Industrial site rehabilitation [abstract]

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, industry, both large and small scale, had a major impact on the physical structure of our cities, towns and landscapes and the daily lives of their inhabitants.

Leaving aside issues of economics, increased efficiency or social impact, one of the major changes that has occurred in industrial practice since the arrival of the industrial revolution in Australia in 1815 is the compulsion (either statutory or moral) to rehabilitate redundant industrial sites.

In terms of cultural heritage, rehabilitation programs pose a major threat to our ability to understand our environment and to relate to the physical evidence of major historical events and processes. Specifically, rehabilitation in many circumstances erases the physical component of a major aspect of our heritage.

The trend towards industrial site rehabilitation affects not only contemporary industrial features but also those historic sites which, like many mines, are in the same location as new ventures. Urban industrial sites are often located on what is now prime waterside real estate and are under increasing pressure to realise the underlying land value or perceived 'development potential'.

This paper will examine key issues that arise in relation to industrial site rehabilitation, using examples from conservation projects at industrial places during the last five years. Major issues to be addressed include questions of safety and visitor access, the physical condition of industrial structures, the implication of purpose-built structures and plant for long-term conservation, contaminants and other environmental concerns, modification to landscapes, adaptation of buildings and removal of operating equipment.

Probably more than any other type of cultural site, industrial sites and the threats and issues raised by proposed rehabilitation lend themselves to resolution through the planning and decision making process advocated in the Burra Charter.

Richard Mackay

Richard Mackay is an industrial archaeologist and heritage consultant, and is a principal of Godden Mackay Heritage Consultants, a firm which has developed an extensive practice in dealing with redundant 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 Richard has also been involved in six major projects on redundant gasworks, his most recent gasworks project being a conservation plan for the Hobart Gasworks.