Book Reviews
Roads, Tourism and Cultural History: On the Road in Australia

Author: Rosemary Kerr
Publisher: Channel View Publications, 2018
ISBN: 9781845416683
Review by: Dr Siobhán Lavelle OAM

Dr Rosemary Kerr is an historian and heritage consultant who is a member of the Australia ICOMOS National Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes and Cultural Routes. This book is the published version of her PhD thesis, which originated from consultancy projects related to roads and bridges. Kerr has wide research interests in Australian history, cultural heritage, cultural routes, and the history of travel and tourism.

The Introduction features the story of the abduction and murder of British backpacker, Peter Falconio. This is a jarring start and it sets the tone for an examination of the notion and nature of the road, as a symbol of both civilisation and barbarity; hope and horror; dream and nightmare. This ebbs and flows through the various chapters which are informed by an extremely wide range of sources including Australian travel writing, diaries and manuscripts, tourism literature, fiction such as novels, plays and poetry, and motion picture feature films.

There is a broad survey of Australia’s history as a settler colonial society and how this has shaped imaginings, experiences and representations of the road over time. Aboriginal song lines are described as the earliest ‘roads’ that connected people physically and spiritually across the continent, in contrast to the fiction of an ‘empty’ land, on which the colony was founded. Discussion of the 19th century history of roads is cast against the rise of significant Australian ‘frontier’ legends—the explorers, the convicts, the pioneers, the bushman, the swagman; and the bigger concepts of the Bush or the Outback. Next comes the rise of the road trip, from initial transcontinental endurance tests to the development of four-wheel-drive touring. Kerr reminds us that tourism is closely connected to national identity, with many road travellers constructing their journeys in search of the ‘real Australia’. Kerr examines the significance of the circular road journey in Australian culture and its broader symbolism. She asks: Is the Australian road really a road to nowhere?

Concepts of freedom and escape are explored, noting the tension of these in both a penal colony, and then in an immigrant nation—the lack of belonging or a place to call ‘home’. Representations of road travellers, from swagmen and sundowners to ‘motor gypsies’ and caravanners, are followed by examination of the rituals and communities of the road, including swagmen on the ‘wallaby track’, bikers, truckies and grey nomads. Also considered are the rise of hotels, motels, roadhouses, and the ubiquitous ‘big’ roadside attractions that are part of Australian road tourism folklore.
Anxiety about the Australian road in popular imagination is explored. The road is a ‘badland’, with environmental destruction as roads overlaid and destroyed the landscape and the identity of the roadscape itself as a killer with ‘horror stretches’, fatal ‘black spots’, and murderous psychopaths. There is a powerful analysis of the road as a site of activism and protest—from civil rights campaigns, such as the Freedom Rides of the mid-1960s—to road movies and novels which comment directly on Australia’s ongoing struggle with race relations. This brings us through the 1990s and early 2000s towards the present, in the context of native title claims, Deaths in Custody, the Aboriginal ‘Stolen Generations’ report, and the so-called ‘History Wars’.

Three key case studies: the Birdsville Track, Stuart Highway and Great Ocean Road, explore the physical and cultural ‘construction’ of these roads. Each case study displays a more traditional historical approach with a chronological documentation of the story and events related to each iconic road. Kerr asks: How and why have some roads become more famous than others? Which stories and meanings are privileged? What are the implications for heritage preservation and tourism interpretations of these routes?

Kerr concludes that there is opportunity for more holistic interpretations of these iconic heritage roads to engage with other journeys and stories and that overlapping understandings and meanings would result in a richer appreciation of these routes. She argues for more work on roads as vital components of the nation’s heritage and tourism resources.

This work reflects its prior life as a PhD with its emphasis on a broad literature review, remnant academic terminology and conceptual framework. Whilst there is meticulous chronicling of sources, the book has a degree of repetition of material. Judicious editing for a more general audience would have increased its appeal. Particularly disappointing are the small size and black and white illustrations, which let down the author’s choice of these as important images to enhance the text. Overall this book does not really sit within the disciplinary niche of history, but it does provide a new, and wide ranging survey of the relationship of the road and distance to Australia.

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**Paddington: A history**

Edited by: Greg Young  
Publisher: The Paddington Society, NSW, 2019  
ISBN: 9781742235981  
Review by: Ian Kelly

*Paddington; A history*, a winner of a National Trust of Australia (NSW) heritage award (heritage publication, 2019), is a different type of urban history. Rather than provide the typical single voice narrative, this beautifully presented book offers a diverse group of historians who each bring their specialist perspective to the history of this nationally significant conservation area.

Greg Young, the editor, describes the structure of the book as having an integrated, rather than linear, narrative. Each chapter looks at the history of Paddington from a different aspect: the Aboriginal presence (past and present); the changing landscape and vegetation; the way early colonial land grants and the topography have shaped the sub-division patterns; the development of Victorian housing; the decline and regeneration of the inner city suburb; recent gentrification; and, through it all, the people who have helped shape its social character and public image, and conserved its distinctive terrace housing.

