [a building] to a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time’ (Viollet-le-Duc 1990: 195). By contrast the English art critic John Ruskin (1814-1879) described the stylistic restoration approach in The Seven Lamps of Architecture in 1849 as ‘the most total destruction which a building can suffer…a destruction accompanied with false description of the thing destroyed’ (Ruskin 1849: 184). Ruskin’s approach to the built environment was taken up by his friend, the English socialist designer William Morris (1834-1896), and incorporated into the 1877 Manifesto for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), the first explicit statement of conservation principles for the built environment (Stubbs 2009: 133-5). Stubbs explains that the ‘stylistic restoration’ versus ‘purist preservation’ approaches were ‘two competing schools of thought [that] became known as scraped and anti-scrape (a heavy-handed versus a highly restrained approach)’. 
By the late nineteenth century a ‘third way’ emerged – ‘which avoided both the style obsessed excesses of the restorers and that radicalism of those that prefer it to see the disappearance of a building rather than an intervention’ (Martinez 2008: 249-250). According to Graham and Howard, this third way was outlined by the Italian architect Camillo Boito (1836-1914) in a conference paper in 1883, and proposed that conservation should take place ‘only when the monument is in danger of disappearance and absolutely necessary, and the intervention should be kept to a minimum, avoiding any kind of stylistic reconstruction’. In addition, Boito believed in preserving the authenticity of the monument and in respecting its epochs and modifications. He argued that it was necessary that the parts that were added in restoration should be visually different from the original material. He was in favour of the introduction of contemporary architecture, arguing that the date of the restoration should appear on the monument and that the intervention should be fully documented and archived (Martinez, 2008: 249-250).

These ideas will be familiar to anyone working in the Australian heritage industry today. This ‘third way’, a compromise between ‘stylistic restoration’ / ‘scrape’ versus ‘purist preservation’ / ‘anti-scrape’, became the basis of the approach taken by the Athens Charter in 1931, the Venice Charter in 1964 and the Burra Charter in 1979.

The Venice Charter articulated critical principles for heritage conservation such as preserving the original setting for a monument, respecting the valid contributions of all periods of a monument’s history, replacing missing parts in a way that integrates harmoniously but remains distinguishable from the original fabric, employing a wide range of expert techniques, respecting archaeology, introducing interpretation and rigorously documenting the works undertaken. Importantly, the Venice Charter envisaged ‘each country being responsible for applying the plan within the framework of its own culture and traditions’ (Preamble, Venice Charter, 1964).

A major theme of the first conference of Australia ICOMOS in Beechworth in 1978 was the perceived need to translate the European wordiness of the Venice Charter into language more appropriate for the Australian context (Australia ICOMOS, 1978). A small but high powered committee of six people set to work and within two years Australia ICOMOS had developed the Burra Charter, as it became known – because it was endorsed in the small South Australian former copper mining town of Burra Burra. The name ‘Burra’ was deliberately modest in contrast to the grand place names of the European charters, such as ‘Athens’ and ‘Venice’. Its official name was The Australia ICOMOS guidelines for the conservation of places of cultural significance.

Whereas the Venice Charter talks about the ‘preservation and restoration’ of ‘monuments’, the Burra Charter talks about the ‘conservation’ of ‘the cultural significance of a place’. Although the Venice Charter defined monument widely to include ‘more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time’ (Article 1), there are few places in Australia that could be called a ‘monument’ without inviting ridicule. The change of emphasis in the Burra Charter was not just semantic. As Susie West explained in her brief history of heritage management:

[The Burra Charter] created an international impact on how heritage professionals make decisions about the meanings of heritage sites and places. It did so by renaming the heritage category ‘sites and monuments’ as ‘places of cultural significance’. This switched the emphasis from ‘stones and bones’, material culture, towards the meanings of places, the significance that humans attribute to material culture. (West 2010: 38-39)

The Burra Charter coined memorable phrases for crucial principles, for example, advocating ‘a cautious approach to change’ – ‘as much as necessary but as little as possible’ (Burra Charter Article 3). The language of the Burra Charter was ‘plain English’ (decades before that became a widespread aspiration) and it offered definitions and clear distinctions between key terms such as ‘conservation’, ‘preservation’ and ‘restoration’, thus setting up a commonly agreed technical language for the heritage industry.

