KEEPING HOUSE FOR DIFFERENT MASTERS

History, Heritage and House Museums in Australia

Anna Wong

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Department of History
School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
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ABSTRACT

Far from the popular perception of stuffy rooms filled with dusty furniture, house museums are an integral part of our heritage and cultural character. It is the experiential and three-dimensional aspects of house museums through the combined practices of architectural design, history, decorative and fine arts, which makes them such a powerful interpretative medium. The presentation of a complete historic environment that includes buildings, furnished rooms and gardens, provides a window into a past that is both familiar and easily recognised. Since Vaucluse House (the first Australian house museum opened in 1912), house museums have both reflected and influenced how the public perceive their past and also what constitutes cultural identity.

This thesis examines how seemingly realistic presentations of past environments mask a social arena where definitions of heritage and history are constructed and contested. This study of the historical milestones of the house museum movement traces how the Australian house museum played a central role in the heritage movement, both philosophically and methodologically; and how house museums reflected and shaped particular perceptions of Australia, its past, and its cultural identity over the past century.

Beginning with historical developments in America, England and Australia in the mid-nineteenth century which culminated in the opening of Vaucluse House, this thesis focuses on eight Australian house museums to highlight the milestones in the house museum and heritage movements, and their cultural, social and political basis. These include Vaucluse House, Experiment Farm Cottage, Elizabeth Bay House, Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill Estate, Hyde Park Barracks, Susannah Place and the Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House.

This thesis also illustrates how house museums were, and remain, a ‘cultural locus’ of changing cultural perceptions and values. Rather than being a simple reflection of the museum’s creator or curator, the conservation and interpretative history of house museums reveal the complexity of the heritage and history-making process. A multitude of social, cultural and political factors, both past and present, have converged to shape the form, content and history of house museums.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements i
List of Figures iii
Abbreviations xiii

INTRODUCTION:
From Brideshead Revisited to Sojourns into Heritage 1
The House Museum 3
Opening the Doors: Sojourns into the History of Heritage 5
History, Heritage and House Museums 8
Studying the House Museum at the Centre of Converging Forces: Research Methodology and Thesis Outline 16

1 MELDING NEW WORLDS AND OLD:
Creating an Australian Heritage from American Modernity and British Traditions 23
Introduction 23
Mount Vernon: The American Heritage Movement and the First House Museum 25
‘Civil Religion’ and the Deification of George Washington 27
Middle-Class Reform and the ‘Cult of Domesticity’ in Nineteenth Century America 31
Mount Vernon: Melding Civil Religion and Domestic Reform 36
The Next Generation: American Progressivism and the Colonial Revival 42
The Advent of the Period Room and the Colonial Revival 42
Progressivism and Professional Heritage Practices: SPNEA and William Sumner Appleton 52
The Beginning of a Standardised Heritage System 55
Using Science to Create an Idealised Past 57
Searching for an Antipodean Hero: Australian Historical Consciousness from 1880 to 1914 59
Popularising Australian History 60
Pioneering Australia’s Heritage Movement 66
History Museums and Hero-making in the ‘Future America’ 67
Summary Conclusion 73
2 Turning Historical Consciousness into Bricks and Mortar: Vaucluse House and the First House Museum in Australia

Introduction

Creating the Home of Australia’s Founding Father

William Charles Wentworth: The Makings of ‘The Hero of Australia’

Building the Gothic Revival Dream

American Progressivism, Environmental Politics and the Resumption of Vaucluse Estate

The Legend of the ‘Constitution Room’

Museum Practices and the Great Gender Divide

A New Alliance

Architecture and Male Expertise

Interior Decoration and the Female Realm

A Place for Inaccuracy in Australia’s History

Summary Conclusion

3 An Australian Heritage Renaissance: Experiment Farm Cottage and the National Trust

Introduction

Relighting the Heritage Fire

The Colonial Revival in Australia

The National Trust of Australia: The New Name of Heritage

Experiment Farm Cottage: The Fruition of Modernist and Colonial Revival in Australia

