Australians started to question the notion of progress and development on a broad scale in the 1970s and this was reflected, for example, in the establishment of the Australian Heritage Commission with its concern for 'the things we want to keep'.

Some believe today that we have saved too much, buried our heads in the sands of the past so as not to face up to the hard task of changing into a high-tech, post-industrial society. Others believe that this heritage resource can be used to build a tourist-oriented, leisure-serving 'industry' as the socio economic base for regional development. This follows trends in Britain where 'the past is steadily growing' with over half the 1750 museums belonging to the Museums' Association having been established since 1971.1

The 1987 House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment presented the 'Thatcherite' view of heritage; 'enormous wealth of our heritage', 'tourist industry' employing 1 400 000 people, 'new jobs', 'economic values'.2 It barely discussed the potential for personal enjoyment, altruistic stewardship or scholarship which, for many, underpin and justify the conservation of cultural heritage. Indeed, it championed the commercial approach as offering the 'surest prospect for the long-term conservation of many historic locations . . . at little expense to the taxpayer'.3 This is the nub: not conservation for its own sake or to maintain heritage for its pleasurable and aesthetic qualities or as a reservoir of knowledge and education, but primarily because it can be made to make money and thereby reduce the amount of government financial support or subsidy. Heritage is seen as capable of paying its own way and tourism is the vehicle for the most direct and effective promotion of conservation of historic buildings and monuments. Tourism clearly is a catalyst but it is itself a dynamic and volatile element subject to a host of external pressures.

Public funding of cultural heritage conservation in Australia has also been linked to the economic returns realizable through tourism. In Victoria, the government's 1987 economic strategy outlined a program to promote historic houses and access to heritage places as part of tourism and arts promotion. However, the heritage resource managers effectively halted the program after the presentation of the business consultants report because the latter did not build in any financial return for the long term conservation of the heritage places. The heritage resources are still drawing in the visitors (510 550 visitors to the 21 Victorian National Trust properties open to the public in 1988/89).4 However the managers are responsible for 'industry' which has developed in an ad hoc, under-resourced, fragmented manner but which has captured the popular and political imagination. The flood of new museums and exhibitions developed for Australia's Bicentenary of British settlement on the eastern seaboard highlighted this trend. This then is the overriding tension in the conservation of our cultural heritage; that it is seen as a public resource capable of economic return.5

Given that heritage conservation is a fact of public and private life, what are the tensions in using heritage places? Major tensions arise from:

- the intrinsic purpose for conservation of the place;
- the 'ownership' of the culture being presented;
- the anti-intellectual nature of the interpretation and manipulation of messages;
- the need for attractions for repeat visits;
- provision of visitor facilities;
- the role of volunteers and sponsors;
- the physical capacity of the place;
- the effect of the heritage place on the surrounding neighbourhood.

**Places of cultural significance**

Cultural places are conserved because an individual or group decided that the place had special values warranting protection through legislation or managerial action (or inaction in remote areas). If that place is a house it is generally a grand mansion, the most familiar symbol of our cultural heritage. These historic houses are not museums, although that is the basis on which they are promoted. They are living entities and as such preserve and reinforce past values in the present, values such as hierarchy, a sturdy individualism on the part of their owners, privilege tempered by social duty and a deference and respect for social order on the part of those who service and support them.6

This can be backed up by the demands of National Trust members to restore, maintain and present historic houses in a certain manner, such as the recent refusal by the Victorian Trust Council to repaint...
Como in its original colours or the court action by the Ladies’ Committee to prevent the commercial use of Lindsay in Sydney.

Other places of cultural significance may not fit into the charter of the owner/manager. Hence the great urge to tidy up, improve, and in the process, destroy the significance. For example, national park managers are concerned to preserve ‘natural’ ecosystems and remove anything exotic, such as the fruit trees surrounding a burnt out homestead whose site is now reclaimed by the native bushland. Or they may obliterate ruins of activities associated with past exploitation of the land now included in the park, such as the ruins of a whaling station or sawmill. Historic structures in national parks are also generally the ‘poor relations’ when it comes to budget allocations for restoration and maintenance. The survival of these relics is not guaranteed in an atmosphere where ‘green is good’ and planting a billion trees is the current target.

