ASSESSING THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWAN BREWERY SITE, PERTH, W.A.

Ian Stapleton

A conservation analysis of the Swan Brewery site was commissioned by the Heritage Council of Western Australia in late 1991. At that time there existed a history of the Swan Brewery company, an assessment of documentary references to the Aboriginal significance of the site, a student thesis on the buildings and architect, and several opinions about cultural significance, but there had not been a comprehensive study.

The subsequent work by my firm involved the following components:

- The commissioning of a history of the site and the Swan Brewery company and consequent statements of historical significance by Suzanne Welborn, Perth, historian
- Documentary research to locate illustrations, photographs, town plans, site plans, architectural and engineering drawings, etc. of the 19th and 20th centuries.
- On-site interviews with former Swan Brewery staff about the configuration and operation of the brewery in recent times.
- Survey of the fabric of the surviving brewery buildings
- Survey of the site of the buildings and the immediate setting of the site
- Survey of the town/river/streetscape qualities of the place
- Survey of the historical landmarks of the Perth/Kings Park locality
- The commissioning of an assessment of the technological significance of the brewery by Godden Mackay, Sydney heritage technology consultants
- Brief survey of comparative city brewery sites in Australia by various heritage consultants around Australia
- Documentary research about the brewery architect, Talbot Hobbs
- Survey of plant species in the setting of the place with the assistance of the Kings Park Board staff.
- Documentary research about various potential bases of significance such as pre-European landform and vegetation, use by harbour master, relationship to Kings Park Board, land reclamation, nearby convict and old men's depot, etc.

The conservation analysis report contained a summary of this information and an analysis of it including a detailed physical history of the site and its component parts. This is followed by discussions of the historical, technological, architectural landscape, landmark, archaeological and social significance of the place leading to a relatively brief statement of significance which was divided into principal and secondary categories.

The brewery site is located on the edge of Kings Park on the Swan River, opposite the CBD of Perth. The place is bisected by Mounts Bay Road and can be divided into three areas:

- Brewery area on the river (south side) of the road
- The park area, the site of the former convict and old men's depot, now part of Kings Park
- The stables area, an area formerly occupied by the Swan brewery stables and service areas, now almost completely cleared of buildings and vegetation
Large amounts of less substantial buildings and almost all of the brewing equipment of the brewery were demolished and/or removed c. 1988 as part of an unrealised scheme to rejuvenate the area which also included the realignment of Mounts Bay Road and the construction of a vehicle underpass between the brewery and stables area.

The park area contains the Kennedy Fountain, a natural spring, one of many reported in the area at the time of European settlement, which was made a monument as early as 1861.

Briefly, the history of the brewery and stables areas is as follows (dates are summary only):

1831-3? Small shipyard by Colonial Boatbuilder, James Smith
1833-1838 Mount Eliza Native Institution (feeding depot and school)
1838-1843 Steam flour and saw mills operated by John Schoales and George Nash
1845-1846 Stores
1847-1850 Grain and wool store by Henry and Robert De Burgh
1850-1852 Temporary convict depot awaiting erection of Mount Eliza Convict Depot on on adjacent park site
1852-c.1860 Residence and garden of De Burgh, part of time leased to Lionel Lukin
1860-1870s Tannery operated by Brown Bros.
1879 Perth Ice Company operated by John Ferguson and William Mumme. Brewing by George Passmore ‘in open’
1880-1888 Brewery by Ferguson & Mumme’s Swan Brewery
1888-1981 Swan Brewery operated by The Swan Brewery Company Ltd.
1981-1985 Ownership by various private companies
1985 Ownership of Western Australian Government
1988-1989 Redevelopment/refurbishment work (incomplete due at least partly to Aboriginal sacred site claim).

The documentation of this history required several approaches. The early history needed confirmation by way of early illustrations, maps and plans to make real past events of which there is not apparent physical remains.

Fortunately Nicholas Jackson of our office was able to uncover early surveyors' field books giving the precise location of the early buildings. These beside the early water colour of the mill, give the early events reality. The task in the brewery period was not so much to establish the brewery’s existence, but to understand its complexity.

