

Tracks tricks and truth: heritage routes and tourism

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There have been links between history, heritage and tourism in Australia since the mid nineteenth century, as travellers have been interested in exploring places with historical associations or areas of natural beauty. But it has only really been in the last 30 years or so that heritage and tourism have become strongly linked. Growth of interest in heritage in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with the development of tourism as a major economic and leisure industry.¹

As the links between heritage and tourism have become more evident, both in Australia and in Europe, there has been increasing debate about their relationship. There have been warnings since the 1980s that heritage values of stewardship, scholarship and identity are threatened by 'the Heritage industry'; that the language of the marketplace is structuring thinking about the function and future of heritage and that interpretation, a key element of the interface between place and visitor, is becoming a marketing tool rather than performing its more traditional roles of conveying heritage significance, educating, questioning and encouraging informed debate.²

Interpretation is also seen as a powerful tool for conveying sense of place and community identity, especially when 'interpretation and community development meet ... in a concern to create or enhance a sense of place, to establish what is significant or valued in the environment or heritage of a particular community, and to provoke action for its wider appreciation and conservation'.³ The ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter devotes considerable attention to establishing principles for cultural heritage interpretation that will:

- 'present...significance in a relevant and accessible manner to the host community and visitor';
- convey cultural complexities and conflicts of values; and
- are based on involvement of host communities and indigenous peoples.⁴

As part of the proliferation of heritage tourism activities in the last twenty years, heritage trails have appeared in country towns and older urban areas around Australia. Initially produced mostly by and for history or architecture enthusiasts, heritage trails, like other heritage 'products', are now being planned for and marketed to a wider audience.

Trails are being developed as tourist attractions in themselves and sometimes as means of directing tourists to particular places or businesses. More attention has been paid to making such trails attractive and accessible. Recent European and Australian research indicates that people who visit heritage and cultural attractions are likely to have a general rather than a specific interest in heritage. It is expected the cultural market in general will extend towards mass tourism 'through the opening of new popularised cultural and heritage attractions'.⁵ The pressures for interpretation and presentation of heritage places (and the trails that link them) to become more 'popular', more attractive and more appealing are therefore likely to increase and the traditional roles of educating, questioning and encouraging informed debate are likely to be weakened.

What do you need to do to make heritage more appealing to more people - to 'liven it up'? Some common techniques used are to select places with strong stories; select stories that will spark more interest; use graphics and design to create visual interest and use innovative interpretation techniques. As tourism marketing moves closer to heritage, the marketing essential of identifying potential target markets for the trail or heritage 'product' is incorporated at an earlier stage. The 'product' can then be developed in ways that will attract the identified market segments.

All of these things exert pressure for the trail or interpretive activity to be developed in a particular way. Heritage significance, sense of place, community values and identity struggle to survive the market-enhanced selection and communication processes. Neil Cossons' 1989 concerns remain relevant: 'can truth survive the pressures of the disposable income economy and the power of the tourism industry? ...Some will say that truth will simply wither away when the user pays; that the lowest common denominator will always apply.'⁶

Trails, interpreters and communities

Most existing cultural heritage trails in South Australia have been initiated by communities in country towns or in suburban areas that have grown up around an identifiable core⁷. The people involved in developing these trails were (and are) generally driven by an interest in history or in aspects of the natural environment. Historical societies, for instance, have been active producers of trail brochures. Tourism organisations have become involved because they believed that heritage would attract visitors to their area. None of them necessarily has interpretation skills.

Of the hundreds of heritage walking and driving trails in country towns and urban areas all over Australia, it is likely that a minority have been planned with principles of good interpretation in mind. Most interpretation practitioners have focussed their attention on national parks or museums. I have observed from my ten years' experience as a consultant that many communities – and much of the tourism industry - don't know what the term interpretation means, and few have knowledge of interpretation theory and applications.

Gillian Binks' comments (quoted earlier) on the potential of the relationship between heritage, community and interpretation are a valuable reminder of what can be achieved when all goes well. She went on to say that 'Interpreting ... local heritage and environment in all its forms and expressions is a key aspect of the process of community development. It has a significant role to play in identifying and maintaining the richness of diversity of communities both urban and rural. A tourism product so well grounded in a community's heritage and environment is (much more) likely to be self-sustaining long after the fashion for a more ephemeral tourist activity has passed'.⁸

This paper presents a case study of cultural heritage trails in the South Australian town of Angaston.