In the Tradition of the ‘Pioneer Legend’: The ‘First Land Grant’, the ‘First Settler’ and the ‘First Private Farm’

Turning the First Land Grant into a House Museum

A ‘Splendid Example of Early Georgian Architecture’

Establishing a Museum Genre

Summary Conclusion

4 From Green Ban Insurgence to Heritage Regulation: The Elizabeth Bay House Trust

Introduction

Elizabeth Bay House: The Beginnings of a ‘Great House’

The Rocky Path from Private House to Public Building

The Government Enters the Heritage Fold: A Private Use of a Public Asset

Changing Attitudes: Elevating Environmental and Community Well-Being Above Profit
5 Defining ‘Professionalism’ through the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales: Reinterpreting Vaucluse House

Introduction
Pillars of Twentieth Century Heritage Bureaucracy: Social History, International Conventions & Professionals

Social History: A New Perspective to Examining the Past
UNESCO and the Global Standardisation of Cultural Heritage Principles
The Burra Charter: The Influence of Social History and International Heritage Conventions on Australian Practices

Cementing Government and Professional Control: Sideline Community Heritage Organisations through Legislation
The Historic Houses Bill and the Dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust

The Beginnings of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales

New House Museum Practices: Creating an Aura of Professionalism, Uniformity and Efficiency
Manufacturing Heritage Expertise and Experience

Implementing the New Heritage System: Vaucluse House Under the Historic Houses Trust

Historical Research and the Mantra of ‘Building Archaeology’

Summary Conclusion

6 Two Sides of the Conservation Coin - ‘Fakes’ or the ‘Real Thing’: Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate

Introduction
Material Culture and the Historical Record

What’s the Difference? Conservation and Interpretation at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate
Elizabeth Farm: Symbolising ‘the Ideas and Ambitions of the Colony’s First Fifty Years’

Restoring Elizabeth Farm: A Case of Conservation or
7 Layer Upon Layer: Archaeology, Heritage and Public History: Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place

Introduction
Heritage and House Museums as Public History
Archaeology and the Fight Against Historical Bias
Displaying 'the Conscience of Heritage Management' at Hyde Park Barracks
   Restoring a Georgian Ideal
   A New Government and a New Direction for the Historic Houses Trust
   Creating 'A Museum in Itself'
   Exhibiting the Curator's Eye: Archaeological Conservation vs Interpretation
Susannah Place: A 'Museum in the Making'
   From Condemnation to Conservation
   Exhibiting the Working-Class: 'The Final and Inevitable Act of Middle-Class Intervention?'
   Vienna Cottage and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum
   A Working-Class House Museum or a Museum of Conservation Philosophies?
Summary Conclusion

8 'Myth Making' and the Postmodern Museum:
Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House

Introduction
The Age of the 'New Museology'
From the First Government House Site to the 'Museum of Sydney'
   Rediscovering the First Government House
   Recognising Aboriginal History and Social Significance in an Empiricist World
   1788 and 'the Oldest Remnants of European Settlement'
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Anna Wong
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER 1

1.1 George Washington’s Mount Vernon, in Virginia, USA (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

1.2 Hasbrouck House, Newburgh, N.Y. (National Park Service).


1.4 James Haylar’s The Only Daughter, 1875 (Forbes Collection, Battersea House, London).

1.5 Augustus Egg, Past and Present, 1848 (Tate Collection, London).

1.6 View of Mount Vernon from the Northeast, attributed to Edward Savage, c.1792 (MLVA).

1.7 The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 1873. Pamela Ann Cunningham is seated fourth from the right, gazing at the Houdon bust of Washington (MLVA).

1.8 Front of Mount Vernon, 1858 (MLVA) and The Home of Washington” (ca. 1858), by Currier and Ives, color lithograph, (MLVA).

1.9 ‘Sanitary Fair, February 22, 1864’ (Brooklyn Public Library — Brooklyn Collection).