From the 1880s the Swan Brewery Company expanded rapidly, a process involving a bewildering number of extensions, changes and renewals of the buildings and other features. Research was hampered by the absence of most of the drawings from the company's plan room. A limited number of these were assembled from Hobbs Winning, the long time architects for the site, from public authorities (having been submitted for approvals) and from a student thesis.

The recent history of the buildings and technology was in part understood by interviewing the former Swan Brewery staff, notably Mr. Oliver Hines, who was able to annotate plans with detailed information.

All the above sources were correlated with numerous photographs and drawings of the brewery to build up a picture of its evolution. This has been documented in a series of block plans which also include site features such as fences, roads and wells, and also includes built fabric in the stables and park areas of the place.

It is now possible to speak clearly about the elements of the place. For instance, the apparent confusion about the brew towers can be explained:

There were four: the c.1889 tower, now demolished, the 1897 tower which is extant, but virtually incarcerated within other fabric; the Building 5 brew area, not really a tower at all; and the 1923 tower built more as an architectural feature than for brewing.

A similar analysis was carried out with the land form, site features and vegetation of the place in order to better understand the surroundings of the buildings.

What then survives at the Swan Brewery site?

In the park area there is a municipal park dating from the late 19th century, including a brick lavatory block c.1970s and a timber framed pump house c.1960s. There is the Kennedy Fountain, with fabric dating from 1861. There is a fine avenue of plane trees and substantial group of fig trees.

In the stables area there is a rendered brickwork water board pump house and tank of 1930 and a reinforced
concrete vehicle ramp, c.1988. There are also the remains of the protesting camp of that time.

In the brewery area there is a large group of connected buildings as follows:

- **Building D1** - 4-level cellar 1933
- **Building D2** - 3-level cellar 1923
- **Building D3** - 2-level machinery and store building 1897
- **Building D4** - 2-level store and laboratory building, c.1890s and 1960s
- **Building D5** - 3 to 4-level brew house 1920, mostly demolished
- **Building D5A** - single level switch room, 1933
- **Building D6** - 4-level brewing tower, 1897
- **Building D7** - 3-level machinery and store, c.1890s & 1900
- **Building D8** - 4-level cellar, store and cooling tower, 1920
- **Building D9** - 3-level store building, 1897 and c.1900

Within the buildings there are a very few pieces of surviving machinery: a mash tun in Building 5, a grist mill loose in the compound, a bag hoist in Building 3 and brine pipes and valves in Building 3. There is also evidence of former machinery in most buildings.

Surrounding the buildings are the remnants of a stalled development site including site sheds, scaffold, man-proof fences and another section of reinforced concrete vehicle ramp c.1988.

More generally, the place contains Mounts Bay Road realigned three times, reclaimed land along the river front including a lime stone sea wall, the Kings Park escarpment as modified for the road at its spurs, for the convict depot in the park area, and for the brewery in the stables area together with its vegetation cleared and regenerated possibly three times.

There is also potentially the archaeology of the whole of the history of the place on and beneath the present ground level.

At the commencement of the study there were many ways that the place was potentially of cultural significance within the traditional categories of historical, architectural, technological, landscape, landmark, archaeological and social significance.

The Australian Heritage Commission and the Heritage Council of Western Australia each have their own evaluation criteria, but essentially such investigation is looking for attributes of rarity, representativeness, creative or technical brilliance as outlined in Dr. J. Kerr’s *The Conservation Plan*.

An example of a potential significance was the technology of the extensive steel framing of the buildings. After enquiry Godden Mackay concluded only that the substantial steelwork reflected the development of steel construction in Australia during the early 20th century. On the other hand buildings D2, D8 and D9, the later cellar buildings, are examples of brickwork technology and are virtually unique because of the use of multiple cavities and dampcourses associated with insulation. Only large cool stores of a similar date would have such work.

