

# Geographies of Australian Heritages

Loving a Sunburnt Country?

*Edited by*

**ROY JONES**

*Curtin University of Technology, Perth,  
Western Australia*

and

**BRIAN J. SHAW**

*The University of Western Australia*



# GEOGRAPHIES OF AUSTRALIAN HERITAGES

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*For First Generation Australians  
Josephine and Bernard Shaw and Lee,  
Ceridwen and Lewis Jones*

## Chapter 1

# Introduction: Geographies of Australian Heritages

Roy Jones and Brian J. Shaw

### **Heritages: things worth saving?**

As other geographers before us have acknowledged, heritage ‘is an idea that is being increasingly loaded with so many different connotations as to be in danger of losing all meaning’ (Graham et al. 2000, 1). The many ways in which heritage can be divided include: topically (natural and cultural – and a whole range of subsets, such as botanical and architectural, under these broad headings); ethnically (Indigenous, settler, migrant – and into numerous subgroups within these classifications); perceptually (tangible and intangible or, more broadly, experienced by the senses or the intellect); and by scale (local, national, global and various levels in between these three). Yet all these sub-categories of heritage will contain an array of items, which are considered to be, in Lowenthal’s (1979, 555) words, ‘things worth saving’. However, precisely what is considered to be worth saving will change over time. Graham et al’s (2000, 2) claim that the ‘key defining element’ of heritage is ‘the *present* (our emphasis) needs of the people’ is significant. For example, in late nineteenth century Australia the ‘convict stain’ was something to be eradicated. By the late twentieth century, convict-built – and convict built – heritage was widely valorised and many Australians now search increasingly sophisticated databases in search of convict ancestors.

Thus Graham et al. remind us that heritage is fundamentally a contemporary phenomenon. While we may wish to save things from the past for the future, it is the opinions, decisions and actions of people in the present that bring about their salvation and preservation or, indeed, their obliteration. Furthermore, both Graham et al (2000, 3) and Lowenthal, through his use of the term ‘worth’, remind us of the significant and growing economic dimension of heritage. Whatever their scientific, aesthetic or sociocultural merit, it is their financial ‘worth’ that is an increasingly important factor in decisions on whether particular heritage items are presently ‘needed’.

But, while the commercialisation and, thus, the commodification of heritage is one ‘connotation’ by which the term can lose elements of its meaning, a further problem arises when the question ‘Who are the “people” whose present needs are to be met?’ is put. In settler and multicultural societies, such as Australia, the views of different groups on which ‘things’ are and are not ‘worth saving’ in this context are likely to diverge considerably.

**Australian heritages**

For most of Australia's colonial and postcolonial history, its various governments strove to impose a British heritage on the continent and its inhabitants. In many ways, their enduring success in this regard has been impressive. The English language is the undisputed means of both official and general communication for the vast majority of the population. As late as 1952, an article in the *Adelaide Advertiser* referred to 'English' and 'foreign' migrants as separate categories (Jones 1995, 251) and strong discrimination in favour of, if not English, then certainly British and, to a lesser extent, European, migrants continued until the 1970s. And, in 1999, Australians voted to retain a British head of state.

But other heritages either remain or emerge. Given both its size and its location, the natural environments of Australia are diverse, globally idiosyncratic and radically different from those of the British Isles. For the settler groups, as for the Indigenous population that preceded them, the colonisation of Australia involved coming to terms with a challenging and initially unfamiliar physical environment (Bolton 1981) and, for at least some of these settlers, this has also entailed an identification with the continent's natural landscapes and an acknowledgment that elements of these landscapes are 'worth saving' (Powell 2005). Indeed Dorothea McKellar made this identity shift as early as 1906

The love of field and coppice,  
Of green and shaded Lanes,  
Of ordered woods and gardens,  
Is running in your veins;  
Strong love of grey-blue distance,  
Brown streams and soft, dim skies –  
I know but cannot share it,  
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,  
Of drought and flooding rains,  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel sea,  
Her beauty and her terror –  
The wide brown land for me.

Just as these landscapes could not be 'embellished' (Stannage 1990) until they became something that was merely British, so the Indigenous population could not be simply obliterated. While the debate over the attempt to wipe out Tasmania's Aboriginal population continues (Macintyre 2004; Windschuttle 2002) the early and even mid twentieth century belief that the role of the colonisers was merely to 'smooth the dying pillow' (Bates 1938) of the Indigenous population was widespread. But, in the early twenty first century, the Aboriginal population has once more reached pre-conquest levels, and Indigenous birth rates are significantly higher than those of virtually all the settler populations. In practical terms, serious levels of Indigenous

disadvantage remain, notably, but certainly not only, in health standards and life expectancy rates. But, in comparison with the assumption of 'terra nullius' by the first European colonisers, the upholding of the existence of a form of Native Title in the Mabo and Wik High Court decisions of the 1990s is at least a step forward in the acknowledgment of Australia's Indigenous heritages.

