



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Amy Jarvis is the Heritage Officer at the Australian National University (ANU). Holding a Bachelor of Cultural Heritage Studies with Honours, Amy has worked in heritage conservation and management in both the private and public sectors as a researcher, consultant and manager.

Having managed and worked on conservation and strategic management projects throughout Australia, Amy's role at the ANU has provided her with unique opportunities to delve deeply in to the history of not only the ANU itself but the early development of Canberra. Over the last 18 months, Amy has been managing major restoration and outreach projects at ANU's Mount Stromlo Observatory, one of Canberra's earliest and most significant scientific sites.

Understanding Through Fabric: The Stabilisation and Interpretation of the Mt Stromlo Director's Residence

Paper Abstract

Upon completion in 1928 the Director's Residence was one of Canberra's grandest dwellings. Hosting opulent events and distinguished guests, it was the social heart of the Mount Stromlo Observatory.

The bushfires of 18 January 2003 changed both the Observatory and Canberra forever. Cyclonic winds, extreme temperatures, a fierce fire front and the resulting ember attack razed much of the mountain. The iconic Director's Residence was one of the built casualties of the fire. Left without a roof, windows, doors or much of its interior, the building remained a constant and stark reminder of the ferocity and devastation of that day.

For over 10 years the building stood like a 'broken tooth' on the ridge, fenced from the public with its condition continuing to deteriorate. ANU had focussed on rebuilding the research and working capacity of the site, however during this period the once strong connection with the community had started to fade.

In 2013, ANU was fortunate to receive two Commonwealth grants – one to develop an interactive heritage trail, and the other to undertake stabilisation and interpretation works at the Director's Residence. Launched in January 2015, the project saw the Residence transform to interpret the many layers of history on the site, providing a unique, contrasting and evocative visual and visitor experience.

The fabric of the residence actively illustrates the site's evolution with the outside resembling its 1928 form, while the interiors bear the scars of the fires and the significant work which was undertaken to ensure its stability. With four unique audio-visual installations to communicate both the history of the Residence and the Observatory, ANU has succeeded in providing a visitor attraction, which meets both the requirements of the Burra Charter and re-engages the Canberra and national community with the site.