Opening Address

The highlight and most exciting element of this seminar is the diversity of its delegates. 'Lights of our Past: Australia's Stained Glass Heritage' represents the first opportunity for all kinds of people involved in the conservation of Australia's stained glass heritage to share their knowledge, expertise and experience – it is long overdue.

Stained glass is an integral part of the fabric of many buildings throughout the country, from grand cathedrals and palatial mansions to suburban houses and the humble cottages of our earliest settlers. As a result, Australia has an enormous body of stained glass – yet only small pockets have been researched and documented. Much of this rich heritage is ageing, and until now, needed little attention to conserve it.

For some time the Historic Buildings Council (now the Heritage Council) has been concerned about the lack of industry standards in conservation works to stained glass. Many buildings on the council register have stained glass which makes a major contribution to their significance. In some cases, the glass is specifically listed in the statement of significance.

There is a need, in many cases an urgent need, to create an awareness of the need for the conservation of Australia's stained glass heritage. We must raise the levels of knowledge and skills amongst existing practitioners, and train new artists, architects and builders to tackle this sensitive and vital area. It is difficult to get people with different interests talking the same language. All professions have their own vocabulary or jargon and we need to develop a workable code of practice that everyone understands.

The Historic Buildings Council was therefore pleased when the Australian Association of Stained Glass Artists (Ausglass) Victoria, with similar concerns about our stained glass heritage, approached it with the proposal of joining together to develop this seminar.

Stained glass often holds the social, cultural, architectural, religious, and economic history of its locality. Christ Church in St. Kilda is a prime example. As the first stone church built south of the Yarra, it was built between 1854 and 1857, and houses a remarkable collection of stained glass, installed over more than 100 years and donated by some of St Kilda's earliest and most prominent families. These windows represent a who's who of stained glass of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries in Melbourne.

Designed by Purchas and Swyer, this building is remarkable for its unusual beam construction (which nearly 140 years ago was widely believed would fall down), the unusual use of Point King sandstone ferried specially from Sorrento, and a patterned slate roof, amongst other important elements within the building. Its importance is enhanced by its siting on a church square with other period buildings of special significance.

The Hon Rob Maclellan

The Hon Rob Maclellan is Minister of Planning and Development for Victoria.
Following a recommendation from the Historic Buildings Council, the Christ Church, St Kilda, will be added to the council register. Once officially gazetted, the building will be legally protected from demolition or alteration without approval of the Historic Buildings Council.

As the minister responsible for heritage in Victoria, I would like to congratulate the organisers of this landmark event, Ausglass, and the Historic Buildings Council. The vision of Ausglass Victoria in conceiving the need for this seminar is a major achievement. The organisation of this seminar is a first for Ausglass, who in the past have concentrated on promoting more contemporary work. This kind of proactive initiative by the membership of Ausglass is an important step forward and will surely have a lasting and positive impact on the future of our stained glass heritage.

Successful working relationships and partnerships between business, industry and heritage organisations continue to grow. I am particularly pleased to note the level of industry support and involvement in this seminar. This kind of bipartisan co-operation and ability to see a future through conservation is particularly encouraging for the preservation of our nation’s heritage assets.

There is no doubt we are embarking upon exciting, if not revolutionary times. The gathering of so many with different backgrounds, interests and expertise to gain an appreciation of each others’ perspective, is a first for this country.

I encourage your discussion and debate and wish you every success in the development of a draft code of practice for the conservation and restoration of stained glass. Ultimately the legacy of your work will be the development of the guidelines to ensure the conservation of Australia’s stained glass heritage into the next century – surely an inspiring task!

I would now like to declare ‘Lights of Our Past: Australia’s Stained Glass Heritage’ officially open.