Jane Harrington

Jane Harrington is a Melbourne-based consulting archaeologist who has worked for the last few years with Heritage Victoria. She is currently completing a statewide thematic study of the lime burning industry in Victoria.

editorial

Having spent several years roaming the Victorian countryside in search of remnants of lime burning activities I have developed a fondness for the remains of a now (virtually) obsolete industry.¹ This attraction derives from an increased awareness of the aesthetics of these and other industrial and processing sites, the remnants of which are to be found, invariably, in remote and isolated places. The sense of isolation, and the beauty that can be found in the material reminders of past natural resource processing activities, is a theme addressed in several of the papers in this volume. Jacqueline Verrocchio likens the tobacco kilns of north-east Victoria to ‘small lighthouses along imaginary shorelines’, noting that ‘some are of unusual and particularly beautiful construction’. Both Iain Stuart and Michael McCarthy evoke the extraordinary – if harsh – beauty to be found in the natural and cultural landscapes that are all that remain of past birding and pearling/pastoral activities.

Simon Cubitt’s paper on Tasmania’s snaring huts and skin sheds includes a similar appreciation of the setting of these structures. His thorough review of skin processing methodology and types of sheds highlights the innovative approaches that appear to characterise the history of harvesting and processing Australia’s resources. This is also clearly illustrated in Daniel Catrice’s article on the Kurth Kiln, a charcoal-producing site in the forests of Gembrook, Victoria.

The theme running through all the following papers, however, is the developed appreciation of the often-harsh lifestyles of the players in these collecting, hunting and processing activities. And as Michael McCarthy so succinctly points out, in many instances the lack of physical evidence hampers a comprehensive understanding of the lifestyles of those associated with these industries, a failing which can be remedied by a review of additional historical resources.

I believe that these articles reinforce the call for recognition, now growing, of the significance of the heritage value of rural and industrial sites. Protecting sites in remote locations, and overcoming the ‘lack of interest’ in activities involving burning, processing and killing, are perhaps two challenges which are on their way to some sort of resolution.

endnotes

¹ Industrial burning of limestone is still a productive economic activity. The localised, brick and limestone constructions of the 19th century have been replaced by more centralised, modern technology. However, while kilns may be larger and constructed of more modern material, the theory and general practice of burning limestone to create lime remains unchanged from that which has been employed for hundreds of years.