Editor’s Introduction

This final issue of Historic Environment for 2012 offers a rich collection of papers, with contributors coming from a variety of backgrounds. The issue is notable for its eclectic mix, and range of topics. In my role as Editor I have felt it is important Historic Environment is an open space, where different perspectives on heritage and conservation are given a platform for publication. One of my priorities has been to foster a more productive dialogue between those working in the heritage and conservation profession and those based in the education sector. This issue reflects that concern. As such, it contains articles that present very different styles of writing, and points of focus. Some pieces are more accessible than others, and readers will naturally find certain articles more interesting and stimulating than others. But as I was reminded in preparing the issue for publication, explorations into the unfamiliar and a willingness to cross over boundaries are nearly always rewarded; in this case the satisfaction that comes from learning about something completely new, or seeing something very familiar from an entirely different perspective.

The issue opens with Adam Trau’s discussion of what seems to be one of the key questions of our age: how to reconcile the global and the local? This is a highly familiar problem for world heritage sites, and Trau takes up the question in the context of Chief Roi Mata’s Domain in Vanuatu. The perspectives he offers arise from extended periods of time spent on the ground, over a number of years. He correctly observes that most accounts of world heritage privilege the global, and by way of a counter he presents us with a ‘bottom-up’ perspective via an account of how the local community negotiates issues like land management, tourism and the commercialisation of their past. Trau hopes that focusing on such themes can, in effect, help open up new ways of looking at conservation and heritage governance for the Melanesia region.

In contrast Sharon Veale and Robert Freestone offer a more historical perspective for the establishment of the Australian Heritage Commission and the Register of the National Estate from the 1960s onwards. Their paper focuses on the formation of Federal Labor’s Department of Urban and Regional Development, in order to provide a broader political and institutional context for the rise and fall of the National Estate in Australia. It is a story that vitally complements ‘official’ accounts of this period, and most notably the creation of the Hope Enquiry’. Those interested in the emergence of conservation legislation and policy in Australia will find much that is new here, given the article focuses on aspects of history that have not received the critical attention they deserve, until now. The paper concludes by summarizing the implications this period held in shaping more recent events.

The paper by Tracy Ireland takes up the topic of colonial archaeology sites, and the challenges associated with in situ conservation. Somewhat innovatively Ireland undertook an online survey to elicit perceptions about place, conservation and the values associated with material culture. To this end the survey explores a broad number of themes, including visitor perceptions, and the sense of place colonial archaeological sites do and do not offer. Pursuing such themes leads Ireland to conclude that heritage conservation should be seen less as a technical exercise, and more as a creative process that binds people to places and objects in a ‘web’ of relationships.

In Hamish Maxwell Stewart’s paper we shift gear again, both in approach and content. In a somewhat alternative narrative of convict heritage, Maxwell Stewart offers a comparative perspective of transport fatalities. It is a story that offers an important reminder of the benefits of seeing convict transport to Australia in relation to other territories and domains of Empire. Readers will find the geographic scope of the story compelling, as the piece describes the chronology and scale of penal colonies and infrastructures of transport across different imperial contexts. It is also an account that provides a valuable back-story to the Australian Convict Sites added to the world heritage list in 2010.

Andrea Witcomb takes us to Vietnam, and the case of the Long Tan Memorial. Frustrated by the all too familiar association of war memorials with nationalistic sentimentality, Witcomb asks us to consider more carefully the complex social and political engagements that converge upon, and emerge from, such sites. As an Australian war memorial site, Long Tan raises important questions that are applicable to other highly symbolic sites overseas. The article presents us with different cultural perspectives concerning an original and replica cross. Memory and its material ‘carriers’ is the topic of interest here, and Witcomb suggests we need to be sensitive to the localized, incomplete, ever evolving narratives that form around the cross(es). Stories of goodwill gestures, difficult memories and carefully contrived diplomatic relations all feature here in an account that illuminates the complex cross cultural issues that enmesh the ANZAC story in a country like Vietnam.

Ian McShane takes up similar themes – that of monuments, memorials and memory making – and the ways in which these can create a register of emotions for public space. McShane looks at a number of cities across Australia in relation to the political dynamics of public commemoration. To do this he article drills into thirteen policies for commemorative structures that have been drafted in the past decade and a half. His account helpfully provides an overview of the literature on urban commemorative spaces in Australia, and the history of policy formation in this area. We learn about devolution, shifts in service delivery frameworks and the convergence of policy making across different cities. McShane’s account represents a rich tapestry of themes, ranging from risky memories to the democratization of public space, in an account that brings to life a history of urban place making and government policy.

The final article by Linda Clark et al. returns us to the theme of convict history, this time through the lens of clothing. Focusing on three collections in Tasmania, the authors present us with a fascinating account that takes us direct to the clothes themselves, rather than the more familiar textual narratives found in archives. As they note, Tasmania occupies a pivotal place in the telling of the convict story, given the island contains the vast majority of known surviving clothing. They tell us about the colour, style and quality of garments, together with their associations of class, rank and humiliation. Shirts, waistcoats,
established International Advisory Group. Since then, he has been involved as one of several advisers on a recently completed project on Chief Roi Mata’s Domain, and has served as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Heritage Vanuatu. Adam’s research has focused on the intersection of development and World Heritage needs in the Pacific region, and he has conducted research experience in the fields of community development, tourism, and heritage management in a range of countries.

Over the last 10 years Adam has had considerable practical and research experience in the fields of community development, tourism, and heritage management in a range of countries. Adam’s doctoral research focused on the intersection of development and World Heritage needs in Vanuatu and he has served as an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (2008–9) at Chief Roi Mata’s Domain, and has since been involved as one of several advisers on a recently established International Advisory Group.

In his capacity as a Heritage Consultant, Adam has worked in museum collection management and research at Port Arthur Historic Site, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, and National Trust of Australia (Tasmania). He currently works as a Research Officer for Heritage Tasmania.

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart is an Associate Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania. His research interests include the history of unfree labour migration, health, work, social control and colonization particularly convict transportation to Australia.

Tracy Ireland is Director of the Donald Horne Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney. Most of his work is spent trying to figure out how cultural heritage practices, including memorialisation, can be used to foster cross-cultural understandings and dialogue. He is the author of Reimagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum (Routledge 2003), co-editor (with Chris Healy) of South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture (Monash University e-press 2006, 2012) and co-author (with Kate Gregory) of From the Barracks to the Burrup: The National Trust in Western Australia (UNSW Press 2010).

Tim Winter is an Associate Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney. Most of his work is spent trying to figure out how cultural heritage features in issues like nationalism, post-conflict recovery, sustainability, postcolonial identities and urban development. He has published widely on these themes and conducted research projects in a number of countries in Asia, and more recently in Qatar. His recent books include The Routledge Handbook of Heritage in Asia and Shanghai Expo: an international forum on the future of cities.

Thank Ken Taylor, Susan Balderstone and Erik Champion for kindly volunteering to provide helpful overviews of three texts that I am sure will be of interest to readers.

Notes on Contributors

Julia Clark has recently retired from the position of Manager, Interpretation & Collections at Port Arthur Historic Site. She is currently undertaking a PhD in convict studies. Linda Clark is Conservation Manager, National Trust of Australia (Tasmania). She was previously Head of Conservation at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

Hamish Maxwell-Stewart is an Associate Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania. He is author of several books including Closing Hell’s Gates (Allen and Unwin, 2008) which won the Margaret Scott award (2009) and Kay Daniels award 2010. His research interests include the history of unfree labour migration, health, work, social control and colonization particularly convict transportation to Australia.

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