Who owns the culture being presented?
The ‘ownership’ of the culture being presented can cause problems. Aboriginal Australians, convicts, housewives, and factory workers are represented in heritage places out of context and without consultation. The virtues of bygone heroes are likewise inflated. Admired forebears acquire qualities esteemed today, however anachronistic, and their faults are concealed or excused. Thus we have the ‘kindly squatter’ working with his men ‘as a team’. However, disaffected minorities reject this paternalistic approach. David Lowenthal, in discussing ‘changing the past’, shows how Americans shun reminders of what seems shameful or demeaning because history has to be a chronicle of national greatness. I am sure we can all think of recent glorifications here in Australia – instead of examining the squalor, poverty, despair of the immigrant women in textile mills or the unsafe working conditions of the miners in the ‘great golden era’ such as at the New Australian mine in Creswick where 22 miners died in 1882.

Anti-intellectual nature of heritage site interpretation
The anti-intellectual nature of many heritage site interpretation programs has been highlighted. We have no understanding of history in depth, but instead are offered a contemporary creation with more costume drama and re- enactment than critical discourse. It is clear that the more interpretation becomes available, the more people rely on it: they prefer to imbibe history in comfort in heritage or visitor centres and are seldom conscious of, or worried about, the alterations of the past that interpretation implies.

With the use of microchip technology the past is made more engaging with slide presentations, taped sounds, film and flashback to prehistoric times. The golden past becomes more homogeneous than the present. It becomes simply ‘yesteryear’. If there is development it is ‘progress’ where continuity is discovered in the place of chance or luck, and where rooms and houses are restored to a uniform conception of a period, and objects are standardised by their display. As Hewison says: ‘The past is domesticated and, by regulation, made safe; it is rescued, removed, rebuilt, restored and rearranged’.

He quotes Dr. Neil Cossons, the former director of the Ironbridge Gorge museum:

A lot of what is presented isn’t based on scholarship at all but upon attitude and emotion. So I think the anti-industrial attitude is an antipathy towards industry now, but we’re quite happy to look at history of say fifty years ago, because it’s part of our heritage.

He argues that the ultimate pastime of the 1980s is to visit the forges and farmyards of open air museums in order to watch other people work!

Nostalgia for the industrial past and the rise of industrial archaeology is an ironic commentary on the decline of the industries it studies. The Association for Industrial Archaeology was founded in 1973, the year of the oil crisis. The real growth in the subject followed then as Britain declined as an industrial nation (from supplying 30 per cent of the world’s exported manufactures in 1913 to 7.9 per cent in 1985). While the real world of industrial manufacturing decays, redundant and obsolete machinery flourishes – in museums and heritage sites. As industries die, the heritage solution is increasingly applied. The museum of industrial artefacts is no longer an educational resource or the repository of records and memories; it is an employer and an economic asset as a tourist attraction.

This can be seen at Ironbridge Gorge where the original Abraham Darby foundry at Coalbrookdale was opened as a museum in 1959. The museum is now spread over seven separate sites in the valley and is the cultural focus for the adjoining Telford New Town established in 1968. Beamish Open Air Museum just south of Newcastle-upon-Tyne was established on 200 acres of green farmland in 1970 and displays buildings and materials moved in from threatened sites elsewhere in the region. Again Wigan Pier that ‘wreck of civilization’ immortalized by George Orwell, has had an injection of new life centred around the canal side warehouses which the owners, British Waterways, had planned to demolish in 1982 and redevelop. Instead, a heritage centre with displays and performances on the theme of ‘The Way We Were’ has arisen. Pubs, shops and a water taxi...
between Trencherfield Mill and the pier along the landscaped canal are added attractions. The past has been summoned to the rescue of the present, with three and a half million pounds invested in old structures to stimulate an ageing economy and derelict place. The past was never like this!