From its (British) birth in 1788, there has also, and always, been cultural and, thus, heritage diversity within Australia's settler population. Initially, the Irish were the most culturally significant non-British group (Proudfoot 2003). Although Ireland was part of the United Kingdom from 1800 to 1922, this group always maintained a (largely Catholic) identity separate from that of the predominantly Protestant British Australians. Both Ned Kelly, the bushranger, in his Jerilderie letter of 1879, and Peter Lalor, the leader of Eureka Stockade rebellion in 1854, invoked their Irish heritage in their opposition to British control of Australia. But Lalor's lieutenants included a Prussian and an Italian and the gold rush which led to the Eureka rebellion also precipitated the arrival in Australia of large numbers of 'diggers' from all over the world, though it was the influx of the Chinese that gave rise to most contemporary concern.

Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century successive waves of migrants added to the country's cultural diversity. These settlers came from Southern and Central Europe in the immediate post-war period and subsequently from the Eastern Mediterranean, East and South East Asia and the Pacific. The proportion of overseas-born in the population fell from 23 per cent in 1901 to 10 per cent in 1947, but then rose to 24 per cent by 2004. Significantly perhaps, this early twentieth century fall in the proportion of overseas born coincided with Australia's first decades as a unified (albeit federal) and (relatively) independent nation. Patriotism and nationalism were fostered both by the progress towards federation at the end of the nineteenth century and by the country's participation in two World Wars. By mid-century, therefore, a distinctive Australian identity and heritage were developing in a way that made the country 'very familiar and awfully strange' (Hammerton and Thomson 2005, 124) to the Ten Pound Poms arriving there from Britain. In subsequent decades an increasingly diverse nation has sought to define and redefine a distinctively Australian heritage and identity in which this diversity has been variously celebrated, as in the endorsement of multiculturalism in the 1970s, and decried, as in the contemporary search for a single set of 'Australian values'.

### **Geographies of Australian heritages**

To paraphrase Graham et al. (2000, 4–5), heritage occurs in place(s), it is important to people (s), it is inevitably 'context bound and power laden' and it is 'an economic good and is commodified as such'. It therefore mirrors geography in its concerns for places/environments, for peoples and their identities, for power and conflict (particularly over space) and for local and regional development. Given these multiple similarities, it is not surprising that heritage issues arise in a wide range of geographical sub fields from environmental management through cultural, historical, political and economic geography to urban and regional development and tourism.

With this in mind, the remaining chapters of this volume provide a series of geographical perspectives on a selection of Australian heritages. In compiling this collection we have sought to mix the environmental and the cultural, the metropolitan and the remote, the economic and the political and the academic and the applied by bringing together a group of authors who are predominantly geographers by training, though their current academic positions also encompass Planning, Tourism, Archaeology, Heritage and Urbanism and University Management. We have also moved beyond academia to include contributors working in Park Management and Heritage Tourism as well as a private Heritage Consultant. In doing so, we have sought to illustrate some of the varied ways in which inhabitants of this sunburnt country have chosen – or have not chosen – to love it.

### **Loving a sunburnt country?**

In Chapter 2, Graeme Aplin carefully outlines the legislative and bureaucratic framework for heritage protection in Australia. He details the responsibilities of the federal government and those of the respective states, territories and local authorities, while also considering the roles of voluntary and community organisations. While making the point that the bulk of practical, day-to-day heritage responsibility rests with the states and territories, or with local government, he devotes particular attention to the recent overhaul of federal environment and heritage legislation by the Howard Coalition Government, an issue that is later revisited by William Logan in the concluding chapter.

In Chapter 3, Aplin extends this introductory analysis in the global context, specifying the part played by Australia under the terms of the World Heritage Convention. He provides a detailed analysis of Australia's sixteen World Heritage properties and the contenders for possible future nomination, detailing the sometimes-thorny relationships that exist between the Australian Government and World Heritage bodies in relation to controversial development issues in places such as Kakadu National Park. The focus on National Parks is continued in Chapter 4 where C. Michael Hall documents the changing geographies of Australia's wilderness heritage. This chapter discusses the wilderness concept and provides an insightful historical account of the Australian wilderness conservation ethic and movement. Hall also details the growth in Commonwealth regulatory capacity and state responsibilities, together with the ongoing importance of tourism as an economic rationale for wilderness conservation.

In Chapter 5, Marion Hercock reveals a different perspective on wilderness heritage, writing on the ABC of running an innovative heritage-based tourism operation. Based on her own personal experiences, she details the wider economic and social context of global finance and markets that impinge upon her operation; the 'paradox of place and places' which adds to the problem of marketing little-known sites; and some of the 'on the ground' complexities created by the local social setting, which includes government administration of conservation reserves, the private management of mining and pastoral leases and the administration of Aboriginal lands, as well as the physical environment and the unpredictability created

by rain or storm events. This essay raises some interesting questions regarding the sustainability of small heritage tourism operations.