Angaston: tourism development and heritage trails⁹

Heritage walk brochure, 1993

Angaston is in the Barossa Valley, 80 km from Adelaide. It has a number of buildings on the State and national heritage registers and was designated a historic town by Tourism South Australia in the 1980s. Its first heritage trail was developed by a community committee for the heritage program of the 1993 Barossa Vintage Festival. The trail linked twenty two places around the central part of the town. Community members with an interest in history assembled the material for it. The places selected for inclusion were generally agreed to be representative of important themes in Angaston's history as a community, including its close connection with the Angas family, members of which played important roles in the foundation of South Australia. Most of these places were listed on the State Heritage Register. Most were included in the Heritage Survey of the town.¹⁰ The heritage survey report together with other sources used in compiling the information for the brochure were acknowledged and further sources if information were suggested for those interested. Funding for the brochure was obtained through the South Australian Cultural Tourism Committee. Local businesses Yalumba Winery and AQ Printworks assisted with sponsorship.

The outcome was a glossy brochure that met with an enthusiastic reception from towns people and visitors. Architectural description and social history dominated the content. The first print run of 5000 was used up within a year. Guided walks following the trail route were held at weekends, conducted by volunteer guides from the community.

Heritage, business and tourism – the ideal

Towards the end of 1993, Angaston moved towards setting up a Main Street program. The objectives of this program, run initially through the SA Tourism Commission, were to 'maximis[e] the opportunities of a community so it can revitalise its main street and increase the potential of business and tourism activities'.¹¹ Public meetings were held, an Angaston Main Street committee was formed, funding was obtained from the State government for the 1994/95 financial year, and a Coordinator was appointed. From the outset, the Angaston Main Street Program was seen as a means to 'link heritage, business and tourism' along the length of the main street, Murray Street.

A 1995 Tourism, Heritage and Interpretation report commissioned by the Committee recommended the development of opportunities for visitors to appreciate Angaston's history and heritage, including identifying and interpreting places of interest in and near Murray Street.

Implementing the heritage interpretation program was the responsibility of a working group that reported back to the Main Street committee. Over the next two years, themes for interpretation were agreed upon; plaques were planned for a number of buildings in the main street; interpretive signs at six key locations were designed; the existing heritage walk brochure was reprinted, then 'livened up' and reprinted again. An innovative interpretive tool, the Angaston Game, was planned.

Community process – the reality

Nothing quite worked out the way the way it was intended. The heritage working group met a number of times to consider what should be included in the various activities. Their suggestions were then put to the Main Street committee, and to several public meetings. Other interested individuals made suggestions and contributions and changes were made as a consequence. For instance, interpretive plaques were initially

planned for 18 buildings identified by the consultant and the heritage working group. These buildings were all included in the existing heritage walk brochure. A later decision by the Main Street committee that the plaques would have to be paid for by sponsorship changed the basis for determining which buildings would have plaques. The Angaston Main Street Newsletter of October 1995 opened the door:

Families and shop owners, anyone with an interest or story to tell, can sponsor a plaque....This project is a beauty. It's a way that for a little money, your family and your family history can be remembered. It's another way in which our town can enhance its special character.¹²

This change in interpretation process had both positive and negative outcomes. Several local businesses responded to this, wrote their own texts and put the plaques on their front walls. This broadened the base of ownership of the plaques program, drew attention to buildings that were not included in the heritage walk and added some details of building use to the common pool of information. But control of content was lost and some of the buildings recommended for plaques did not get them because sponsorship was not forthcoming. In retrospect, it was a turning point in the interpretation program.

The walk brochure was 'livened up' by a public relations professional who re-did the graphics and rewrote the text. The 1844 George Fife Angas print on the front cover of the original was moved to the inside and a new picture of Angaston's early twentieth century lamplighter was chosen to replace it – pictures with people in them were thought more likely to appeal to a wider range of visitors. The historical introduction was shortened, subheadings were put in to break up blocks of text and building names were highlighted. Some of the original information on architectural details was replaced by social history, reflecting the incorporation of information from more local sources. The entry on the Old Police Station and Gaolhouse underwent most transformation. The original was:

Old Police Station and Gaolhouse

Angaston's old police station was built of rubble, marble and limestone in 1855 on land donated by George Fife Angas. In 1866 Angaston's first telegraph line was set up to the station. Stables, a gaol house, courtroom, magistrates' room and cells were added in 1865. Since 1961 the building has been used as a private residence.¹³

The 'livened up' text for the second version reads:

Police Station and Courthouse

George Fife Angas deplored drunken and unruly behaviour. He wrote in 1851: 'there were persons prowling amongst sheep stations and shepherds' huts in the neighbourhood, who did untold injury in making the shepherds drunk with spirits slyly introduced but no one had authority to apprehend them'.

Angas lobbied the Government for the area's first police station. He then donated the land and building materials. The complex eventually included stables, courtroom, magistrates room and cells for wrongdoers.

