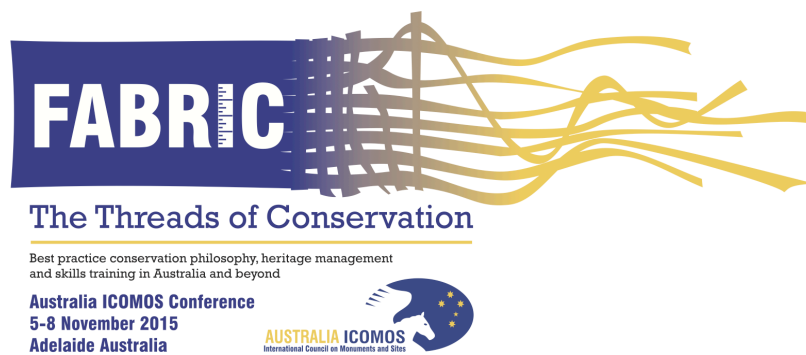


Creating Value For The Public: Beyond Significance?

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Proceedings of:



My comments on built heritage and the importance of public value to its continued stewardship draw from others' experiences of articulating public value, not simply as a reflection of public preference but the shaping of public preference in practice.

It may well be that a decline in heritage resourcing and reputation in this country reflects a mis-match in expectations of its stakeholders and a dominance of statutory purpose over telling the story. In our increasingly uncertain and competitive times, observations have been made elsewhere about stewardship more generally. Those observations remind us that heritage has a distinctive capacity to create public value: In turn public value has a distinctive ability to claim agendas and the potential to expand the esteem in which it is held.

Commenting on cultural leadership in turbulent times, Robert Hewison observed that organisations have moved from hierarchies to networks, from slow to accelerating change, products to processes and from regulation to facilitation; a predictable order is being replaced by an ever unfolding one. In this era of New Public Management, one of governance rather than government, where services are delivered by others and their provision is managed by Government, heritage has lagged in responding to such huge changes.

Recently I contributed to review of South Australia's planning system, including opinions about built heritage, the management of which is divided across separate Ministers, departments and criteria, as well as 68 local councils. My thoughts turned to the robustness of the heritage sector and its ability to schmooze, influence and be seen as natural interlocutor. As part of work toward the planning reforms, the Expert Panel on Planning Reform sought guidance on heritage management from other states. In his review of the ACT Heritage Act, Duncan Marshall noted the general trend across Australia, *'...for governments to provide less support, partly as a result of the increasing numbers of heritage places, but also because of declining priority. While individual or one-off support is sometimes provided, the perceived general pattern is of limited and declining support.'*¹

Why is that so? Does diminished priority reflect diminished public esteem for built heritage? Is there a public value deficit? Public value and cultural value, unlike asset value, are slippery terms. Those of us in the heritage industry deal regularly with notions of and thresholds for cultural value; we recognise the ambiguities and tensions inherent in reconciling cultural value with asset value of heritage places – too very different values or coincident depending on your viewpoint. David Throsby and others have attempted to resolve views of 'value' in

market-acceptable terms – including the use and non-use values for a place, particularly what became known as bequest value.

Kate Clark, (CEO, Cadw) in last year's APT Bulletin, devoted to values-based conservation, observed that if cultural heritage is not to be further marginalised, '*...preservationists need to do more to capture, articulate and communicate the value of what they do...Significance is a great start, but there is more to do.*'ⁱⁱ

Kate Clark described the public value generated by heritage as comprising:

- Caring for what people value or hold dear
- Social, economic and environmental benefits, and
- Providing a service to the public.

This may be more familiar to some as the triangle of the Intrinsic, Instrumental and Institutional, drafted by Demos to describe public value creation by public institutions.

Public value theory had considerable impact in the noughties in Britain when heritage was on the nose to such extent that Tessa Jowell, Tony Blair's Culture Secretary, delivered a lengthy and personal essay *Government and the value of culture* (2004) without once using the word 'heritage'. This and her subsequent essay *Better Places to Live* (2005) provoked English Heritage and the National Trust to better engage their respective publics – a significant turning point in policy debate and a re-positioning of the public value of heritage – perhaps a reminder of Jamie Oliver challenging views on nutrition to refine public preferences and ultimately impact political opinion.

The public value of heritage had been eroded to such extent in the UK, that a profound 're-set' of the sector was provoked, to better link institutions and professions with the publics they serve. The National Trust, contributed to this re-set with short accessible stories on why particular places mattered, its 'Spirit of Place' initiative. Statements of significance were aggregated into strategies for the marketing of individual places and their presentation. They were also nationally linked to form thematic views of 'Going Local', connecting widely dispersed places of local significance into an 'institution' on a grand scale.

