



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Emma Gwynn is part of the Heritage team at Old Parliament House, one of the nation's most iconic buildings, where she assists with the conservation and communication of the national and commonwealth listed values of Old Parliament House and its significant collections. Emma holds a Bachelor of Heritage Management from the University of Canberra.

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Windows on the world: conserving the bronze windows of Old Parliament House

Paper Abstract

The sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise between place managers and conservation specialists is essential to innovative and sustainable practice for the preservation of heritage places. This paper presents a case study of the conservation of the front facade of Old Parliament House, on the Australian National Heritage List where the working relationship between the staff and various contractors including the conservation specialists of International Conservation Services has led to an advanced approach to the preservation of decorative architectural metal features. When Commonwealth Architect John Smith Murdoch was given the task of designing Provisional Parliament House the Federal Capital Advisory Committee dictated that 'the external architecture would be simple, but decorous'. From the first the building was only ever expected to last for 50 to 100 years and there was a stated wish that the building not turn into an architectural jewel that might preclude later demolition.

Demolition never happened and the building is now a national icon, symbolising the spirit of Australia's democracy. For nearly 90 years the six bronze ornamental windows on the northern front façade of Old Parliament House have faced the harsh climatic conditions of Canberra. They have received little attention apart from minor running repairs and are in largely original condition. Now we are embarking on a project to ensure the preservation of these windows and the front façade of this iconic and cherished public building. In this presentation we will outline the varied technical and conservation challenges, describe the public engagement opportunities, share some of the delightful surprises that have come from understanding how and who made these architectural features what makes them significant and demonstrate how working together has enhanced our shared professional practice.