Beyond this work of ‘translation’ of the Venice Charter, the Burra Charter also offered new conceptual approaches for heritage practice. It insisted upon a logical approach to heritage
conservation – that the assessment of significance of a place should be completed before any management decisions are made or works undertaken. This common sense principle is perhaps the Burra Charter’s lasting contribution to heritage practice internationally and has become known as ‘values based heritage management’. This approach was taken up by the Los Angeles-based Getty Conservation Institute in its Values-based conservation series from 1999 - 2004.

The values-based conservation approach was elaborated in the revised and enlarged Burra Charter of 1999 which emphasised ‘significance’ as community-based and contingent. An example of this nuanced approach is demonstrated by the problem of late twentieth century graffiti in Fremantle Prison in Western Australia, which was World Heritage listed in 2010 for its associations with the convict era. Whereas the prison has significance to the world community for its role in the international history of enforced transportation, to whom the graffiti may be intrusive, it also has significance to a contemporary community of former prisoners who were inhabiting it as recently as 1991 – to whom the graffiti may be meaningful (Witcomb 2011). The Burra Charter lays out a means of assessing significance so that stakeholders may be recognised and their views taken into account.

Another remarkable feature of the history of the Burra Charter was its rapid and comprehensive uptake across the heritage industry in Australia. It quickly became and remains the standard for Australian heritage practice (in aspiration if not always action).

Beyond its importance within Australia, the Burra Charter was also ground-breaking as the first national heritage charter which effectively replaced, rather than complemented, the Venice Charter as a recommended basis for national heritage practice. While it can be argued that the preamble to the Venice Charter invites participating countries to do this, the Burra Charter set a bold precedent that has since been emulated by New Zealand in the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value (New Zealand Charter) developed in 1995, and revised in 2010 (Burke 2004), while other countries have also developed their own sets of principles such as Canada (Appleton Charter 1983 and Quebec Charter 2008), Brazil (First Brazilian Seminar about the Preservation and Revitalization of Historic Centers 1987) and Indonesia (Indonesia Charter for Heritage Conservation/ Piagam Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia 2003). In the late 1990s Australia ICOMOS was invited to partner with the Australian Heritage Commission and the Getty Conservation Institute to provide assistance to the Chinese State Administration for Cultural Heritage in the creation of a set of conservation principles for China which would become known as The China Principles (Altenburg & Sullivan, 2012). The combined popularity of Australia ICOMOS’ Burra Charter and James Semple Kerr’s The Conservation Plan has contributed to Australian heritage practice and principles becoming internationally influential (Zancheti 2009; West 2010; Clark 2014).

Outline of the Burra Charter Oral History Project

Although the Burra Charter is pervasive within heritage practice in Australia, and is admired internationally, few people are aware of it outside the heritage industry. It is an unsung achievement of Australian cultural history that I thought deserved more direct and explicit historical attention. Also intriguing is the fact that the Burra Charter is a collective production – designed by a sub-committee of Australia ICOMOS members. It contradicts the old saying, ‘Ask a committee to design a horse and they will come up with a camel’. This committee came up with a unicorn, something wildly better than anyone might have imagined possible. How did they do it?

Why not ask them? After several years of wondering with friends and colleagues if I should start an oral history project interviewing the senior members of Australia ICOMOS, I applied for and obtained a grant for NZ$5000 from the New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage. In order to meet the application requirements I expanded the project to also look at the writing of the New Zealand Charter and whether the Burra Charter was influential there. This resulted in the project including five oral history interviews with heritage pioneers in New Zealand and this provided information for a case study considering the international influence of the Burra Charter, which revealed a remarkable story of cross fertilisation of ideas over the Tasman.
Another key factor in getting the project off the ground was arranging a suitable repository for the interviews. Since it was a national rather than state-based project, I approached the National Library of Australia and ultimately it was agreed they would commission me to undertake the recordings for their collection, under their copyright. The library lent me their high quality recording equipment and offered instruction in how to use it. Perhaps most importantly the library makes the recordings readily available for listening on the internet (where the interviewee has given appropriate permissions).