Hewison argues that:

Had we more faith in ourselves, and were more sure of our values, we would have less need to rely on the images and monuments of the past. We would also find that, far from being useless except as a diversion from the present, the past is indeed a cultural resource, that the ideas and values of the past – as in the Renaissance – can be the inspiration for fresh creation. But because we have abandoned our critical faculty for understanding the past, and have turned history into heritage, we no longer know what to do with it, except obsessively preserve it.11

**Historic sites as cultural heritage sites**

Developing historic sites as cultural heritage sites requires ‘attractions’ so as to stimulate repeat visits and generate financial income. Sometimes this can be done by highlighting seasonal changes to the place, such as haymaking at a farm, or by holding special events, such as the Pioneer Skills Day at Gulf Station, Yarra Glen, which is their peak visitor day each year.

However, rather than using natural attractions such as seasonal events, anniversaries or celebrations, there is a tendency to overdevelop the site or add attractions, like travelling exhibitions or re-enactments. Re-enactments reproduce past events and these are designed to entertain or convince actors and audiences of the relevance of the past. Unfortunately the Tall Ships and Bicentennial landing parties, which showed how far away Australia is from the rest of the world in sailing time, did not prepare us for the isolation caused by the pilots’ strike!

Re-enactments are especially popular in America with over 800 outdoor museums regularly presenting living history programs. Period-dressed cooperers and blacksmiths explain what they are doing and why, but their speech and know-how are mostly modern. In conveying up-to-date facts about the past, they preclude intimacy with it. The National Park Service finally called a halt to all battle re-enactments when they realized that people were seeking enjoyment out of what was literally human tragedy.12

For millions of people who turn a blind or bored eye on ancient monuments, not to mention history books, re-enactments can enliven history. But they risk turning venerable places into jokey or self-conscious replicas of themselves, or worse, persuading participants and even spectators that one can escape to the past. The pageantry of re-enactment transports today’s locales into a fictitious yesterday purged of historical guilt, where people act out fantasies denied them in the contemporary world.13 The whippings ‘on the hour’ of unruly convicts at Old Sydney Town illustrate this.

**Providing visitor facilities**

The provision of visitor facilities creates great tensions in using and managing our cultural heritage sites. From the first act of signposting the site, we draw attention to its special status. Markers interpreting this relic or forbidding access to that one profoundly influence what we make of them. Some visitors to history-laden places attend more to the markers than to what they celebrate. From my experience it is often better to be temporarily ‘lost’ than to be over-informed, to let the sense of the place soak in.

Cultural norms about how places should be displayed determine the type and extent of alteration – or sometimes the style of the designer. National Park Service Mission ’66 design can be found at sites across the United States. The treated pine car park barrier became a standard here.

Demands for intelligibility often justify altering ruins: the picturesque Roman sites, medieval castles and monastic ruins in British government care have been made more comprehensible by lowering ground surfaces, heightening walls, revealing buried details. Subsequent additions that ‘confuse’ the scene are removed (wartime Nissan huts and nineteenth century pigsties but not seventeenth century gateways). The surrounding sward, cropped with military tidiness, enhances the bleak, austere and majestic mood the public has come to expect from ruins.14 This phenomenon has been observed in Australia with the tidying up of sites by removing ugly accretions. In one case at Port Fairy, the ‘ugly accretion’ almost removed was in fact the original structure on the site.

Protective measures may detract from the appearance or understanding of the site features of an historic place. Yet without them the relics/features may decay or vanish all the sooner. Protective grilles, walkways, steps and stairs, scaffolding and props all fall into this category.

Popularity threatens the fabric and the history of the place and to prevent such damage further affects surviving relics. Thus, preservation sets in motion extensive remodelling of the very past it aims to protect. Removing dirt or rust, reconstructing a ruin, restoring an old building to what it might or should have been, all aim at improving on what has survived.

Jane Foulcher describes this trend in Australia as ‘Plastic Heritage’ when discussing how Brunswick Green has become the building colour of the 1980s reinstated from paint scrapes by the pioneering restoration projects of the 1970s:
Buildings of almost any age are ‘heritaged’ with paint schemes made popular by historic houses. Indeed Brunswick Green will confer a feeling of age, and style, just about anywhere.\(^{15}\) However, restoration, reinstatement and reconstruction are necessary processes for maintaining the physical fabric of an historic place. The general public enjoy reconstructions. Few have the taste or the training to appreciate the past simply from fragmentary remains. Sovereign Hill in Ballarat provides 500000 visitors annually with an image and an understanding of the Victorian gold rush era of the 1850s, yet many of the original sites remain abandoned, overgrown or readapted in the nearby countryside awaiting detection by the curious ‘cultural tourist’.

