Gothic silence or postmodern deconstruction? Presenting the values based stories of heritage places of national significance

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Values are at the traditional core of conservation – values attached to an object, building, place or landscape because it holds meaning for a social group due to its age, beauty, artistry or association with significant persons or events or otherwise contributes to processes of cultural affiliation (Mason, 2002:11). Values are the characteristics attributed to heritage objects and places by legislation, governing authorities and/or other stakeholders. These characteristics – its aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual values – are what make a place significant. Any place will have a range of values; these may be assessed against criteria in order to determine whether the values are important enough for the place to be listed for heritage protection (Lennon, 2003:120).

In 1997 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reviewed the roles and responsibilities for heritage identification and environment protection, including the major gap between World Heritage and National Estate sites in their protection regimes. COAG agreed that the Commonwealth’s role should focus on matters of national environmental significance and that the listing, protection and management of heritage places was a priority for reform (Hill, 1998:3, 33). This resulted in the Commonwealth’s new Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC) which now defines environment to include Australia’s natural and cultural heritage – a very significant shift in our conservation philosophy in Australia (see http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc).

From 1 January 2004, amendments to the EPBC Act 1999 came into effect to create a new National Heritage List of natural, Indigenous and historic places with outstanding heritage value to our nation and a Commonwealth List of heritage places owned by Commonwealth agencies who are now responsible to identify and protect the heritage values of these places. Under the new system, National Heritage will join the other six important matters of national environmental significance (World Heritage properties, Ramsar wetlands of international importance, listed threatened species and communities; migratory species protected under international agreements, nuclear actions, and the Commonwealth marine environments) already protected by the EPBC Act. The Australian Heritage Council Act 2003 also came into effect on 1 January 2004 and it created a council of experts to assess the nominations to the National and Commonwealth Lists and make recommendations to the Minister about the heritage values of nominated places.

The criteria for heritage listing are generally the same for heritage assessment throughout Australia, with the important addition of Indigenous tradition to the National Heritage criteria. What differs is the threshold – national list places must have ‘outstanding heritage value to the nation.’ The role of assessment is therefore crucial and involves comparative analysis. This is the main function of the new Australian Heritage Council.

The National Heritage management principles (regulation 10.01E) state that ‘management of National Heritage places should respect all heritage values of the place’ and seek to integrate any other government responsibilities for those places (Schedule 5B, 3). So it is clear that the new national heritage regime embraces protection of the range of cultural values in a place.

The COAG reforms have clarified the roles and responsibilities of all levels of government for conservation protection now outlined in an agreed National Heritage protocol and a new Environment Protection and Heritage Ministerial Council meets regularly to discuss high level issues such as policy formulation, financial incentives, heritage tourism initiatives. The statutory frameworks are now in place along with some ‘tools’ for integrated conservation practice.

Themes and thresholds

The 1999 revisions to the Burra Charter were a maturing step in recognising that many Australians have deep attachments to places and that conservation is needed to protect these intangible values as well as the ones based on physical fabric. Intangible values are expressed for example in laconic language relating to regions and ‘the bush’, in identity with the ‘outback’ and ‘the sunlit plains extended’, in the mixing of reality and myth in the various settler society visions of Australia ranging from Romantic, colonial, national to ecological (Frawley1992). Imagery expressed in both high and popular culture through painting, music and song, literature and poetry informs Australians views of and understanding about their country. Much has been written about this (Serle, 1973; White, 1981; Bonyhady, 1991).

Australians seem to be engaged in an endless quest to define themselves in this ancient continent and deciphering some of the associations with places assists in this search. The Burra Charter framework helps by the identification of values in the place and the development of a statement of significance which articulates the values and their meanings. The evaluation of the degree of importance of a particular value (rare, typical, representative, etc) of a place when compared with that value in a related place gives it its significance. The threshold for significance is the degree to which the place possesses a particular value to justify its listing; and setting that threshold therefore requires comparative analysis (Pearson and Sullivan...
Typologies of places and a thematic framework assist in comparative analysis of places in the assessment of significance. Using themes assists in thinking more widely about historical processes and also highlights the values exhibited at places rather than only assessing the fabric of the place. It also enables comparisons with other places exhibiting a similar theme and at different scales - local, regional, national and international (AHC, 2001:2-3). Themes are tools and not rigid as they represent current views of the past and of the environment which will change over time and be subject to multiple interpretations.