Chapter 6, written by Roy Jones, Colin Ingram and Andrew Kingham, demonstrates how the three central characters of Australia's iconic Waltzing Matilda narrative, namely 'swagmen', 'squatters' and 'troopers', intersect in today's 'outback' area of the North West Cape – Ningaloo Reef region of Western Australia. Their present-day equivalents, being unauthorised wilderness campers, production-oriented pastoralists and local regulatory authorities, are now increasingly engaged in a number of contestations regarding access to key resources, the preservation of natural heritage and the management of the rapidly growing tourism industry.

In Chapter 7, Wendy Shaw draws our attention to notions of tradition and heritage as they are applied to Indigenous peoples in Australia. She argues that because Aboriginal people and their associated places have been disengaged from mainstream experiences, they have become museum-like objects. Consequently Indigenous heritage remains discursively locked in archaeological pasts, and urbanised Indigeneity in places such as *The Block*, in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern, is constructed as 'out of place'. She compares this contemporary spatial reality to Sydney's Rocks area that has now been (re)fabricated and cleansed to represent an idealised and sanitised history of colonisation. This theme of deliberate demarcation between indigenous and settler heritage is continued in Chapter 8 where Nicholas Gill and Alistair Paterson write about Aboriginal people and Australian pastoral cultural heritage, whereby the myriad Aboriginal involvements in pastoralism have been largely forgotten and have gone unmarked. The authors emphasise the diversity of Aboriginal associations with pastoralism and pastoralists, the variety of Aboriginal pastoral landscapes, and the continued relevance and dynamism of Aboriginal associations with pastoralism, through a number of case studies utilising archaeological and geographical perspectives.

Chapter 9 provides us with an invaluable insight into South Australia's long and distinctive Germanic heritage, set in the context of rural idyll place making. Matthew W. Rofo and Hilary P.M. Winchester trace the changing nature and representations of Germanic heritage and reveal the contested nature of local place identity in the Adelaide Hills village of Lobethal, established by German Lutherans in 1842. The village's contemporary construction as a Christmas wonderland has reinvented and reinvigorated a declining rural community but the authors look beyond the obvious boosterism to unravel the complexity inherent in the landscape and the highly subjective nature of heritage place making.

The remaining case studies deal with urban-based heritage in Perth, Western Australia. In Chapter 10, Catherine Kennewell and Brian J. Shaw examine Perth's 1962 Commonwealth Games legacy. More than 'just' sporting heritage, the Games were instrumental in exposing the rather parochial capital of Australia's hitherto 'Cinderella State' to the much wider world, yet the future prospects for Perry Lakes stadium, the main venue for track and field events, and the award-winning Games Village in City Beach, are now decidedly uncertain. The authors trace the demise of these structures in the context of vested residential interests, urban planning initiatives and the broader issues that relate to the upgrading and relocation of sporting stadia. The realisation that any objective assessment of heritage value quickly disappears in

the face of potentially reduced resale values, or of restrictive development guidelines on private properties, is a recurring theme that resurfaces in Rosario's chapter.

Roy Jones, who writes on Port, Sport and Heritage in Western Australia's historic port city of Fremantle, continues the sporting theme in Chapter 11. While the value of Fremantle's built heritage is unquestioned, the lack of National Heritage Listing notwithstanding, the city has other significant roles, notably as a major port and as a significant service, entertainment and tourist centre. Jones traces the history of Fremantle's development and tells the story of how these roles have become increasingly intertwined and, on occasions, contested, in a climate of economic, demographic, social and cultural changes. Contestation is also the dominant theme underpinning Rosemary Rosario's Chapter 12, entitled 'Places Worth Keeping', which considers the case for the protection of heritage at the local level. Written from the perspective of a heritage professional, this chapter reviews some of the issues relating to the City of Subiaco's release of the review of its municipal inventory, looks at their immediate aftermath, and some longer-term consequences. It concludes by addressing the ways in which local heritage can be managed successfully, calling for the heritage message to be clearer, easier to understand, more consistent and, above all, balanced.

Finally, Chapter 13, written by William S. Logan, provides a reflective summary of the issues encapsulated in the wider volume. This concluding chapter re-casts heritage as an element of Australian cultural politics, exploring the linkages between ideology and conservation practice. It considers some of the current difficulties being experienced by the Australian heritage system that render it vulnerable to political exploitation. Moreover, Logan echoes some of the concerns expressed by the heritage professionals writing in this volume, that the system is over-extended in respect to its planning control functions, while still narrow in heritage content and fragmented in its efforts to provide appropriate legislation and administration. Most appropriately, in a volume such as this, he concludes by recommending a special role for geographers, whereby their unique set of synthesising skills and interests can be marshalled to challenge the neo-liberal social and economic development approach. The geography agenda insofar as it relates to heritage issues can embrace the intangible values of places and help to achieve more holistic and culturally sensitive approaches to environmental understanding and protection.

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