1.10 John Ward House and its recreated kitchen (1684) (Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts).

1.11 The late Georgian (1770-1880) room and the 1990s room at the Geffrye Museum (Geffrye Museum).

1.12 Winterthur, c.1884 (Winterthur Museum).

1.13 The Chinese Parlour at Winterthur, 1935 (Winterthur Museum); and the Chinese Parlour at present (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).


1.16 South Australian Court, Bush Scene, Melbourne International Exhibition, 1880 (Government Printing Office, Melbourne (State Library of Victoria)).

1.17 The Pioneer by Fred McCubbin, 1906 (National Gallery of Victoria).

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Vaucluse House, 1910 (Caroline Simpson Resource Centre, HHT).
2.2 Portrait plaque of William Charles Wentworth (ca. 1854) by Thomas Woolner (nla.pic-an6300286).
2.3 Vaucluse, 1851, painted by G. E. Peacock (ML 236).
2.5 Mr Wentworth departing from Sydney by Walter G. Mason (Sydney: J.R. Clarke, 1857) (nla.pic-an8017163).
2.6 W.C. Wentworth’s funeral: view taken in College St, 6 May 1873 (ML GPO 1 – 18473).
2.7 'Mausoleum, 1880'. (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 5: William Charles Wentworth, 1856-1898 (Caroline Simpson Resource Centre, HHT)).
2.8 ‘A Bad Smell’, Australian Health Society (August 1880) (ML SLNSW).
2.10 The stables, Vaucluse House, 1910 (ML GPO 1-11713).
2.11 ‘Vaucluse House, ruins of storage attached to quarters, 1909’ (ML GPO 1-11713).
2.12 Entrance to the convict barracks, 1910 (Vaucluse House Collection, HHT).
2.13 Dining room looking into little tearoom, c.1914.; and Chimney Piece in ballroom, c.1914. (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 4: The furnishings of Vaucluse, 1920-1925 (Caroline Simpson Resource Centre, HHT)).
2.17 Sketch of The Burdekin House, Macquarie St., Sydney by Hardy Wilson, 1914 (NLA.pic-an2720709).
2.18 The Old Commissariat store, Sydney, 191?, Harold Cazneaux. (NLA.pic-an2384421)
2.19 Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney, 1936, by Lionel Lindsay (National Gallery of Australia - IRN 46766).
2.21 Dining Room at Vaucluse House, 1933 (Photographed by Thomas Joseph Lawlor, Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 12: Vaucluse House & Grounds, Caroline Simpson Resource Centre, HHT).
2.22 Drawing Room at Vaucluse House, 1933 (Photographed by Thomas Joseph


2.24 The sesquicentenary procession through Sydney included floats with strong reference to Britannia, as well as to the pioneering settlers that forged the nation (Hood Collection- Vol.36: Sesquicentenary celebrations, 1938, SLNSW).

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (Photograph by the Fraser Family, National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
3.2 Cooks’ Cottage in Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003).
3.3 Mulberry Hill located on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003).
3.4 Parchment map of the Cow Pastures Road from William Hardy Wilson’s Cow Pasture Road, 1920.
3.6 Experiment Farm Cottage, Parramatta (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2000).
3.7 ‘Early plan of Rose Hill c.1790’, Bonwick Transcripts Box 36 (ML SLNSW).
3.8 Surgeon John Harris, Principal of NSW Corps, nd (ML GPO 1 – 01161).
3.9 ‘Residence of J. Macarthur Esq., near Parramatta NSW’ / by Joseph Lycett (Views in Sydney, 1825).
3.10 Experiment Farm Cottage, 1891 (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
3.11 Mrs Fraser sitting at the front of Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
3.12 The south-west rear corner of Experiment Farm Cottage, with four of the Fraser children, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
3.13 The western side of the front verandah, Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
3.14 In the front garden, facing east, Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
3.15 Eryldene / photograph by Cazneau, c.1919 (Eryldene Collection).
3.16 Experiment Farm Cottage prior to restoration (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
3.17 Experiment Farm in 1963, after its restoration (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
3.18 Sitting Room, Experiment Farm Cottage, 1963 (Leslie J Buckland., and

3.20 Opening of Experiment Farm Cottage in 1963 (The Advertiser, 24 July 1963).

3.21 The NSW Governor, Sir Eric Woodward, at the opening of Experiment Farm Cottage (The Advertiser, 24 July 1963).

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Staircase, Elizabeth Bay House / Photograph by Harald Cazneaux, 1930 (PIC LOC C17-6, National Library of Australia).