The Australian Historic Themes Framework comprised nine principal themes which are linked to and elaborated by a network of more specific sub-themes:

1. Tracing the evolution of the Australian environment
2. Peopling Australia
3. Developing local, regional and national economies
4. Building settlements, towns and cities
5. Working
6. Educating
7. Governing
8. Developing Australia's cultural life
9. Marking the phases of life

The framework was designed to be generic for Australia as a whole and was endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory heritage agencies in March 2000. New sub-themes may be developed, or existing themes may be linked to the framework as required, according to regional variations or particular historical processes. The framework can be applied to places at all levels of significance from local through to national. It deals only with historic values although it recognises that natural, social, scientific and aesthetic values may also reside in a place. A national framework of historic themes offers links between the different regional stories in Australia's history, and the heritage places that help to illustrate that history. We are the only nation to occupy a whole continent and the diversity of our experience of our landscapes and their component places can be linked through a thematic framework – comparing like with like in heritage assessments.

The role of themes as an organizing tool in the assessment and subsequent interpretation of historic places developed as mainstream practice during the 1990s.

The new Australian Heritage Council, in testing out the heritage significance of a place, is determining what are the places of importance to our country. We must show the diversity of Australia's heritage, not just the familiar and the places that are immediately recognised. The early listings must establish the rigour of thresholds that are explicable to the general community not just the heritage professionals. We need to establish beyond doubt the methodology of using values to define what it is to be protected and ensure the rigour of the management plans that are adopted. We must ensure that the National List is derived from many sources not just the insiders, hence the public nomination process. Distinctively Australian was launched by the Prime Minister in December 2003 and outlined a number of themes through which to populate the List.

The Council has agreed to prioritise these themes for a strategic approach to assessments of nominations as follows:

- An Ancient Country – with focus on fossil sites and geomorphology, and to progress Indigenous creation stories at the same time, linking the stories and science.
- An Island of Natural Diversity – Unique Flora and Fauna, Biodiversity Hotspots, with Indigenous connections.
- Building a Nation - Migrants by choice or coercion (convict sites, gold, Chinese, post World War II and Snowy Scheme); Creating an Australian democracy, Defending the Nation (Australians at War, including Indigenous battle sites.
- Inspirational landscapes.

These themes also need to be turned into marketable messages in a communications strategy in order to focus and attract public nominations. We need to engage you in thinking about national thresholds for heritage values by examining some of our themes. But firstly we should briefly examine our first completed historic place nomination, which forms one of the three inaugural places on the National Heritage List to see how the thresholds were set against the criteria for the Royal Exhibition Buildings in the Carlton Gardens, Melbourne.

**National heritage values of the Royal Exhibition Building**

The Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens were nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List before the new national heritage legislation was passed. The inscription was supported by Commonwealth and State Governments, Australia ICOMOS and had broad community support. In July 2004 the Royal Exhibition Building was added to the World Heritage List for its importance as the last great survivor of the international exhibition movement of the late nineteenth century. It was constructed for an International Exhibition in 1880 and hosted another, the Centennial International Exhibition, in 1888. The exhibitions displayed to the world the coming-of-age of the prosperous and growing colonies of Australia. The international exhibitions brought people and ideas together on such a grand scale they helped to develop the global economy and enterprise culture that underpins modern democratic society.

*Figure 1  Royal Exhibition Building interior.*
The inscription on the World Heritage List was under the following cultural heritage criteria that the building and gardens: (i) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design. World Heritage listing of the extraordinary Royal Exhibition Buildings and its garden setting recognises post-European settlement for the first time as part of Australia’s rich and internationally important heritage – the creative expression of nineteenth-century society.

But what are its national heritage values?

The Royal Exhibition Building as the site of the opening of the first Australian Parliament is of outstanding significance for Australia as a defining event. The event symbolises the creation of Australian nationhood.

Our assessment in relation to the National Heritage List criteria (which are discussed below) rated the Royal Exhibition Building above threshold on criteria (a), (b), (c) (e) and (f), one of which is all that is required for the AHC to advise the Minister to add the place to the National List.

However, it has many other values, including social values which contribute to its State and local significance. These arise from subsequent events in its use and occupation and provide rich material for telling its stories as part of tourism interpretation. They include:

- use as fever hospital in 1919 to cope with 1800 patients infected with the deadly influenza virus (Spanish flu);
- a temporary home for the collection of war memorabilia brought back by returned soldiers following the First World War;
- use for temporary troop accommodation in 1940, then requisitioned under National Security Regulations for the Royal Australian Air Force to be used for barracks and training;
- use as a major migrant reception centre from 1949 to 1962;
- a venue for weightlifting and basketball during the 1956 Olympic Games;
- and most importantly for my generation, the venue for our matriculation exams!

Analysing this place in accordance with its heritage values assessed at various thresholds provides an insight into the range of stories it can tell. In the USA, the values described for places in the National Register of Historic Places have formed the basis for tourist itineraries and a selection of these can be downloaded from the web by travellers (www.nr.nps.gov).