I contacted Australia ICOMOS, of which I was already a member, to seek endorsement and found that the executive was enthusiastic about the project. They nominated some members for me to interview and helped me get in touch with people when requested. Some they nominated had already been interviewed by the National Library of Australia’s oral history program, including Joan Domicelj, Isabel McBryde and Barry Jones. By the end of the first phase of the project, creating recordings for the National Library of Australia, I had conducted 23 interviews in 8 cities, most lasting between two and three hours. Brief details of the interviews are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: List of 23 interviewees in Bronwyn Hanna’s ‘Oral History of the Burra Charter’ project for the National Library of Australia, 2010-2014.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date and place of interview</th>
<th>Interview available online?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Allom, Richard</td>
<td>6/12/2010, Brisbane</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham, Judy</td>
<td>18/7/12, Sydney</td>
<td>Not online, available for loan with interviewee’s permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourke, Max</td>
<td>17/9/12, Canberra</td>
<td>Available online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forrest, Peter</td>
<td>10/3/13, Darwin</td>
<td>Not online, available for loan with interviewee’s permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haglund, Laila</td>
<td>18/12/13, Sydney</td>
<td>Not online, available for loan with interviewee’s permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irving, Robert</td>
<td>22/10/13, Sydney</td>
<td>Available online</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, Peter</td>
<td>3/9/13, Hobart</td>
<td>Available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerr, James Semple</td>
<td>25/8/2011, 6/9/11, 10/10/11, 18/10/11, 25/10/11, Sydney</td>
<td>Not online, may be available for loan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lennon Jane</td>
<td>25-26/4/13, Brisbane</td>
<td>Available online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lewis, Miles</td>
<td>25/11/11, Melbourne</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucas, Clive</td>
<td>19/7/11, Sydney</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
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<td>Marquis-Kyle, Peter</td>
<td>7/12/2010, Brisbane</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
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<td>Mulvaney, John</td>
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<td>Vines, Elizabeth</td>
<td>25/8/11, Sydney</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Available online</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yencken, David</td>
<td>29/11/11, Melbourne</td>
<td>Already interviewed by the NLA. This short, additional interview is online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, David</td>
<td>27/11/11, Melbourne</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
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This list of 23 includes four of the six people who sat on the original sub-committee which drafted the Burra Charter in 1979 and five New Zealanders who contributed substantially to the writing of the New Zealand Charter. The choice of interviewees was largely guided by recommendations from early interviewees and from the Australia ICOMOS secretariat. There are several critically important people in Australia who contributed to the later development of the Burra Charter who should be interviewed for this project in the future.

In advance of each interview I rang to ask if the interviewee would like to be involved in the project then sent a letter with relevant information and a summary of the general gist of the interview questions. There was no rigid list of questions as I hoped to avoid overly rehearsed responses. The National Library oral history program operates on an all-of-life approach to interviewing people, thus all the interviews begin with people explaining about their family background and education. This unexpectedly enriched the project as it ended up demonstrating the myriad of ways in which people from so many different places, backgrounds and disciplines came together to bring the heritage industry into existence in the 1970s and 1980s. I was honoured to hear this wonderful array of life stories, told with consistent verve and coherence. Perhaps I should have expected this from a selection of such highly skilled heritage practitioners who understand the relationships between broad historical themes and individual places, and who have committed so much of their time to the public good of developing better heritage practices.

Oral history can elicit different types of information than is readily available from other sources. There is a great deal of general knowledge about any discipline that is so pervasive and so obvious that everyone knows about it but no-one writes it down. Oral history can capture some of these implicit, everyday understandings. It must be understood that not everything said in an oral history interview is absolutely accurate, that we all adjust our life stories to some extent, consciously or unconsciously, because of flawed memory or so that we can live with them. Facts mentioned in oral history interviews do need to be checked against documents and other evidence. Nonetheless this group of interviews offers an invaluable set of pathways into understanding the development of the heritage industry in Australia in general and the Burra Charter in particular. However, the task of writing a detailed history of these developments remains yet to be done.

### Issues for a history of the Burra Charter

A range of issues would need to be explored in a more detailed history of the Burra Charter. A literature review is required to establish what has already been researched and articulated about the development of the heritage industry and the application of the Burra Charter in Australia.

Since commencing this research I have become aware of number of other oral history projects with heritage practitioners in Australia, including Paul Ashton and Jennifer Cornwall’s interviews with the Australian Heritage Commission employees and associates; the NSW National Parks

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Challis, Aiden</td>
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<td>Not online, available for loan with interviewee’s permission</td>
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<td>Reynolds, David</td>
<td>21/4/11 Auckland</td>
<td>Available online with interview log</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiting, Dean</td>
<td>22/3/13, Wellington NZ</td>
<td>Not online yet, available for loan with interviewee’s permission</td>
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& Wildlife Service oral history program, and ongoing oral history research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Architects, the Australian Garden Heritage Society and the NSW Government Architect’s office.