The Old Police Station now houses Bethany Art Gallery. Nine inch baltic pine and slab slate floors are worth a look.¹⁴

The map was made easier to read by marking the trail route with a dotted line in addition to numbered sites and including the creek that runs through the middle of the town. Some information about modern businesses was included, together with new sections on Schulz Butcher and Angaston Cottage Industries – both important elements in the recent social history of the town as well as businesses selling local produce. Visitors were encouraged to enter the buildings that were open to the public such as businesses and churches.

The outcome was a walk brochure that retained most (but not all) of the historical information of the original and linked it more strongly to the town's contemporary life. The Angaston Main Street agenda of promoting the town's businesses and its market position as a historic village was moved forward.

Neither version includes any reference to the Peramangk people who occupied the land before European settlement. Throughout the Barossa region, in fact, there is such a heavy emphasis on its settlement history that Indigenous culture and heritage are rarely or barely mentioned in histories and interpretive materials.

The Angaston Game – the plan

In 1996, planning began on a game that would build on the existing heritage walking trail as a new and different type of interpretive tool that would interest families as well as the age 35-plus adults who are the main users of the heritage walk. The game was to link heritage places and businesses in and near the main street, and encourage visitors to enter main street shops. It aimed to encourage visitors and residents to look more closely at the town

The game was originally planned to have a map with two routes marked on it; two sets of cards, each with an image relating to a building or site on the town walk and a question or 'clue' that would help game players to match the picture with the place.¹⁵ Matching the cards with the places was the game 'quest'. A booklet with interesting stories about Angaston was to accompany the cards and map.

The heritage subcommittee spent about a year identifying places to be included on two routes for the game walk and thinking about what sorts of images might be used on the cards and what the clues might be. Site selection was based on buildings already identified as having significance for the town. Most of them were heritage-listed. The committee felt that the final writing and art work needed to be done by somebody creative – they had historical interests and research skills rather than graphics, design and game writing.

The Angaston Game – the reality

Main Street applied successfully to the South Australian Country Arts Trust for funding for an artist to work with members of the local community to 'liven up' the game. Part of the requirements of this funding program was that the artist selected work with artists from the community and develop their skills in the chosen art form. The artist appointed had a particular interest in developing virtual reality games. The original intention was that he work with the material already gathered and develop a new game

on the model the committee had worked on. He rejected this model very early in his appointment and effectively discarded the work that had preceded his appointment and began to work on a new format. This was based on the sort of framework used for developing 'choose your own adventure' or virtual reality games such as popular 'quest' computer games, where players choose a role and play out a set of scenarios that vary with the choices made by the player. There was excitement about the potential to develop something both engaging and original. It was also risky – nobody really understood what the artist had in mind or what he would want them to do. Nevertheless, there was general agreement that his recommendations be followed.

A new working group was set up and more public meetings were held. The new aims were more ambitious but less specific about target markets – they were to 'draw tourists in and get them to stay for longer' and 'educate visitors in a user-friendly way about the town'.¹⁶ Infotainment rather than education dominated the agenda. The new working group grappled with new concepts and game-speak: protagonists, heroes, villains, quests. It became very clear that fiction would dominate and that the only place for history was as fragments of story ideas around which a character or scenario could develop. There was debate in the working group about lack of concern about themes and the distortion of history. The historians fell away from the working group leaving the creative writers and artists to work on game development as directed by the artist.

In 1999, the emerging new game was described thus:

We designed the Angaston Town game as an interactive role playing game. Assuming the identity of a fictitious character from Angaston's past, the player involves themselves in a 'virtual reality; mystery adventure, one incorporating some interesting and sometimes spicy tales of old Angaston. Played on the 'game board' of the Main Street, the game leads the player through the town from the sites of historical interest to shops and establishments. Local products and services are clues or other crucial elements to the game play, thus advertising them to the player while further promoting the town. [It aims to] attract the eye of international tourism at the highest level.¹⁷

This sounds compatible with the original objectives. But if we look at the actual product we can see that there has been a fundamental change. The game (now called 'Villagers and Villains') is based around eight imaginary characters (protagonists), each of whom has a 'quest' or adventure. Players choose a character and a quest and then follow complex instructions. '8 Adventures 25 Options 16 outcomes You Pick the Path!' calls the game book cover.

The promotional flier that accompanied the game's launch in August 2000 warns: 'The Game is challenging, with wrong turns at every choice, presenting players with obstacles and lies'. The style of writing, presentation and graphics appear to be designed to attract the sort of audience that might be interested in 'Choose your own Adventure' books or 'quest' computer games. Characters include Mik Williams, the [fictional] stone mason, whose introduction includes this description 'You are the no-good Mik Williams, rogue, liar and cheat. Are you as sinister as people think, or is that all an act?... A law unto yourself you hate petty bureaucrats and rules and the Law. The damned thing was written by the rich to protect their interest after all. Well to hell

with them.’ Mik’s quest is to rid his house of the ghost of ‘the silly cow’ who drowned herself ‘to prove her love for you’[ie the character Mik].