The furnishing and presentation of historic houses and sites is another area where visitors arrive with preconceptions of what they will find. At Woodlands homestead, an 1840s prefabricated English timber house in Gellibrand Hill Park near Tullamarine Airport, visitors comment that they hope we get the funds to furnish the house and finish the restoration. They have failed to read our introductory interpretation panels which tell them why this house is different and not furnished! The 1847 paint scheme revealed in one room has been criticized as ‘too dull’, visitors having become accustomed to the new, brighter heritage colours replicated by leading paint companies and applied to other unrevealed sections in other rooms. Fabric conservators are also aware of this public perception when fragile drapes and coverings are cleaned, repaired and redisplayed.

Adaptive reuse of buildings arouses conflicting reactions. New uses for old structures may seem a sacrifice; rather than reconvert redundant Anglican churches, Lord Anglesey, the president of Friends of Friendless Churches, prefers them left vacant as reminders of eternal spiritual values.\(^{16}\) Yet, for the historic area manager, a redundant church or building may be adapted to a visitor centre, shop or restaurant. This will prevent introducing intrusive new buildings into the historic area, whether in a modern, sympathetic reproduction or ‘revival’ style. Few admirers of the classical can tell Roman from Grecian, let alone Hellenistic; revivals are commonly mistaken for survivals and the passage of time dissolves distinctions between originals and emulation.\(^{17}\) The debate on the most appropriate way to provide modern facilities in an historic setting ranges from one extreme to another. This is exemplified by the glass pyramid covered new entry to the Louvre in Paris, the copper clad pyramid visitor centre at Collin’s Landing Site in Risdon Cove, Tasmania and the 1988 public toilets in the recreated 1890s Mechanics Institute at Wallalla, Victoria.

Toilets, car parks and attractive picnic barbecue areas can create intrusions or provide recreational opportunities and draw crowds not primarily interested in the heritage resources which were the reason for the preservation of that place originally.

**Volunteers and sponsors**

The role of volunteers and sponsors can also cause tensions in current use of cultural heritage sites. Volunteers, by definition provide their services free and managers are increasingly forced to use them as a source of labour. However, they often do not have the mix of skills and/or subsequent training to perform their new tasks. Historic house guides with embellished tales of the private lives of earlier inhabitants are legendary. Bias, prejudice and straightforward lies are sometimes the result rather than the presentation of the recorded, known facts.

Sponsorship can introduce replicas – products and souvenirs – into a site or lead to a narrower interpretation of the place to suit the sponsor’s needs. Corporate logos and advertising may offend by clearly illustrating that history pays! However, the long term benefits may be that the advertising can be taken down but the funding has enabled works to be undertaken which caused the features/buildings on site to remain.

**Physical capacity**

The physical capacity of an historic place may also cause tensions for both managers and visitors. The historic building may be too small or fragile for the crowds wishing to inspect it and peak loads have to be spread throughout the opening times. Differential entry charges can be used to achieve this in some cases. Visitors cause physical wear and tear on floors, tiles and steps and air breathed out can cause humidity and mould growth on fragile surfaces such as cave paintings or stencils, while touching can rub them away.

Protective measures can detract from the experience of the historic place, such as scaffolding, permanent props or protective covering, like the glass and steel housing, which has turned Abraham Darby’s blast furnace into a reliquary, or the protective canopy over Casa Grande, an ancient American Indian adobe structure in Arizona. The canopy reduces Casa Grande to triviality and ‘it now takes powers of imaginative reconstruction far beyond anything that can be inculcated by current “visitor orientation” techniques to see the adobe as the great monument of the plain’.\(^{17}\)

Physical safety is also an issue for historic site managers. Unexploded ordinance at the former Army Reserve which is the new Point Nepean National Park means that visitors must book in to visit and travel only along designated routes within the park to visit the various forts, barracks and gun emplacements.

