Editorial

Historic Environment is a journal which aims to attract multidisciplinary interests working on the conservation and interpretation of our past environments. This is the first issue devoted to historical archaeology, a field poorly understood by other professionals and consequently not well used.

Archaeologists themselves are slow to come forward with descriptions of their projects, and it has taken nearly twelve months - and a fair amount of badgering and cajolery - to assemble this collection of articles. There are significant omissions, like the Port Arthur project in Tasmania where archaeological work has been going on for a decade, and the Hunter Valley industrial sites in New South Wales.

The articles presented cover a wide spectrum and include the role of archaeology in investigating the operation of a gold mining site, the development of a nineteenth century Aboriginal mission, and the extent and significance of the site of Australia's first Government House.

The archaeological investigation of the first Government House site, funded by a State Government prepared to stand by its Heritage Act, led to a dramatic result whereby the development company for the site was released from its contractual obligations so that the site could be 'conserved in its entirety'. This dig and its results have been the subject of much media attention, leading the layman as well as the professional to deliberate on the role of historical archaeology.

Archaeology is an academic discipline but it can also be a tool for others involved in the conservation process. It is more than just excavation. Ideally there is a sequential programme: firstly the history of the site is compiled, then a preliminary archaeological exploration is carried out to determine whether or not there are any deposits of value. Following an assessment of this exploration, a major excavation project can be properly planned and executed. Before any development works take place a conservation plan should be prepared which includes a compilation of the site's history, results of the archaeological investigation and a set of constraints and options for the use of the site. This conservation plan spells out the site's cultural significance, and gives guidelines for minimising the impact of any new works required. If it is deemed necessary to excavate any part of the site, this should be undertaken well in advance of any building or development works. Architects, archaeologists, planners and users or clients should then combine to produce a management plan.

As we approach the Bicentenary we hope for broader support for historical archaeology, which is at the very essence of conservation. That is, it conserves actual objects in their setting(s) so that history is not falsified, and so that tangible remains rather than mythical interpretations are left for future generations.