4.2 ‘Alexander Macleay, 1838’ / attributed to Margaret Carpenter after the original by Sir Thomas Lawrence (Camden Park Preservation Committee / reproduced by HHT, Elizabeth Bay House: A History and Guide, 2001); and ‘Elizabeth Macleay’, c.1800 / attributed to John Hoppner (ML).

4.3 ‘Woolloomooloo [sic.] from Domain Road’ (From J. Maclehoose, Maclehose’s picture of Sydney and strangers’ guide in New South Wales for 1839: embellished with forty four engravings of the public buildings and picturesque land and water views in and near Sydney (Sydney: J. Maclehoose, 1839)).


4.5 ‘Rockwall, with Grantham and other Potts Point villas in the distance’, January 1844 (ML – SV/75).


4.7 Elizabeth Bay House, c.1895. Platintype by Freeman & Co. (HHT).

4.8 Elizabeth Bay House prior to its sale, September 1927 / Silver gelatin print by Broughton Ward & Chaseline (HHT).

4.9 Elizabeth Bay House was used as an artists’ squat in the early 1930s (Sydney Morning Herald, 18 July 1935).

4.10 Elizabeth Bay House (The Home, 1 October 1936).

4.11 Under the Government Architect, the Public Works Department repaired the dome at Elizabeth Bay House in 1965 (HHT).


4.13 Arrests at the Playfair Building (left) and protest against demolitions at The
Rocks (right) in 1973 (News Limited).


4.15 Cartoon of Elizabeth Bay House converted into a casino (Daily Telegraph, 18 June 1976).

4.16 Prizewinners of ‘Name the Emblem’ Competition visiting Elizabeth Bay House with Premier Wran on 14 May 1980 (ML – GPO3 10399).

4.17 Prizewinners of ‘Name the Emblem Competition’ being shown through the Library, Elizabeth Bay House, 14 May 1980 (ML GPO 3 – 10400).

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Ann Toy and Peter Watts in the kitchen at Vaucluse House, 1981 (HHT).

5.2 Flowchart in the Vaucluse House Garden and Park Conservation Plan showing a systematic approach to heritage conservation management.

5.3 For the ‘Good Housekeeping’ exhibition, Elizabeth Bay House was created to look like it was being spring cleaned (HHT, Annual Report 1982-83, 12).

5.4 The cover from a set of postcards sold by Nielson-Vaucluse Park Trust to raise funds, c.1956 (Vaucluse House Collection, HHT).

5.5 The recreation of the Drawing Room was based on the 1853 inventory, and contemporaneous illustrations and descriptions (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982, 14).

5.6 Recreated Breakfast Room, Vaucluse House, 1982. Note the portrait of Cromwell above the door (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982).

5.7 The end of the hallway on the first floor was reconstructed as Fitzwilliam Wentworth’s bedroom. This area was originally partitioned off with a cedar screen, which was relocated in the stables (HHT, Annual Report 1982-83, 16).

5.8 The Master Bedroom at Vaucluse House, 1982 (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982)

5.9 Lady Rowland, Ann Toy and Jill Wran in Miss Wentworth’s room at the opening of the bedroom wing (HHT, Annual Report 1982-83, 15).

5.10 The recreated kitchen (left) and scullery (right) at Vaucluse House (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982).

5.11 Recreated kitchen garden at Vaucluse House (Dave Gray, 2005).

5.12 In 1999, the Historic Houses Trust began its ‘Kitchen Garden Festival’ at Vaucluse House (HHT).

5.13 The ‘Constitution Room’ at Vaucluse House in 1982 (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982).

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House (Photographed by Anna Wong, 2005).

6.3 Most of the Calthorpes' House, including the living room (above) and
dining room (below)\textendash were furnished and decorated in 1927 (photographed
by John Houldsworth, 1986 (\textit{Department of Environment and Heritage}).