Setting thresholds for national heritage values

Each of the national heritage criteria contains two related elements – a description and a threshold. For criterion (a), the descriptive element is that ‘the place is important in the course or pattern of Australia’s natural or cultural history’. The threshold requirement, which is the same for each of the national heritage criteria, is that because the place satisfies the descriptive element of the criteria, it has ‘outstanding heritage value to the nation’. To determine this threshold of ‘outstanding’ requires comparative assessment of like with like as in the descriptive elements, or finding that the place is unique and otherwise meets the criterion, as with the Royal Exhibition Building.

As part of the theme of Building a Nation, convictism is a key story of forced movement of people, migration by coercion, to Australia. This historical movement is also significant in a global context because it exemplifies a world-wide process of colonial settlement using labour provided by forced migration. This unfortunate process was emulated by other colonisers, notably the French in New Caledonia (Forster, 1996).

Using the World Heritage Committee’s Global Strategy and Thematic Studies for a Representative World Heritage List (1994), a nomination of a serial listing of Australian Convict Sites by the Australian Government for inscription on the World Heritage List in 1999 considered the forced migration of British convicts to Australia in the context of global convictism, which directly unites the themes of movement of peoples with settlement under the universal theme of ‘Co-existence with the Land’. This was summed up in a 1918 poem by Dame Mary Gilmore:

I was the convict sent to hell.
To make in the desert the living well.
I split the rock.
I felled the tree –
The nation was because of me.

There are over 200 remaining convict places in Australia related to the convicts sent here between 1788 and 1868 (Pearson and Marshall, 1995). The key sites in the 1999 serial nomination were: First Government House Site, Hyde Park Barracks, and Great North Road, in New South Wales; Port Arthur Historic Site, Coal Mines Historic Site, Darlington Probation Station on Maria Island and Ross Female Convict Station Historic Site, all in Tasmania and the Fremantle Prison, Western Australia. Norfolk Island residents had voted against inclusion of their site at Kingston.

Figure 2 Gothic silence - in a beautiful setting.

The following questions to establish indicators of significance relating to this theme of convictism might assist in setting a threshold for national heritage value:

a. Importance in course, pattern of Australian history:
Is the place connected with a defining event in Australia’s convict history?
Is the place an outstanding example of a 19th-century convict establishment, with intact and authentic physical reminders of this formative aspect of the nation's history?
Does it demonstrate the physical form and evolution of the penal system in Australia?
Does it illustrate the importance of 'work' in the penal system, with the prisons effectively operating as industrial establishments and the convict used as human capital in building colonial economies? Does it illustrate aspects of prisoner reform of importance in the development of Australian reform and welfare philosophies?

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects:
The Australian prison system was built on its convict foundations. Does the place have rare attributes, such as being a 'prison within a prison,' or other uncommon features of the penal system adapted to Australia covering aspects such as social practice and architecture?

c. Potential to yield information – research:
Does the place have research potential likely to yield outstanding information primarily related to the convict experience because of its relative integrity and authenticity? Does the place have outstanding sources of evidence including documentary, collections, structures, archaeological and landscape evidence?

d. Demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place:
Australia’s convict sites share patterns of environmental and social colonial history including classification and segregation; dominance by authority and religion; the provision of accommodation for the convict, military and civil population; amenities for governance, punishment and healing, and the elements of place building, agriculture and industry. Does the place demonstrate the principal characteristics of an Australian convict site relating to:
• Changing attitudes to punishment, reform, education and welfare;
• A high degree of integrity and authenticity in the physical landscape and setting, thereby providing important evidence of the history and use of the place;
• The deliberate design and arrangement of the form and location of elements reflecting the order and hierarchy of military and penal history.

e. Exhibiting aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group:
Does the place have a landscape setting valued at different periods by the community? Is this important at a national scale, and how has that been demonstrated? Does it maintain its original relationship with its maritime or landscape setting? Have other aesthetic values of the place been recognised as outstanding in various forms of art, literature and music?

f. Demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period:
Some aspects of convict industrial techniques were technical achievements. Does the place exhibit outstanding evidence of this?

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons:
Aspects of Australia's convict experience are recalled as a reminder of our inherited psyche and our communal past – ‘being a government man’ or ‘an old lag’. Does the place have strong associations for a group or community and has this association been outstanding and over a long time?

h. Demonstrating special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons:
Does the place have a special association with a person or group, in this case convicts, political prisoners, reformers, administrators and governors? Does the personal connection with the place have to be outstanding or the person themselves? Many prisons were for male convicts, while female convicts developed the Australian nation by having their services outsourced as assigned domestic servants sometimes in the grand houses of the commercial and pastoral sectors. What is the gender representation of the place and is it an outstanding contribution?

i. Importance as part of Indigenous tradition:
Before the development of a convict layer on the place what were its Indigenous connections? And were there post-settler contact connections? Are they still an important aspect of tradition and contemporary significance arising from the perceived intactness of the natural landscape and/or the presence of sites or associations that connect the present-day Indigenous community to their past?