Amongst the fictional characters are real people from Angaston’s history – founding father George Fife Angas and lamplighter John Bott among them. Their character descriptions in the game book give no indication that they are different from the wholly fictional characters. Genuine historical issues, such as the connection between poor water quality and infant mortality in the nineteenth century, are bundled up with ghost stories created for the game.

The presentation of history and heritage in this way raises serious and troubling issues.

The stories are invented. False images of Angaston’s past have been created. The characters, claiming to be based on ‘fair dinkum people’¹⁸ have at best a tenuous relationship with Angaston’s history. The expressed hope that ‘visitors will discover the unique history and qualities of Angaston’¹⁹ by playing the game is seriously misplaced. The language is inappropriate on every level. It does nothing to enhance sense of place or convey what is significant or valued in Angaston. The end product, designed to attract a wider audience than the more traditional heritage walk, is without an obvious market. The usual history/heritage audience will be alienated by the style, approach and lack of substantial content. The young, male audience most likely to respond to this sort of approach has not materialised. The game book, bag and sundry accessories costs \$10 to buy – this in itself is a barrier for young players.

In 2000, I had a group of my Bachelor of Cultural students trial the game before its formal launch. Among them were parents of young children who said it was so confusing and frustrating that they would not consider playing it with their children. One group reported that they realised that they were so focussed on sorting out the game rules that they had not actually taken much notice of Angaston itself. They reported frustration at the lack of ‘real’ information about the town.

Conclusion

Despite the existence of interpretive guidelines, extensive community involvement and input from local historians, I believe the *Villagers and Villains* end-product fails dismally as either history or heritage tourism trail. David Lowenthal’s *The Heritage Crusade* examines issues raised by the exploitation of heritage in the marketplace. Lowenthal distinguishes history from heritage which is packaged for the marketplace. Heritage, he says, makes no attempt to create a ‘true impression’ of the past or to be objective or impartial – ‘values to which many historians have aspired, with varying degrees of success’. It ‘exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error’.²⁰

The Angaston Game left history behind in its eagerness to attract new audiences. It is consistent with Lowenthal’s view of heritage. And Cossons concerns that truth would wither away and the lowest common denominator apply have been borne out in this example. *Villagers and Villains* was produced as a marketing exercise - what is not yet clear is the market response to the Game.

This case study demonstrates the difficulty of achieving heritage interpretation with integrity. Good intentions and community involvement are not sufficient, even when community members have interest, expertise and talent. Nor is it sufficient to have general guidelines for interpretation. Clear and detailed guidelines are essential – and they must include guidelines on acceptable approach and content.

The story of the Angaston Game also shows the importance of ensuring that:

- Artists and designers work to clearly defined briefs. Briefs need to specify the interpretive framework within which the artist should work. They need to be very carefully worded on matters of control of content and style.
- Reporting mechanism provide for regular checks on progress and adherence to guidelines. These mechanisms will obviously vary from place to place and organisation to organisation.
- The issue of control is clarified from the start - who controls the selection and presentation of information, who controls the images and style, who controls the nature of the outcomes.

In Angaston, these standards and processes were not in place. *Villagers and Villains* is an unhappy example of the corruption of heritage in the push for entertainment.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Davison, G. 1991; Richardson, J.I. 1999.
- ² Hewison 1989:17-18, and many of the papers in Uzzell, D. 1999. See also Cultural heritage and tourism : Australia ICOMOS Conference on History, Architecture, Environment (1990: Adelaide); *Historic Environment* April 1990; ICOMOS 1999.
- ³ Binks 1989:191.
- ⁴ ICOMOS 1999.
- ⁵ Richards, G. 2000:14; Prentice 1993; Foo, M. and Rossetto, A. 1998.
- ⁶ Cossons 1989:17.
- ⁷ Examples in Adelaide are Norwood, Port Adelaide, Mitcham and Tea Tree Gully.
- ⁸ Binks 1989:193.
- ⁹ Sources used for Angaston include notes of public meetings; minutes of Angaston Main Street committee and subcommittee meetings; and personal papers.
- ¹⁰ Linn 1990.
- ¹¹ *Main Street Newsletter* 1(1). 1993?
- ¹² *Angaston News* October 1995.
- ¹³ *A Heritage Walk of Angaston* 1991.
- ¹⁴ *A Heritage Walk of Angaston* c.1995.
- ¹⁵ These ideas were inspired by the English *Bollington Quest*.
- ¹⁶ Angaston Town Game January 98 Update.
- ¹⁷ Report to Main Street Committee, April 22 1999.
- ¹⁸ Angaston Main Street and Lumsden de Vries 2000:2.
- ¹⁹ *Villagers and Villains* flier, 2000.
- ²⁰ Lowenthal, D. 1997:121.