6.4 The white bathroom and kitchen reflected the preoccupation with hygiene
and cleanliness in the early twentieth century (\textit{from Anne Bickford,}
\textit{Calthorpes' House, 2003}).

6.5 \textquote{John Macarthur} (\textit{Dixson Gallery of SLNSW}); and \textquote{Elizabeth Macarthur}
(\textit{Dixson Gallery of SLNSW}).

6.6 \textquote{The residence of John Macarthur, esq, near Parramatta NSW} (\textit{Joseph
Lycett, View in Australia, London 1824 (ML)}).

6.7 Camden Park by Conrad Martens, 1845 (\textit{Dixson Gallery of the SLNSW}).

6.8 Elizabeth Farm, c.1900-1927 / by Broadhurst Postcard Publishers (\textit{ML PXA
635/711}).

6.9 Elizabeth Farm, 1968 (\textit{National Archive of Australia – A1200 L73989}).

6.10 The original 1793 shingles, Elizabeth Farm (\textit{reproduced from HHT,}
\textit{Elizabeth Farm: A History and a Guide, 1995}).

6.11 \textquote{Above} Current museum interpretation of the Drawing Room (\textit{HHT}).

6.12 The drawing room / by Elizabeth Macarthur, Album of Watercolours,
c.1865 (\textit{Private Collection, reproduced by HHT, Elizabeth Farm: A History
and Guide, 1995}).

6.13 Dr James Broadbent preparing Elizabeth Farm for opening in 1983 (\textit{HHT}).

6.14 Current museum interpretation of Elizabeth Macarthur's writing table, with
copies of her letters (\textit{HHT}).

6.15 Jill Wran, James Broadbent and Sue Hunt at the opening of Elizabeth Farm,
1984 (\textit{HHT}).

6.16 The use of replica furniture and objects allow visitors to wander freely
through the museum (\textit{Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005}).

6.17 Portrait of Richard Rouse, 1847 / by William Griffith (\textit{The Hamilton Rouse
Hill Trust Collection}); and Portrait of Elizabeth Rouse, c.1825-30 (\textit{ML
SLNSW – MIN 77}).

6.18 Family at Rouse Hill, 1859 / photographed by Thomas Wingate (\textit{ML
SLNSW}).

6.19 The house from the north showing the 1865 wing extension and the old
stables (\textit{ML SLNSW}).

6.20 The Summerhouse, Rouse Hill, c.1918 (\textit{The Miriam Hamilton Collection}).

6.21 The restored stables and summerhouse by the Public Works Department
(\textit{Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005}).

6.22 The interior, including the Sitting Room (above) and School Room (below)
were conserved to include all the objects and furniture over the past 140
years (\textit{Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005}).

6.23 Rouse Hill House was conserved 'as found' by the Historic Houses Trust.
This meant conserving the peeling paint and deteriorated joinery and
timberwork (\textit{Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005}).

6.24 The conserve 'as found' policy adopted at Rouse Hill included the
dilapidated outbuildings and numerous abandoned vehicles (\textit{Photograph by
Anna Wong, 2005}).

6.25 New material, such as this timber fence rail, are stamp dated so that they are
easily distinguishable from the original fabric (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

6.26 Repairs were made visible, such as the refixing of these weatherboards with distinguishable new nails and washers (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

6.27 Test panels at the Interpretation Centre, demonstrating the effects of visitors on objects and materials. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

6.28 Test panels at the entrance of the Interpretation Centre, demonstrating the effects of foot traffic on different floor surfaces (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

CHAPTER 7

7.1 Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.2 Francis Howard Greenway, self-portrait (ML SLNSW); and Lachlan Macquarie, c.1819 (ML SLNSW - MIN 236).

7.3 ‘Convict Barrack N.S.Wales, 1819-1820’ / by Joseph Lycett (ML SLNSW - PX*D 41).

7.4 ‘A Government Jail Gang, Sydney, N.S.Wales’ / by Augustus Earle, 1830 (NLA).

