Richard Mackay

Richard Mackay, an industrial archaeologist and heritage consultant, is a principal of Godden Mackay Heritage Consultants, a firm which has developed an extensive practice in dealing with remnant industrial sites. In recent years his firm has provided advice and assessment of items as diverse as wharves, railway workshops, mines, abattoirs, gasworks, flour mills, and even Sydney's Luna Park. Their most recent project of this kind has been a comprehensive heritage assessment of the Mt Lyell Mine at Queenstown which will become redundant upon its closure later in 1994. Over the last five years he has also been involved in six major projects on redundant gasworks, his most recent gasworks project being a conservation plan for the Hobart Gasworks.

Gasworks [abstract]

Gasworks are ubiquitous industrial sites. Town gasworks often have great social and historic significance, being associated with the advent of town services and thereby major change to people's life styles. In addition, gasworks may be prominent local landmarks and may include significant examples of industrial technology.

The process of coal gas production involves a set of relatively standard steps: coal receiving, storage and conveying, retorting, disposal and/or storage of by-products and waste, and storage and reticulation of gas itself. Each of these activities gives rise to a distinctive range of structures, plant and equipment.

By their very nature gasworks are purpose-built for limited operating lives. Their fabric, especially that of retorts, is often severely compromised by the intensity of operating use. Changes and upgrading of plant also take a heavy physical toll on original equipment and structures.

Major issues involved in considering conservation and management options for redundant gasworks sites include:

- potential contamination of structures and subsurface areas
- the condition of structural elements
- the layering created by successive upgrading of plant and equipment
- the awkward configuration of structures and spaces
- the location of sites in city centres, often close to water for effective coal delivery
- as well as the normal range of issues arising from the significance of the place, relevant statutory controls and the requirements of the site owner.

Solving these often conflicting concerns requires a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the site, close liaison between heritage practitioners and remediation specialists, and an integrated and often innovative approach to future use and management.