From the preceding descriptions and questions it can be seen that the values expressed in the heritage criteria also represent many of the principal Australian historic themes – Peopling Australia; Developing local, regional and national economies; Building settlements; Working; Governing – and their detailed sub-themes. But do we also examine these interrelationships more broadly and historically? For example, convict transportation to the east coast colonies ceased at about the same time as universal male suffrage was granted, and not long after the Eureka uprising against unjust taxes on those diggers trying to 'make a go of it' in the new country; is there any attitudinal connection between these events which is part of the outstanding story of building our nation? At which place(s) would these heritage values be best illustrated?

Articulating values for conservation management
The heritage value typology of the Burra Charter process privileges the four canonical types of cultural significance value – historical, social, scientific, and aesthetic – not only defining but also shaping them. Value articulation is not a simple act of recording or valuation, but of valorization, and it is an inescapable part of values-based conservation planning (Mason, 2002).

Examining values by type – and not by chronology – might work against the understanding of a place which is a deeply layered site embodying meanings which have been created through the different phases of its natural and human history. Contrast this with a way of assessing heritage values according to the periods or layers of the site: Aboriginal, European exploration, convicts, pastoralists, development booms and busts, World War influences, immigration, conservation management. An historical layer-based values framework can lead to a different management strategy, privileging the values related to a particular period, which may have a beneficial effect on the values related to that period. The idea of chronological layers is
central to the visitors' understanding of the site, and has been
the traditional way of looking at the site's significance and
conservation. How are values of different periods prioritized
when they co-exist in a particular place? Ideally, it would be
possible to organize values both ways, by type and by historical
layer, so that one way of valorization does not dominate.

For example, with the values recognised in the Royal Exhibition
Building according to different themes and thresholds,
conservation planning efforts mitigate this kind of unavoidable,
chronological valorization of value types by using different value
schemes in subsidiary plans — organized, for instance, around
geographic areas, as in the Landscape Plan, around
topicative themes as in the Interpretation Plan, or around eras
in built-element plans. These 'alternative' value schemes cut
 across the main typology and enrich the articulation of values,
without undermining the values-based rigor. Such a process
also shows how heritage values which are the responsibility of
different jurisdictions (international, national, state and local)
can be managed effectively in the one place.

Interpreting values to visitors

Historical themes give us a framework for more detailed
research into the heritage values of a place. These can be
grouped according to the Burracharter values or historical
chronologies. By combining the physical features remaining
and their associated stories, the memories of people are kept
alive and contribute to the sense of place of that location.

As Jim Kerr has reminded us about convict places:
Vanishment is not only achieved by deliberate erasure. It is
just as effectively achieved by interpreting the evidence
through the distorting filters of marketing expediency,
romantic embellishment and irrelevant ideological theories
(Kerr 2002:6).

Meanings have always collided in the interpretation of convict
places despite their 'human essence [...] and the complexities
that constitute existing, multifold and ongoing meaning' (Hay
1996:68). A new approach to communication is required,
rather than the queasy realm of cultural silence in attempts to
find meaning and the quarantining of Gothic ruins in their
convict past as an end point compared to seeing them as a
beginning for modern Australia (Young 1991:33). Interpretation
needs to both recognise the tensions of using our cultural
heritage on site (Lennon 1990:55) and the historical amnesia of
many visitors about the depth of our stories and their linkages
into a much wider world. In a postmodern age where visitors
choose 'some of this and some of that' as a result of
deconstructed messages used in advertising, the solid
foundations for systematic enquiry are often missing.

The challenge for lifelong learning is to build on existing
knowledge. Publicity about heritage values illustrated in places
on the new National Heritage List will hopefully engage
Australians to think more deeply about meanings and
associations with such places as they tell new stories. The
thematically based frameworks give us an opportunity to identify and
record multiple stories associated with a place often lost or
forgotten in this generation.

I cannot emphasize enough the changed context for heritage
assessments at the Commonwealth government level. Senate
amendments to the heritage legislation enabled emergency
listings which are flooding in, consuming staff resources as the
general public exercise their rights but without the benefit of
really understanding national heritage values and their
thresholds. So we need your suggestions and ideas about
national values, innovative communication and a renewed
passion about our heritage which requires you to engage and
re-engage in new thinking and intellectual endeavour.

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