The benefit of this format is that it provides an opportunity to explore these themes in greater detail than otherwise might be the case. A minor downside, however, is a certain amount of repetition of both the personalities and their actions. The book is perhaps best read one chapter at a time, and not necessarily in any particular order although there is a chronological order to it. For example, the chapter on Aboriginal Paddington provides a detailed acknowledgement
of the continuous presence of Aboriginal people in the area, whereas Creative Paddington captures something of the artistic and social buzz of the place in the late sixties. The area was ‘a happening place’, offering a lively alternative to suburbia; one that inspired me as a young high school student to want to live in Paddington (even if it took me nearly 30 years to fulfil that aspiration).

Of course the success of conserving the Paddington building stock has gradually brought about a changing demographic and with it the positive and negative aspects of gentrification. Issues such as the diminishing economic and social diversity of the residents and, more recently, a reduced respect for conserving the integrity of the houses—as exemplified by a recent property article in which the owner boasted of transforming what was described as a rabbit warren into a contemporary designer home, i.e. gutting the place—are discussed in another chapter.

For conservationists it is perhaps the chapter on the struggle to achieve statutory controls that is the most informative. Local residents were able to persuade Woollahra Council to introduce a range of codes, plans and policies to develop a smoother, more detailed, planning process. A key element was the initial Development Control Code for the Paddington Area, adopted by Woollahra Council in August 1974. This was followed by the Paddington Development Control Plan (DCP) 1999, which involved input from a working party comprising representatives from The Paddington Society, the National Trust of Australia (NSW), the Woollahra History and Heritage Society, the NSW Heritage Office and Woollahra Councillors. The Paddington DCP 1999 was succeeded by the Paddington Heritage Conservation Area DCP 2008 and then finally the DCP 2015 C1 Paddington Heritage Conservation Area, which was adopted in May 2015.

The book rightly focuses on the role of Paddington Society members, many of whom were professional planners and architects able to bring their depth of knowledge and expertise to their roles as activists and advisers. However this chapter could have given some more attention to the role of the decision makers—the local councillors who through their votes supported the preparation and adoption of the numerous planning schemes and associated development control plans, which provided the regulatory framework to ensure the conservation of Paddington.

The final chapter – Survival, which offers both a summary and a ‘where to now’ perspective for Paddington is followed by the appendix—the Paddington Terrace House 1840-1910—which splendidly illustrates the key typologies of the Paddington terrace house, although surprisingly it does not include the late Arts and Crafts tuck-pointed brick terrace houses found in the lower reaches of the Rushcutters Bay valley [Boundary, Dillon and Lawson streets].

While the impetus to produce the book was to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Paddington Society and its role in conserving the area, the book is extremely pertinent at a time when many inner city neighbourhoods and conservation areas across Australia are under pressure from local and state governments to increase the density of their housing stock. Although not intended as such, I think any community group hoping to conserve their local conservation area could take positive guidance and heart from the Paddington experience. A key factor, as stated by Peter Spearritt, was having ‘a web of resident-owners having a well developed sense of the locality’, but having the knowledge and skills to persuade the decision makers [local and State] was also critical.

Paddington: A history is well illustrated with plentiful use of archival and contemporary images, with many photographs in colour. The result is a big beautiful book, even if it is a bit unwieldy for bedtime reading. Greg Young and his team of specialist historians have done Paddington, the Paddington Society and the residents of Paddington a great service with the production of this book. But beyond Paddington, or even Sydney, there is much that other inner city residents, concerned with conserving the character of their suburb, can learn from this comprehensive history.
Remote Capture: Digitising Documentary Heritage in Challenging Locations

Edited by: Jody Butterworth, Andrew Pearson, Patrick Sutherland and Adam Farquhar
Published by: Open Book Publishers, 2018
ISBN: 9781783744756
Review by: Dr Wayne Johnson

As the title suggests, Remote Capture has been produced to provide guidelines for the recording of documentary archival resources in locations around the world that are under-resourced. It particularly relates to the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), an initiative launched in 2004 with a grant administered by the British Library.

The publication is a practical field guide aimed at preparing practitioners for the challenges of employing digital photographic recording methods to a broad range of archival documents. Extensive examples of projects are well illustrated such as monasteries, regional administrative and private collections. In all cases the locations that might be considered remote, conservation conditions may not be ideal, and resources (including power) may be limited.

The work sets out processes for recording from the establishment of the budget, to fieldwork, the management of a team, community involvement and relations, and project promotion.

The examples provided also cover a range of cultural issues and sensitivities that might not be considered by European conservators. Documents may be deemed to have inherent religious significance, and in one example, from Bengal, a blessing ceremony was required for the documents prior to commencement of copying.

Remote Capture provides technical information about cameras, exposure settings and digital file size, among other practical advice. Basic conservation advice for the treatment of documents is also provided. Chapter 6 includes considerations when dealing with unfamiliar political and cultural regions such as the dynamics of external political agendas on projects that might attract foreign or local interest.

While produced specifically as a guide for digitising archival records in remote regions, the guidelines and ethical considerations set out in Remote Capture can equally apply to any project that involves the study of cultural heritage anywhere, whether third world, remote or not.

Remote Capture is available to read for free at the Open Field Guides website: https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/747 and can also be ordered in hard copy, or downloaded as a PDF.