EDITORIAL

As the heritage industry expands and careful consideration is being given to the things we keep, there is a need for discussion as to how places and objects of heritage significance can and should be interpreted. In many heritage 'rescue' campaigns there is a group of bystanders who watch with a degree of bewilderment, failing to understand why such efforts are being expended. Half the fight is convincing this group of people of the importance of keeping the building or scarred tree or rock formation or cricket card collection - until there is effective communication of meaning and significance these places and objects remain valueless and expendable. Hence the interpretation of this country's heritage places and objects is an essential part of the work being done in the heritage industry today.

Interpretation engages with the meaning, the significance and the lessons of heritage; we can, however, use interpretive methodologies to communicate more than history lessons. We need to kindle curiosity - perhaps even excitement - in those who are the targets of an interpretative project. Hence, heritage must be approached and given meaning with imaginative and interactive interpretative devices, methods which utilise a variety of media and allow for different levels of interest. Perhaps most importantly, while heritage professionals are able to point out significance which may not be obvious to the uninitiated, there must be recognition of the crucial role of the public, both as the providers and the recipients of heritage information and education.

This edition of Historic Environment addresses a number of issues related to interpretation including how we understand it, who is it for, how do we go about it, and the implications interpretation has for our understanding of heritage and history. The first three articles are more concerned with these broader philosophies and practicalities of heritage interpretation. The last three provide specific examples of diverse interpretative methodologies and recording processes that have been successfully utilised.

We hope the articles that have been included will be both interesting and thought provoking, raising questions as to how interpretation should be implemented, what end results are desirable, and how can success be measured? There are many challenging ideas in the following papers, all of which provide important contributions to the debate on the future direction of heritage interpretation.

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