Whether or not the Swan Brewery had been a pioneer in brewing technology was also carefully considered. The historical research by Welborn showed that it kept up with innovations in brewing technology, via its parent companies in Melbourne which had the benefit of the work of the noted Australian chemist Auguste de Bavay. Consequently, during the period 1900 to 1930 the brewery was, by and large, not technically innovative, but was technologically the most up to date brewery in Western Australia in its adoption of overseas and interstate technology.

The assessment of the architectural significance of the brewery relied, as is often the case, on external or contextual considerations.

The architect for the building, Talbot Hobbs, is an interesting example. Although well known, his place in architectural history in Perth is clouded by the fact that his was a largely commercial practice and many of his city buildings have been demolished. Nevertheless a drawing together of many of the lists of buildings to his credit led to the conclusion that he was arguably the leading practitioner in Perth about 1900 and a talented hand in the Queen Anne Revival/Federation Style seen at the brewery. He is of added interest as Western Australia’s most distinguished soldier of World War I. Not many famous men have the opportunity as architects to leave physical reminders of their life.

The place of the buildings in the brewery architecture of Australia could only be assessed by a study of the prominent city breweries in each capital city. These are:

**Brisbane:**
- Milton Brewery, c.1950s
- Bulimba Brewery, different periods
- Queensland Brewery, c.1940s

**Melbourne:**
- Former Yorkshire Brewery, 1880s
- Former Victoria Distillery, different dates
- Former Forster’s Lager Brewing Company, different dates
- Former Victoria Brewery, predominantly 1900
- Former Castlemaine Brewery, different dates
- Former McCracken’s Brewery, c.1920s
Adelaide: Kent Tower Brewery, 1870s
Southwark Brewery, largely modern
Old Lion Brewery, c.1870s
Coopers Brewery, largely modern

Hobart: Cascade Brewery, c.1870s

Sydney: Kent Brewery, different dates
Resch’s Brewery, c.1900

(dates given are the predominant architectural character)

Brief comparison of these breweries indicated that the Swan Brewery has an architectural character unlike the other major city breweries. Briefly, the Swan Brewery is Australia’s only Federation style brewery. More carefully stated, the Swan Brewery site contains albeit partly demolished, the finest connected group of late Victorian and early 20th century brewery buildings in Australia in a red brick and tile Federation style idiom.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the significance of the brewery relates to its landscape and landmark value. Study of the landform and layout of the precinct and appreciation of its aesthetic qualities led to the conclusion that because of their cohesive architectural quality (red brick, Marseilles tile hipped roof, arched facade treatment) and their unique siting at the edge of the Swan River against the green backdrop of the Kings Park escarpment, the buildings make a unique contribution to the identifiable landscape character of the city of Perth when viewed from both near and afar.

A survey of other surviving historical fabric in the vicinity also led to the conclusion that the buildings are an historical landmark of Perth. There is physical evidence of the existence of Western Australia’s leading brewery at the site for more than 100 years and marking the location of the first boat building, steam milling industries and the first aboriginal school in Western Australia.

These concepts of identifiable character and historic landmark are perhaps more at the core of heritage that the general public might appreciate. They are to do with places that the population and visitors alike remember longer than elements that might be seen in any large city. They are places providing the community with cultural roots. People see them from time to time and this reinforces a sense of cultural continuity.

The principal Statement of Significance of our report is attached to this paper for your consideration.

If this is accepted, the conclusion is that if at all possible the Swan Brewery site should be conserved. To assist in the treatment and use of the site, we have ranked different landscape areas, the external elements of the buildings and the internal spaces indicating the relative significance of these elements. It will be useful in a conservation policy to assign different levels of intervention to these various rankings.

Before this could be done, however other aspects of the significance of the place, notably its aboriginal cultural values should be taken into account. There are also not doubt numerous external factors to be taken into account in developing a conservation policy for the place - matters to do with the river, traffic, funding, economic priorities etc.

However rankings of this type do show that there are opportunities at the place for a variety of approaches and that the presence of high cultural significance does not necessarily mean that the elements of a place should be uniformly frozen in aspic.

