foreword

It is central to Australia ICOMOS' goal to promote the application of sound theory and methodology in the conservation of cultural heritage. Over the last two years there have been consistent calls within the membership for a conference to be based on the subject of rural Australia. It is four years since Meredith Walker and Peter Forrest produced their research paper into Australian Pastoral Technology and the National Estate for Australia ICOMOS. This substantial exploratory work looked for a major conference as its key outcome, and conceded that if this was not possible, conferences of a more specific nature might be achievable.

In New South Wales a lot of interest in rural conservation has been raised by the travelling exhibition of the Historic Houses Trust entitled 'Bush Lives' which focused on real instances of people working to conserve their rural heritage on properties in New South Wales. The interest is felt and shown by the 40 state-assisted heritage advisers in New South Wales, most of whom work in a rural context and who (to varying degrees of success) apply the principles of the Burra Charter.

In this context, a conference was proposed that would provide ICOMOS members with a much-needed gathering point and, while not being able to fulfil the grand aims of the pastoral technology report, to provide an opportunity to focus on rural conservation. It would take up the principal momentum of our organisation in the last two and a half years which has been to do with the Burra Charter and the development of the Cultural Places Policy.

The conference was held on Friday 26, Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 November 1999 at CB Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal Paterson, New South Wales. The date of the conference coincided with the ICOMOS Annual General Meeting.

The location is a large pastoral holding with a major homestead dating to the 1830s. Tocal was not only a highly successful pastoral enterprise during the 19th and early 20th century, but was turned over to an educational facility in 1965 with the establishment of the CB Alexander Agricultural College (now administered as part of the NSW Agriculture Department). It is a highly intact place and the college conducts education with an impressive focus on conservation of culture and environment in the context of agriculture and pastoral activity. The college buildings themselves (built principally in 1965) were awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects' Sulman and Blacket Prizes for architecture. The architects were Ian Mackay and Philip Cox.

The Paterson Valley provided opportunities to visit another intact 1830s property, still in the hands of descendants of their early owners, and run as a viable farm. We also visited the intact rural villages of Paterson, Woodville, Iona and the impressive agricultural landscape of Phoenix Park and the Bolwarra Flats.

The structure of the conference and papers sought to focus on practice. The field of topics presented testifies to the diverse types of endeavour to come to terms with rural decline.

The conference papers were arranged to address identifying rural heritage, then adapting local practice to rural circumstances, followed by working with local communities. The papers that follow in this edition of Historic Environment provide an interesting cross-section of those delivered at the conference. The papers are preceded by the conference agenda, and, where available, abstracts have been included for papers not published in this volume.