Chronicling change, engaging debate: the value of *Historic Environment*

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This issue begins the thirtieth volume of *Historic Environment (HE)*. Whilst the first edition was published in 1980 and so, technically, the journal is 38 years old, the advent of volume 30 and of another ‘decade’ does provide the opportunity to pause and consider the role of *HE* and how it reflects the state of heritage practice and the interests of those involved in the conservation of cultural heritage in Australia.

Graeme Butler, in the editorial to the first edition, argued that the need for the journal was based on the idea that ‘within the small number of professionals involved in historic conservation there was a recognizable source of material for publication’ (1980: 1). Further, that although other journals or magazines touched on conservation issues ‘many of these pertinent articles may go unnoticed by practitioners not interested in the mainstream content of these journals’ (ibid.). *HE* was to occupy a specific niche, showcasing, in an accessible form, the work that was being done, and contemporary thinking on cultural heritage.

The number of professionals has grown, and there has been growth too in the number of academics working in the wide-ranging area of cultural heritage. *HE* has reflected this: the breadth of what is covered in the journal has grown along with these evolving concerns. Whilst early editions often did have a theme; the first *HE* focussed on churches, for example, others conference-based issues highlighted the variety of approaches to, and types of cultural heritage under consideration. We no longer tend to write about ‘historic conservation’; rather the conservation of cultural heritage, in all its myriad forms. This of course includes an important and abiding concern with the conservation of historic fabric, but so too new concerns and approaches to cultural heritage. While Askew in 1991 could reflect on a recent conference which brought together those involved in object conservation and place heritage conservation and note the ‘curious gap between people professionally involved with the conservation of small and large cultural materials’ (1991: i), editions of *HE* have ranged across the whole range of the manifestations of the past in the present. This embraces, inter alia, cultural landscapes in the late 1980s (1989 vol. 7, no. 2), Underwater Cultural Heritage (1992 vol. 9, no. 3), Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009 vol. 22, no. 3), Modernist architecture (2013 vol. 25, nos. 1 and 2), routes and journeys (2013 vol. 25, no. 3. and 2014, vol. 26, no. 1), Digital Heritage (2016 vol. 28, no. 2), and sustainability and social justice (2017 vol. 29, no. 3). A review of issues also sees papers relating to museums, whether it be in the conservation of museum buildings, interpretation, or their role in cultural diversity (among many examples see MacLeod 1991; Kornfield 1997 Huxtable 2000). The archive of *HE* is thus a history of recent approaches to cultural heritage. A meander through the archive pays dividends and I encourage you to browse past issues: to find new gems, rediscover the papers that influenced your thinking, and to once again engage with our collective endeavours.
A review of HE therefore shows the interdisciplinarity of ideas and approaches to the many and varied types of cultural heritage. Or, to adapt a phrase from Linda Young, the different ‘species’ of cultural heritage (2007). According to Butler in that first editorial, the other rationale for HE was communication. His concern was communication between practitioners (Butler 1980), but very soon HE became a space for dialogue between different disciplines, and between practitioners and academics. The boundaries between practitioners and academics are overstated, and people and ideas often move between these contexts very easily. Whilst Peter Donovan’s claim that historians are needed ‘to act as the conscience of heritage architects’ (1986: 12) was perhaps deliberately provocative, the oft-repeated idea that creative engagement across disciplinary boundaries can bring benefits remains an ideal of HE. Among many examples are Winter (2004) writing about cultural heritage and tourism, Young (2005) on the role of interpretation, or Lovejoy (2011) on historians and archaeologists working together. Indeed, this coming together of professionals and academics in the later 1970s provided the basis for what was to become the Burra Charter (Domicelj 2004). In Joan Domicelj’s evocative phrase ours is ‘a tactile, as well as intellectual, field’ (Domicelj 2004: 16).

This issue aims to continue these traditions, bringing together those from a wide variety of disciplines such as archaeology, history, architecture and law. It is, however, slightly different to more recent editions, which have largely been formed from papers presented at conferences or symposia. They therefore tend to have a thematic coherence. This issue is a general issue, comprised of papers that have been submitted directly to HE for consideration. All have gone through the usual double-blind review process. They reflect the continued diversity of contemporary heritage practice, but there are some commonalities amongst the papers.

Susan Balderstone provides a personal reflection on the way in which the charge of the 4th Australian Light Horse at Beersheba has been commemorated, an event which allowed the capture of Gaza and was a prelude to the success of the Allied war effort in the Middle East. The reverberations of this event continue into the present. Alexander Gillespie also writes about the heritage of a world changing event: the first permanent means of communication between North America and Europe via the transatlantic cable. In a rich historical account, Gillespie provides a compelling case for further conservation work on the site where the cable landed in Ireland. Another paper, important in its own right, but which also provides a set of resources for further study is Rogers Hobbs’ paper on the life and work of Charles Mayes. For almost a hundred years from the late 1850s onwards, the publication of Mayes’ Price-Book supported the professionalisation of the engineering and construction industries. Hobbs argues that the books provide an invaluable source of information for architectural historians and conservation architects.

The final papers deal with World Heritage in a variety of ways. Port Arthur, part of the Australian Convict Sites World Heritage serial listing, provides the case study for Jennifer Jones-Travers’ paper. The focus here is representations of the site through postcards and what they can tell us about changing approaches to the significance of the site and sense of place. Shifting expectations of tourists, as well as the changing understanding of Australian convict history provide some of the ways in which to read the postcards. In their paper, Anita Smith and Susan Lawrence provide an overview of mining sites on the World Heritage List and what implications these might have for the Victorian Goldfields if they were to be included on the tentative list for Australia’s World Heritage nomination. In a paper based on his 2017 Jim Kerr Address, Roger Johnson reflects on the continued relevance of the Sydney Opera House, the magic of which, Johnson argues, ‘is yet to be revealed’.

It will be interesting to see how far this interdisciplinarity can go. Recent debates over the convergence of ideas and approaches across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum (GLAM) sector have highlighted what I consider to be a set of overlapping concerns with the conservation of culturally significant places and practices, whether it is the ‘porosity’ of the professions and the issues surrounding community involvement in practice through increased collaboration with the public; the place of cultural heritage in community ‘well-being’ through fostering a sense of place and local pride, cultural memory, health and resilience, and cultural rights; digitization and creative (adaptive?) reuse; a challenging funding environment; or skills,
training and organisational change (Mansfield et al 2014). In all these areas we have much to offer, and much to learn. The recent edition from emerging professionals (2016 vol. 28, no. 3) highlighted these intersections, ranging from urban heritage in Melbourne and Berlin, to Indigenous heritage in both museums and cultural landscapes, and the role of heritage in post-conflict reconciliation. Indeed, Paulette Wallace in her provocative editorial piece on the role of Australia ICOMOS in helping emerging professionals in the sector wondered whether GLAMR (GLAM plus Records) could include Heritage and become ‘GLAMHR’ (Wallace 2016). HE has, over its 30 volumes been a space to chronicle the changing approaches to cultural heritage conservation, showcase the quality of the work that is being done, and engage in constructive, interdisciplinary and creative debate. I look forward to HE continuing to be a place where these conversations can happen.

References