There have been two issues devoted to the history and application of the *Burra Charter* by the Australia ICOMOS journal *Historic Environment* (1983, 2004), and further sources would include the newsletters produced by Australia ICOMOS and ICOMOS International, as well as meetings minutes, personal papers and anecdotal accounts of what happened.

This literature review would need to address the various ways in which the utility of the *Burra Charter* has been recognised, as well as critiques of it, such as the suggestions that it has too much emphasis on ‘fabric’ at the expense of social values or intangible heritage, that it is not always appropriate for addressing indigenous heritage, and that it forms part of an exclusionary ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (Byrne et al 2003; Waterton et al 2006). It would also be useful to provide an analysis of the international spread and influence of the document.

The background social and historical conditions underlying the development of the heritage industry generally also need to be explored. These include traditions of building conservation in western society and especially the nineteenth century British antecedents – John Ruskin, William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), as well as the history of previous twentieth century heritage charters, especially the (first) Athens Charter of 1931, the (second) Athens Charter of 1934 (to which Le Corbusier contributed) and the *Venice Charter* of 1964 which became central to the founding of ICOMOS (International).

Although in NSW much historical work has already been done on the Builders Labourers Federation’ Green Bans of the 1970s (for example, Burgman 1998) my interviews suggest that elsewhere in Australia and New Zealand, the broader context of 1960s and 1970s anti-Vietnam civil protest was an important foundation that led middle class people into heritage activism. The National Trust seems to have been critical in the 1970s for supporting the development of heritage principles and practice, for starting lists of heritage places and for employing and training activists and practitioners.

The Whitlam Government’s signing of the World Heritage Convention in 1974 was a driver for the formation of both the Australian Heritage Commission and Australia ICOMOS, since Australia would require a professional infrastructure to meet its obligations under the convention. Whitlam’s 1974 *Hope inquiry* (*Report into the National Estate*) was fundamental to the passing of the *Australian Heritage Commission Act* in 1975, whose inaugural chair, David Yencken, called the first meeting of ICOMOS in Melbourne in 1976. The Australian Heritage Commission ensured that the *Burra Charter* would be taken up by making Australian Government grants for heritage works conditional upon its use. It was the first Director of the Australian Heritage Commission, Max Bourke, who introduced the *Burra Charter* to an ICOMOS International general assembly in 1981, and became the first Australian member of the ICOMOS International executive.

An authoritative, but brief, outline of the development of the *Burra Charter* over three decades or so has been published recently by Meredith Walker (Walker 2014). This story may be fleshed out with more details about the first conference of Australia ICOMOS in Beechworth in 1978 which resolved ‘that Australia ICOMOS should prepare a statement…[that] should outline the process by which alteration [sic] or conservation of historic structures or sites should be carried out’ (Australia ICOMOS 1978: 169). At the Goulburn ICOMOS meeting in February 1979 a committee was nominated to review the *Venice Charter*: James Semple Kerr; Miles Lewis; David Saunders; Judy Birmingham and Peter Bridges. Peter James was soon asked to join the group to provide a legal perspective. Two of these people had trained as architects, two as architectural historians, one as an archaeologist and one a lawyer. They were five men, one woman, one migrant (from England), all white and mostly Sydney-based, except for Miles Lewis (always based in Melbourne), David Saunders (who had recently moved from Sydney to Adelaide) and Jim Kerr (who was temporarily living away from his Sydney home in Canberra while working for the Australian Heritage Commission).
A common understanding is that Jim Kerr and Miles Lewis were the two central people at work in the writing of the *Burra Charter* and the oral history interviews sometimes bore this out, although it is clear that everyone on the committee contributed their substantial intellect and good will. I found people in Sydney tended to assume that Jim Kerr was the key author, while people in Melbourne thought it was Miles Lewis – an unexpected instance of the Sydney/Melbourne cultural rivalry. Detailed unravelling of the original documents would allow further analysis of who brought what to the table. The oral history interviews do convey something of the dynamic of the meetings themselves, which took place over several weekends in Canberra in mid-1979. By all accounts the discussion was rigorous and detailed, passionate but respectful. The Australian Heritage Commission classified the group as a technical sub-committee and provided some funding for travel and accommodation while the participants gave their own time for free.