Most recently in our case, Jim Kerr's obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald inferred that a battle for heritage thinking was still being waged here, between those who viewed heritage as

the preserve of experts and others who saw it as broader and moulded by the public. Meredith Walker elsewhere offered some insight to these distinctions in approach and service. *‘In hindsight it [is] clear that more attention should have been given to passing on the meanings of places to people...One explanation for the focus on process and regulation is that in Australia the heritage agencies are within Ministerial portfolios related to planning and regulation and not to culture and the arts.’*ⁱⁱⁱ

If heritage is being eroded from public discourse and resourcing in this country, then where is the ‘tilt’ to unseat adverse perceptions of heritage by some, to pump and prime alternative strategies to re-set and re-position the brand as occurred in the UK?

Damian Borchok, previous head of Interbrand (Australia and New Zealand), speaking at a past Heritage Week function promoted notions of heritage as evolving, to be viewed as ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’. He briefly explored his view through the commercial brand as metaphor. He began with the freshness of brand creation, then the importance of keeping current and competitive through brand adaptation, but ultimately the need for brand disruption – the anxious bite of bottom lip, clients brought up short but then engaged in re-set and transformation to begin the cycle anew.

One of the more spectacular demonstrations of marketing the ‘brand’ and expanding institutional value grew from BBC Radio 4 challenging the British Museum to tell a history of the world in 100 objects. From its vast accumulations of 250 years of collecting, the museum selected particular objects for their ability to tell more than one story, to make connections and provoke insight. With radio as sole medium, the objects would have to be imagined, with each listener constructing his or her own image of what the object might look like. As Neil MacGregor, then Director of the British Museum observed – *‘to imagine a thing’ is to appropriate it in a very particular way...every listener would make the object under discussion their own and in consequence make their own history.*^{iv} To engage with history and how personally familiar or foreign the object was to the listener must have conveyed rare and special facility to both object and institution, invoking new audiences and provoking minds to link expertise and understanding in ingenious ways. This novel form of ‘exhibition’ went on to win the 2011 Art Fund Prize, with ripple effects still being felt as the radio-based ‘program’ now tours the globe as a fully-fledged exhibition.

If Who's been sleeping in my house; If walls could talk; Grand Designs; Restoration Australia and the many and varied celebrations of antiques and classic cars are any indication of telly viewing preferences, then declining support for built heritage across Australia should be perplexing.

As a baby boomer, I grew up with the Forsyte Saga and seemingly endless variations on a theme of Upstairs Downstairs: Many then moved on to Brideshead Revisited: Most recently Downton Abbey delivers a beautiful rendition of the lives of a well-to-do household. But as Julian Fellowes stated in relation to Downton Abbey, some continuity in that theme did not mean a static portrayal. *'If we had made Downton in the 1950s, the Crawleys would have been all very gracious and charming and the servants would have been funny. If we had done it in the nineties, all the servants would have been downtrodden and gallant and the family would have been mendacious and vile.'*^v

Success of Downton relied upon, among a host of factors, accuracies in production and material expertise that transcended a fine arts appreciation or past preference for a Gainsborough, Nollekens or a piece of Chippendale as the basis of choice of which historic house to visit. The change pivots about the time of the blockbuster Treasure Houses of Britain exhibition of 1985-1986 in Washington, (almost one million visitors in just over five months) and the contemporaneous purchase for the British nation of that most fragile of time capsules, Calke Abbey, Derbyshire. At the same time, most States in Australia were busily compiling their heritage registers, the Burra Charter was being championed here and abroad, and our public institutions were building new constituencies in government, dramatising historical scholarship to enable conversations with their publics and begin a powerhouse of interpretation.

Concerns for the intrinsic importance of material, its non-use and particularly its 'bequest' values, are shared between public institutions and those working with built heritage. Despite a complication that heritage properties have both bequest and use values and public institutions hold material with largely bequest values, terms including provenance, context, comparative criteria, collection, accessioning and de-accessioning and exhibition are rarely used in terms of heritage registers and their management.

Collections Council of Australia's document *Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections*, promoted a focus on Provenance, Context and Principles. Four

guiding statements that represent a ‘common ground’ for the four major collecting domains (archives, galleries, libraries and museums) to establish the significance of a collection may be paraphrased as:

1. We cannot keep everything forever, hence significance assessments remain vital to optimising resources
2. Significance is not an absolute state, it is relative, contingent, and dynamic, and depending on perspective can change over time
3. Significance decisions may privilege some interests and marginalise others. Alternative views may be hosted that also deliver insight
4. It is vital to understand, respect and document the context of collection materials

Managing heritage registers as a collection could learn much from such terms, including:

- Answering the question of provenance (in trade terms - is it right?) by setting items in context to better ‘rank’ the relative importance of one item as compared with another. Proposed heritage listings insufficiently reveal a sense of comparative ranking.
- Defining the organising principles to govern what forms a collection and therefore what does not. Inclusion-exclusion guidance for heritage listings is often brief and principles may change over time, but re-appraisals of heritage registers are rare
- Fiona Bruce and Philip Mould regularly dramatise the judgements necessary to determine fake or fortune, just as our institutions do. But there is little heritage equivalent to the de-accessioning that may result from careful stock-takes
- If numerous ‘dots’ form a collection, selection of some and not others forms an exhibition. Joining the dots creates insight in ways that heritage places as a ‘class’ tend to find difficult. Yet such interpretation can engage and articulate social history on a grand scale
- Engaging viewers, visitors and users in questions about why a place is of value, distinguishes historical facts of subjective value from those key to establishing significance and can stimulate a didactic dimension.

