Editorial

This edition of *Historic Environment* is given over to a selection of papers presented at the Australia ICOMOS Conference, held at Canberra on 18 and 19 November 2000. The theme of the Conference was *World Heritage: Listing, Management and Monitoring*, and a broad range of issues was canvassed by heritage practitioners from Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

The subjects covered in these papers range from intangible values, through cultural and natural landscapes, to town planning and architecture, all studied within the context of World Heritage significance. One of the key issues to emerge is the question of Eurocentricity. The European traditions of ICOMOS bring to the World Heritage listing process a set of values which places primary emphasis on built environment. This may not be seen as a problem in those parts of the world which have significant constructed monuments, such as Europe, China, India and Central America, although it nonetheless may narrow the focus of what constitutes heritage significance in those places. But in those parts of the world which do not demonstrate a long, continuous tradition of permanent settlement and construction, where the interaction between human activity and the natural environment has been sympathetic rather than adversarial, European values are not necessarily the best standards by which to judge heritage significance.

Australia and New Zealand are good examples of places where indigenous cultures have preserved at least a natural, if not primaeval, environment. The impact of European settlement would not seem old enough, by European standards, to have produced anything of world significance. Therefore World Heritage nominations have tended to concentrate on natural features, such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Uluru / Kata Tjuta National Park. But as demonstrated by this Conference, there are many other aspects to World Heritage Listing, by which sites and monuments may be adjudged worthy of nomination. The papers included here draw attention to convict sites, the gold rushes, colonial planning and unique architectural survival. But here too, Eurocentric values may actually hinder the process. European historical values tend to be focussed on the remote past of the Celts, the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, rather than their more recent past of the 18th and 19th centuries. This era of colonialism may still cause somewhat more than a frisson of embarrassment, but nevertheless it made a greater impact on the world as a whole, than any other period in European history. Convict transportation, the movement of peoples due to economic influences, and free settlement, are the cornerstones of societies founded in the 18th and 19th centuries. Therefore the material evidence of these activities, in whatever form, has a very good claim to be of world significance.

This Conference has pointed to many problems and issues which surround the World Heritage process. It has also pointed out the richness of material which is to be found in Australia and New Zealand, which can educate the world about the human journey that has been undertaken in the last two centuries.