An example of this is reconciling the non-European cultural significance of the place with the European cultural significance. It is encouraging that what appears to me to be the most significant area to aboriginal cultural values, is the least significant with regard to European values. In addition, the complex European cultural significance of the site demonstrates at least to me that a place can have complex associations and meanings and one need not, and perhaps should not, be selected to dominate another.

The idea that a place should be restored to one particular period to reflect one particular significance, has long been dead in our firm. The policy I have included in many conservation studies for sites around Australia is that fabric should not be restored and reconstructed to any particular period, rather it should be interpreted in relation to the significance of its individual elements. Clearly, this is an approach that should be investigated in relation to the Swan Brewery site.

Appendices:
Section 5.1, Principal Significance and Fig.1/33.

References
Appendix 1

5.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Note: See Fig. 1/1 for locations of areas and buildings.

5.1 Principals Significance

5.1.1 The place is prominent in early Western Australian history as where European settlers pioneered:

- Colonial boat building and the first use of Jarrah for boat building
- Friendly co-operation method with aborigines
- The first aboriginal school
- The first use of steam power for flour and timber milling
- One of Perth’s first convict guard quarters and convict hiring depots.

5.1.2 The place has historical archaeological significance because of its potential to reveal information about the above and other past uses.

5.1.3 The Swan Brewery, established there in 1879, grew by the 1890s to be the "crack brewery" in the Western Australia. During the Edwardian period it produced 25-40% of beer produced in Western Australia. By 1924 it controlled some 50% of the beer market. From c.1950 the Swan Brewing Co. had a monopoly in beer brewing in Western Australia and until the 1960s was (along with W.A. Newspapers) the State’s largest employer of labour.

5.1.4 During the period 1900 - 1930 the Swan Brewery was the most technologically progressive brewery in Western Australia in its implementation and/or adaptation of overseas and interstate derived technology.
## Appendix II

**Extract from Swan Brewery Conservation Analysis - December 1991**

### Summary Evolution of Built Fabric 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1933-</td>
<td>4S, BR</td>
<td>Former Lager Cellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Extant insulation is indication of technology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1923-</td>
<td>3S, BR</td>
<td>Former Bitter Beer Cellars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1897-</td>
<td>3S, BR</td>
<td>1897 Cellar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Grd: 6 x brine pipes and valves 1st: Hoist equipment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>1902/6-1980s</td>
<td>2S, BR</td>
<td>Bulk Barley Receivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dispatch Store with Laboratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1920-1980s</td>
<td>3S, BR</td>
<td>Brewhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>part</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Partial remains 1x mash tun; 2x engine beds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>1923, 1933</td>
<td>1S, BR</td>
<td>Transformer and Switch Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1897-</td>
<td>3S, BR</td>
<td>1897 Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1897-</td>
<td>2S, BR</td>
<td>1897 Cellar over Engine Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(No equipment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1920-</td>
<td>4S, BR</td>
<td>1920 Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1897-</td>
<td>2S, BR</td>
<td>Electrical Shop and Malt Bins Over (No equipment, some remnant electrical cabling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1980s-</td>
<td>1S, CON</td>
<td>Construction Site Sheds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1931-</td>
<td>CON</td>
<td>Pump House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CON</td>
<td>Pedestrian Under Pass (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>CON</td>
<td>Kennedy Fountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Rebuilt 1970)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1970-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Barbeque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pumphouse &amp; tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1971-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lavatory block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Malt Hoisting Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loose Grist Mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td></td>
<td>Concrete medium strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wire Fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyclone fencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cycle way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>1934-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>1934-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wharf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES:**

- **Plans:** DULA 30075
- **Illustrations:**
- **Other:** CLS&P Physical survey, September, 1991

**KEY:**

- S = STOREY; BR = BRICK; IR = IRON; TIM = TIMBER; CON = CONCRETE

**DATE IS DATE OF CONSTRUCTION AND DEMOLITION WHERE APPLICABLE**