Heritage registers have more potential than simply their instrumental function. Organising principles are needed to test for internal coherence of heritage registers, but also exploit the dynamic and didactic. They could be curated in ways similar to public institutions, capable of creating value and insight as entities. The compilation of registers and the conversations they encourage could more or less determine their ‘institutional’ value. Analogy with collections policy is persuasive and more potent than perhaps first realised. Correspondence of the institutional, instrumental and the intrinsic, will more or less determine the reputation, role and influence of heritage management. But that reputation is more often defined by impacts of a listing than the opportunities taken to tell the story, collaborate and build public value.

Recent work by UNESCO has challenged narrow appraisals of preservation through the lens of the Historic Urban Landscape and its wider appreciation of dynamic forces that continues to shape urban centres. Echoing something of the final page of Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country*, of some thirty years ago, UNESCO’s brochure of 2013 *New life for Historic Cities* concludes with:

‘Cities are dynamic organisms. There is not a single ‘historic’ city in the world that has retained its ‘original’ character: the concept is a moving target, destined to change with society itself. To preserve the urban historic landscape, strategic and dynamic alliances need to be built between various actors in the urban scene, foremost between public authorities that manage the city and developers and entrepreneurs that operate in the city.’^{vi}

Closer to home, the All British Day in the Adelaide Hills, annually attracts some 1,000 British classics cars. I was there when word went round that the Merlin would be run up at midday. We stood in a rough circle some dozen deep in eager anticipation. Pump, prime, whine, a blued cough, catch and adjust; the roar settled into that characteristic crackle of a Spitfire. But just a taste, ignition off, a rattling stop – then the silence was deafening. Pinking cool, the motor triggered spontaneous applause and just beyond my threshold shift I heard the man with pork sausage arms in suitably accented tones, “Thart ware the motor wot won the Battle o’ Britain”. The visceral excitement of such exhibits readily engages. But the pro-activity of its steward, the Aviation Museum, promotes relevance and influence, attracting additional exhibits, including one of the recently de-commissioned F-111s; it prompted expansion of the museum in the form of a new \$400k hangar.

There are many lessons for built heritage from the experience of our public institutions, to better engage, better understand and accordingly be better understood by others, to become more collegial in the contemporary affairs of suburb and State and re-build the appeal of the brand. Hewison and Holden at the London conference, *Capturing the public value of heritage*, extended observations by Tessa Jowell. ‘*“Historic sites, objects, modern or historic architecture can move us in just the same way as literature, music and the fine arts” ...But how they move us, and how far, is not yet part of the calculus of funding or service level agreements.*’^{vii}

Yet it is this calculus that would focus economic, environmental, socio-cultural and heritage conversations on the moving target of public value creation. We in the heritage industry would do well to cultivate broader conversations and nurture potential alliances likely to accrue from that larger canvass.

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Abstract –

Creating value for the public: Beyond significance?

We stand in a rough circle some dozen deep, eagerly anticipating the motor being ‘run up’. Pump, prime, whine, a blued cough, catch and adjust; the roar settles into that characteristic crackle of a Merlin. Ignition off, a rattling stop – now the silence is deafening.

Pinking cool, the motor triggers spontaneous applause and just beyond my threshold shift I hear the man with pork sausage arms in suitably accented tones, “Thart ware the motor wot won the Battle o’ Britain”.

We can be drawn to and entertained, at times moved, by objects of value in much the same ways as works of art, literature and block-buster exhibitions engage us. But how sites, places and historic buildings move us in similar ways seems insufficiently part of the heritage rationale. Is the appeal of heritage on the wane and what might we learn from public institutions and their periodic re-invention?

Lessons of a re-set in the UK are briefly outlined in this paper as are potential alliances, to broaden the public value of heritage as well as enliven perceptions of it.

“...preservationists have not done enough to capture, articulate and communicate the value of what they do...Significance is a great start, but there is much more to do.” [Clark, K. 2014]

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Paul is a registered architect with a lengthy association with heritage conservation in South Australia.

He served with National Trust committees, worked with local councils and with Peter Donovan and Susan Marsden, undertook the first Heritage Study of the City of Adelaide. After obtaining his MA in Conservation Studies through the IAAS at the University of York, he went on to manage the City’s extensive heritage grants program that continues to this day.

Paul has been subsequently employed by Government as an urban designer, past delegate of the heritage Minister on State heritage matters and has been assisting the reform of the planning system in the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure.

Paul has been a regular contributor to conservation summer schools at Curtin and Canberra Universities.

