INDUSTRIAL SITES

rapporteur: Jane Lennon

Neither Judy Birmingham's paper nor the subsequent discussion focused on the analysis of the significance of industrial sites. Instead a number of points were made about the study of industrial heritage and preservation of the evidence.

1. A multidisciplinary approach to the evaluation of industrial sites is essential because different aspects of the sites interest different professional groups. To date, the engineers are the only group who have official policies on both the collection of significant engineering information and assessment for preservation. (Unfortunately, these policies were not outlined for discussion.)

2. Historians were berated for their failure to become involved in heritage studies.

3. Evaluation of industrial sites must consider the conservation of information as well as the conservation of fabric and recording programmes must be part of a wider conservation study.

4. It was proposed that, due to the diversity of both sites and disciplines involved in industrial heritage, adoption of specific industrial, historical and technical themes would assist in evaluating industrial sites for conservation of significant fabric. This proposal was not accepted by all as the adoption of themes could prescribe history.

5. Defining the significance of a site was seen as an essential forerunner to deciding what to do with the site. If machinery of significance is left in-situ, for example in a flour mill, it tends to become a de facto museum. As Australia can only support a limited number of working museums, the most important examples of nineteenth century technology should be selected from across State boundaries.
6. Technical research objectives were seen as an integral part of the recording procedure so that relevant information could be sought in the assessment. Research plans for each state's industrial history were advocated as critical in assessing priorities for the collection of significant data.

7. A major problem in assessing cultural significance is making comparisons. It was suggested that the Register of the National Estate would yield information by site types and thus enable comparisons to be made.

8. In assessing cultural significance, the social value of a site should be defined. However, in some communities industrial sites are seen as undesirable and best forgotten and not worth preserving - this attitude prevails in Lithgow and Cessnock. Other sites are significant to a minority group in the community. It was felt that statements of cultural significance should include the viewpoints of all groups in the community.

9. The research value of industrial sites as included in statements of cultural significance should include assessments of technological worth of the sites.
Discussion following the paper was very brief, due to the exigencies of time. The main topic raised was the question of custodianship and 'ethnic' significance of sites. Clearly, the Aboriginal views described by Sullivan took some of the conference participants by surprise. The principal issue seemed to be the Aboriginal assertions of custodianship of all sites, meaning control at a policy level of site management, research and interpretation. It emerged that Aborigines found offensive the concept thought to be enshrined in the guidelines that the main value of a site will be its heritage value, i.e. its value to the dominant, majority culture, and that the practitioner will be of that culture.

Speakers from the floor, in particular Max Bourke, Director of the Australian Heritage Commission, put the view that heritage is the property of mankind and that no one owns that past; discussion passed on from Aboriginal sites to consideration of the material traces of other groups such as Chinese. The issue remained unresolved, and will in fact be the sole subject of a symposium of the Academies of the Humanities in Canberra in May 1983 titled 'Who Owns the Past?'.

The need to include consideration of 'ethnic' significance in the guidelines was also canvassed. There was general consensus that it is necessary to take account of the value of a site to a discrete minority group or culture within the community or majority culture, and that ethnic significance must be determined by a comprehensive consultative process.

Finally the question of 'scientific' value of sites was addressed. Many participants were dissatisfied with the section in the guidelines on this type of significance, and the term 'research value' was suggested as a substitute for 'scientific value', and new criteria for the assessment of this value were proposed. Other proposals related to the need to identify natural as well as cultural factors which contribute to a place, and to the value of places for minority groups as discussed above.
In her paper entitled, 'The Application of Australia ICOMOS "Guidelines for Conservation Analysis and Plans" to Towns and other Urban Areas', Meredith Walker promotes the usefulness and applicability of both the Guidelines and Burra Charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance, including towns and other urban areas. In general terms, this view was not challenged by the conference delegates. However, in accepting the Guidelines and Burra Charter, a number of problems associated with the application and use of the two documents was highlighted. In particular, the problems of misunderstanding of both documents by the community, professionals and clients were discussed.

It was emphasised that it is relatively easy to apply the Burra Charter to towns and urban areas, if a clear understanding prevails of the Charter and its definitions. It is apparent that there has only been a notional acceptance of the Burra Charter by the general community, and few studies have actually attempted to apply the Guidelines.

It was agreed that until further studies had been undertaken over a greater period of time, it was difficult to test the Guidelines fully in relation to towns and urban areas.

Three problems of analysing urban areas were identified; lack of reliable and basic data; information about comparable places and urban development generally and establishing a common understanding with the client. Meredith Walker emphasised the urgent need for further comparative studies to be undertaken and the usefulness of a thematic approach to urban areas.

In considering the Guidelines in detail, and in particular the insertion of the concept of research value, there was some questioning as to whether the definition of historic value was sufficiently specific.

Discussion of 2.5 'Completeness' and 2.6 'Finality' brought agreement that in relation to towns and urban areas, a Statement of Cultural Significance would inevitably tend to be more open-ended than for a building.
BUILDINGS
rapporteur: Peter Bridges

The following notes are a brief summary of the discussion:

1. The group took as its subject for discussion an examination of the way in which the guidelines of the Burra Charter have been used, their influence on practitioners in the field of building conservation and on the conservation scene generally.

2. It was agreed that, while the Burra Charter and the Guidelines are widely acknowledged, conservation practitioners often lack appropriate specific training and have sometimes enhanced their credibility by merely paying lip service to the principles set down in the documents.

3. While short courses for architects and others may be valuable in broadening the awareness of ICOMOS and its principles, they are no substitute for comprehensive training courses leading to the establishment of a specialised and new professional competence. This must especially be recognised by the architectural profession.

4. In the field of building conservation an analysis of cultural significance is a key input. Few such analyses have been initiated or carried out in an adequate manner.

5. Analysis should always be undertaken prior to and clearly separated from any plan for implementation. While the input of a wide range of disciplines is called for, it must be recognised that the preparation of a co-ordinated analysis statement is itself a specialised discipline.

6. Physical work on a conservation project may sometimes be commenced before a statement of cultural significance has been completed in detail. Once a positive affirmation of significance is accepted and a broad plan of implementation based on that conclusion has been drawn up, some urgent and protective work may be carried out provided that such work does not destroy or degrade unresearched elements of the fabric or site or entail irreversible actions whose validity may be subsequently questioned. It should be recognised that, although analysis is a continuing process, it
should not be used as an excuse to defer action unreasonably. However the analysis must be completed before it is formally submitted to the client and before the plan of implementation is completed.

7. The major conclusions of the discussion were:

(a) The Burra Charter and the Guidelines are a codification of the practice of historic buildings conservation. They are intended to bring together the broad principles of ICOMOS and the practical, commonsense problems of practice.

(b) In all conservation projects, the analysis of cultural significance must be recognised as an integral and essential preliminary step corresponding to the design/analysis stage of a conventional modern building programme.

(c) The statement of significance must be given appropriate public scrutiny, especially when the subject is of wide public interest, and it, together with the data on which it is based and the recommendations arising from it must be lodged in a recognised repository.

(d) Professional bodies, above all the RAIA, whose members may be involved in conservation projects which come under the Burra Charter should incorporate in their normal Practice Notes and other official statements of policy a strong reference to the need for its members to recognise the significance of any analysis of cultural significance in following and implementing the principles of the Burra Charter.