Susan Marsden

Dr Susan Marsden is a professional historian who is employed as National Conservation Manager by the Australian Council of National Trusts in Canberra and is also a Visiting Fellow at the Urban Research Program, Australian National University. Her published work includes many heritage studies and commissioned histories, the most recent of them Adelaide: a brief history (with K Gargett), Adelaide 1996; A history of Australian capital city centres since 1945, Canberra 1997; and Federation: the guide to records (with S Foster & R Russell) Canberra 1998.

Book review

The Bay, Barwon and Beyond. Heritage Places of Geelong

Author: Anne Cahir

Publisher: Heritage Council Victoria, Melbourne, 1997.

Paperback, 94 pp. illustrated (in black and white and colour), rrp $19.95

This is an attractive small book which provides an illustrated listing of around 110 heritage places in and around Geelong, Victoria’s second largest city. The glovebox-sized book provides helpful maps, a historical outline, the listing, a glossary of architectural terms, a bibliography and an index: in short, everything required to guide readers on a survey of Geelong’s built heritage. The listing which forms the main part of the book presents two or three places on each page, alphabetically ordered by their street names or by township, cross referenced to the maps, and a brief historical and architectural description, together with good colour photographs and reproductions of historical views of the place and its locality. The book’s design works very well and there are few typographical errors (the Hermitage on p 65 should be 1859 not 1959).

The survey and research work which produced this listing was carried out by Heritage Victoria’s ‘expert team of architects, historians, planners and archaeologists’ in the 1995 Geelong Sector Study. The Heritage Victoria team who provided material for this book were Megan McDougall, Anne Cahir (who wrote the text), Alison Carey, Jane Harrington and Diahnn McIntosh. This was the first study carried out by the agency in its new, more systematic approach towards heritage assessment, focusing on one geographical region at a time. (A similar approach has been used by Heritage South Australia since 1980.)

The 11 page history comprises two parts: an overview from the beginnings of settlement to the 1950s, and an outline history of places such as churches and pubs. The history is essentially descriptive (as befits an historical context for a survey of heritage structures) but also canvases such themes as Aboriginal-settler relations (including the typical misunderstanding which resulted in giving the name of the bay, ‘Jillong’, to the surrounding land), and the history of rivalry with Melbourne. As a stranger to Geelong I would have liked a somewhat more detailed historical account.

I also regret the common tendency to focus on the early years and to skim quickly over the period since the late nineteenth century. The history and heritage of the twentieth century is poorly served. The period since 1905 is dismissed in three short paragraphs, although it includes a time of immense population growth and industrialisation ‘as another wave of migrants came to settle and enrich the cultural heritage of the city’. However, the mid-nineteenth century focus is understandable given the preponderance of early heritage places listed. There is not a single place included (and therefore added to the register)
which was built after the 1930s. It is pleasing to see structures such as prefabricated buildings listed and also some interesting industrial places dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the former Barwon Paper Mill Complex (p. 28) and the former Strachan Murray and Shannon Wool Warehouse (pp. 56–57).

Too few heritage studies of this kind see publication, especially in such an accessible form. Quite apart from the role of such studies in assessing places for heritage registers they also generate readable, well-researched and documented heritage guides which gain wide readership if they are published. This audience of general readers and visitors with an interest in Geelong’s heritage is plainly intended to be the audience for The Bay, Barwon and Beyond. Heritage Victoria and its Geelong team are to be congratulated for producing a book which is easy to use, colourful and informative. I hope that this is only the first of a series as future sector studies follow.