Draft reviews of the developing charter were distributed to ICOMOS members for comment in the *Australia ICOMOS Newsletter* (Vol.1 No.4 summer 1978 and Vol.2 No.2 Winter 1979) and comments submitted in response were considered by the committee and incorporated where possible. When time came for the draft charter to be presented to a committee meeting of Australia ICOMOS in Burra in South Australia in November 1979, it was discussed at length, in fact debated late into the night before it was finally endorsed it in the early hours of 19 August 1979. A certain larrikin spirit in the proceedings at Burra is suggested by Max Bourke:

> Now in researching the history of this beautiful small town it turned out that it had originally been called Burra Burra and so when time came to finally give this document a name it was suggested first it be called the **Burra Burra Charter** – I believe the members present could not think of anything less like the *Venice Charter* or more antipodean. (Bourke 2004: 15)

Even the endorsement of the 1979 meeting at Burra was provisional upon the understanding that the document should be put into practice and members given the opportunity to offer feedback. Perhaps this is why there is no published version of the 1979 *Burra Charter* except in the *Australia ICOMOS Newsletter* that notified members of its existence (Vol. 2, No.3, Spring 1979). In 1981 Australia ICOMOS formally adopted a slightly amended *Burra Charter* and the handy ‘*Pocket Burra Charter*’ version dates from this time. The idea was that you could stick it in your pocket and take it anywhere, and people did. It wasn’t long before Clive Lucas pulled it out of his pocket in New Zealand in response to a question along the lines of, ‘How do you do heritage over there?’ But that is another story.

Finally, a more detailed history of the *Burra Charter* would need to address its offshoots and revisions including the major revision of 1999, also its guidelines and revised guidelines and the *Illustrated Burra Charter*, first and second editions (1992-1994 and 2004) (Walker 2014). Some of my sources think the original should have been left as it was and that the revisions make it too long and complicated for everyday use. Others think it critical that the document continued to evolve as understanding of the needs of heritage practice has evolved. It was noticeable in my oral history interviews that the people who had drafted the original *Burra Charter* in 1979 tended to have not read the revised and enlarged *Burra Charter* of 1999.

**A Sound-bite from the oral history interviews**

To conclude this discussion, here is a short excerpt from one of the 23 recorded oral history interviews, chosen because it tells a remarkable but little known part of the story of the *Burra Charter* in a few sentences: the experience of taking this bold, local adaptation of the *Venice Charter* back to the parent body in Europe. It comes from the oral history interview on 17 December 2012 with Max Bourke, the first Director of the Australian Heritage Commission and the first Australia ICOMOS representative to sit on the executive committee of ICOMOS (International):

> By ’81… I was on the [executive of the] world body of… the International Council of Monuments and Sites and I became Vice President in maybe ’83… And I can remember
tabling… this Burra Charter. Because we had people saying to us, ‘Oh I don’t know whether you should… ’ It was one of the things we Bolshe new worlders really took to the international body. The Canadians… and then the Americans… [had] actually started putting weights on ICOMOS to change the Venice Charter and modernise it also. But all of a sudden here’s this newer, nouveau sort of little committee from Australia, who by the way had by that stage more members than any other ICOMOS committee in the world. We’d gone to several hundred members in the space of a couple of years. So we were in a position to say, ‘Here is this rapidly growing branch, it’s dealing with contemporary issues and we think you should look at this Burra Charter seriously’. And they were gobsmacked that we’d done this… I’m not being hubristic but Australia, I think, was the first one to do it. And we didn’t do it for hubristic reasons either, we did it for a very practical reason … What would you be able to give the shire clerk of Coolgardie?

Acknowledgments
The author thanks the ICOMOS members who participated in the oral history project, including Dr Jane Lennon who also offered suggestions during the refereeing process.

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Byrne, D., Brayshaw, H. & Ireland, T. 2003, Social significance, a discussion paper, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, Sydney. Viewed 15 October 2014,


Endnotes

1 The international application of the Burra Charter’s values-based heritage management approach is the subject of a 2014 themed volume of the American journal APT Bulletin: Journal for preservation technology, Vo.45, nos 2-3, 2014.

2 These interviews are publicly accessible in accord with the interviewees’ signed Rights Agreements. Links to the interviews may be found online by searching for the name of the interviewer or interviewee on the National Library of Australia website at: http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/