Historic Environment VII 3 & 4 (1990)
Lead poisoning in rifle butts remaining in an historic park is another concern, as is the cyanide from gold processing which has leached into the soils of many gullies now in picturesque historic reserves in the central Victorian goldfields. Original industrial machinery with exposed belts and pulleys whirring away is a hazard to the throng of visitors fascinated by past motive power and protective grilles and cages can almost destroy the visitor's appreciation and understanding of the processes being exhibited.

Sometimes there is the opposite problem when the historic site may be too large or complicated for the visitor to appreciate the past functional linkages. For example, at Walhalla the majority of visitors only go to the township in the valley floor but miss the 'outer suburbs' and cricket ground on the ridge and the tramways snaking along the contours of the valley sides. Or at country houses the grand drawing rooms are visited but not the servants quarters, dairies or working yards. However, thematic interpretation can be used to iron out these problems and encourage repeat visits to an historic place.

At rural historic sites, there is often room to develop other facilities away from the historic core but new development can change the original character and function of the historic place. At Gulf Station, for example, the National Trust is proposing a large capacity visitor centre and carpark across the gully from the farm complex. However, this will turn the timber slab buildings into a destination or product to be inspected 'up the hill' instead of the present delight of just finding oneself in the middle of the historic complex.

Effect of visitors on surrounding landscape
A current major tension in making use of heritage sites is the effect of the visitors on the surrounding neighbourhood. The Melbourne newspapers have been reporting the battles between the National Trust and the local councils over the provision of car and bus parking for visitors to their historic mansions Como and Ripponlea. Local residents do not like the street traffic congestion and noisy, cheeky visitors leaving functions late in the evening. At Ripponlea buses will now park in the grounds impacting physically on the root networks of mature trees and aesthetically on the landscape.

In other cases, declaring a place a heritage area has led to rising real estate prices, 'gentrification' and pushing out old established local residents. There has been increasing criticism about the fate of The Rocks in Sydney. Many fear that, in the rush for the tourist and development dollar, the heritage value of this early settlement site has been damaged. Many buildings have been preserved but something has been lost. The fabric of the place has been saved but the meaning of the area has been lost. Historically, The Rocks was a waterfront or port area with a mix of residential and light industrial uses. This mix has almost disappeared and been replaced by five star hotels, high-rise apartments and tourist-oriented shops. When people visit The Rocks now, their experience will be unrelated to the historical uses of the area. They will leave knowing nothing more of our founding colonial history and with 'a falsified picture of the past we were trying to save'. The tourist experience in meticulously restored historic buildings and settings in a heritage area is divorced from an experience of understanding the history and sense of place. This criticism could be repeated at many sites across Australia and opens up the problems of education, interpretation, informed debate and aesthetic appreciation – all qualities lacking in the average Australian seeking a fun day out in heritage country.

Conclusion
The problems and tensions outlined make it questionable whether we should bother to make use of our cultural heritage at all. Why do we? Memory and history both derive and gain emphasis from physical remains. Tangible surviving relics provide a vivid immediacy that helps to assure us there really was a past. Physical remains have their limitations and require interpretation; their continual but differential erosion and demolition shows the record, and their substantial survival conjures up a past more static than could be. But relics of cultural heritage remain essential bridges between then and now no matter how depleted by time and use.

Lowenthal argues that:

Recognition of the past as a foreign country now colours our view of antiquity from primeval times down to yesterday. We have partly domesticated that past, where they do things differently, and brought it into the present as a marketable commodity... But we must not repudiate it, for it is a proof that we have really lived. We inherit a legacy no less precious for being often indecipherable or inconvenient. To be is to have been, and to project our messy, malleable past into our unknown future.

Cultural tourists seek to understand the past and our challenge is to present the evidence on which to base that understanding.

Endnotes:
3 Fowler, p. 412.
5 Hewison, The Heritage Industry, p. 129.
6 Hewison, p. 129.
8 Hewison, The Heritage Industry, p. 137.
9 Hewison, p. 138.
10 Hewison, p. 89.
11 Hewison, pp. 138-139.
12 Lowenthal, p. 296.
13 Lowenthal p. 301.
14 Lowenthal, p. 273.
16 Quoted in Lowenthal, p. 288.
17 Lowenthal, p. 276.
18 Age, 10 Feb. 1990.
19 Foulcher, Heritage News, p. 5.
20 Lowenthal, p. xxv.