



## Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Warwick Mayne-Wilson is a Heritage Landscape Consultant based in Sydney since 1991. Prior to that, he was a diplomat with the Department of Foreign Affairs for 27 years, having six overseas postings, the last in Sri Lanka as Australian High Commissioner. He left DFAT in 1985, and undertook degrees in Landscape Architecture and then Heritage Conservation in Sydney.

Warwick has produced numerous heritage studies and conservation plans on historic landscapes, streetscapes, parks and gardens, and defence establishments in NSW. He has also recorded and assessed many dry stone walls, ocean rock baths, and geological formations around Sydney. Most recently he has specialised in heritage impact assessments. Four of his projects have won awards. He is the author of many articles and lectures on these and related topics (including curtilages), as well as his recent book *Town Parks of New South Wales – Past Present and Future*.

### Is landscape fabric significant and why conserve it?

#### Paper Abstract

During 20 years of fieldwork examining landscape fabric – e.g. rock formations, ocean rock pools, parks, mature trees, or waterbodies – the question for this landscape heritage assessor then arose: when and why may they be deemed 'significant'? Is it only when they are 'converted', fashioned or designed into something by humans or, alternatively, depend on the perceptions and cultural background of the viewer?

Or is it when humans consciously or subconsciously 'register' natural fabric, or absorb its presence 'by osmosis' which engenders an enhanced affective engagement with a 'place' that items of natural fabric within it are valued as significant, so then conserved?

Many kinds of natural landscape fabric which generate universal awe, wonder, admiration and attachment are already heritage listed. More recently, technical or aesthetic skills in manipulating natural fabric – e.g. weathered rock to construct dry stone walls, or ocean rock pools converted into safe swimming pools – have created items of heritage significance too. In other cases, old quarry faces' display of ancient geological formations viewed in newly created parks alongside them have gained heritage recognition.

Old town parks contain much heritage fabric, from enclosing fences, staircases, and paving to park furnishings of all types. Many important elements were built by unemployment relief labour during the Great Depression and, as they remain the basic infrastructure of many parks today, are valued.

This paper will explore why and to what extent such diverse fabrics are 'significant' and warrant conservation. It will canvass a range of different perceptions, evaluations and appropriate conservation responses, as no one conservation methodology suits all these diverse types of fabric.

It will also argue that a community's appreciation of our geologic and ecological environment that has evolved over deep time can foster the conservation and management of natural fabric.