7.5 ‘Prisoners’ Barracks, Hyde Park’ by Robert Russell, 1836 (NLA).

7.6 ‘St Jame’s [sic] Church, Supreme Court House’, 1836 / by Robert Russell (NLA).


7.8 By the 1960s, the courtyard of Hyde Park Barracks was crowded with ad-hoc additions and new buildings for the law courts and civil offices (Sydney City Council, Sydney Reference Collection).


7.10 Hyde Park Barracks, March 1976, at the start of the restoration program by the Public Works Department (ML SLNSW – GPO2-47498).

7.11 Ariel view of Hyde Park Barracks and The Mint, 1985. This view shows the extent of demolition undertaken as part of the restoration program (MAAS).

7.12 Hyde Park Barracks in 1984, restored to its original Georgian form. All the additions after 1820 were removed (ML SLNSW – GPO 4-34972).

7.13 Reconstructed hammock room at Hyde Park Barracks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.14 One of many rat’s nest found in the underfloor cavity at Hyde Park Barracks (HHT).

7.15 Orientation room, Hyde Park Barracks. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.16 A wall in the Orientation Room showing the ‘layers’ of use and evidence (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.17 The history of Hyde Park Barracks is displayed stratigraphically from its
use as a convict barracks, female immigration depot, and law courts and offices (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.18 Displays in the Orientation Room included convict tools, including a stone grinding wheel with the ‘BO’ Board of Ordnance marking (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.19 Forks, knives and sewing implements signified the female immigration depot period of Hyde Park Barracks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.20 Display in the ‘Archaeology Room’ showing the process and techniques of archaeological excavation (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.21 A sample of the many artefacts excavation at Hyde Park Barracks. They were displayed according to their material to demonstrate the practice of classification (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.22 The upper level of the Hyde Park Barracks was stripped back to display the convict period (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.23 During the restoration of the building, ‘spy holes’ were uncovered. They were used by the overseers to observe the convicts at night (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.24 Susannah Place, The Rocks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

7.25 Gibbs Lane, leading up to Gloucester Street, The Rocks, 1901. The back of the corner store (No. 64) of Susannah Place is marked by the sign ‘CHEAP CASH GROCER) (ML SLNSW – GPO 2-52629).

7.26 The Whalers Arms, Gloucester Street, The Rocks, 1901. Located opposite Susannah Place, the pub and the adjacent houses were demolished as part of the slum clearance program following the Bubonic Plague (ML SLNSW – SPF 190).

7.27 Circular Quay Skyline from Gloucester Street, The Rocks, January 1965. Susannah Place is shown against the growing city skyline (Photograph by the Australian Photographic Agency, ML SLNSW – ON173).

7.28 The Back-to-Backs museum was conserved as one of the last surviving examples of the thousands of Victorian working-class houses in Birmingham that were built back to back around a courtyard as a means of providing housing to a rapidly growing industrial population. Four houses were recreated to represent particular periods from the 1840s to the 1970s (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2004).

7.29 97 Orchard Street, constructed in 1863 and vacated in 1935, the building was transformed into the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (photograph by Benjamin Epps, 2001; Lower East Side Tenement Museum).

7.30 The Rogarshevsky family standing outside 97 Orchard Street, c.1915 (Lower East Side Tenement Museum).

7.31 The Rogarshevsky family’s apartment prior to, and after restoration. The interiors were recreated using oral history testimonies and objects donated by the family (Lower East Side Tenement Museum).

7.32 Peter Watts at Susannah Place during conservation works, c.1991. (HIT)

7.33 No. 58 was left ‘as found’ to demonstrate the physical state of the terraces when they were converted into a museum. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003)

7.34 Swing Tags were placed in No. 58 in 1997 to assist in the interpretation of
Susannah Place. (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*)

7.35 The information provided by the swing tags were generally about the form and function of the built fabric. (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*)

7.36 The recreated 1840s parlour in No. 60 (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*).

7.37 The corner store at No. 58 was recreated to c.1910 using John Young’s oral history. His family lived at Susannah Place from 1902 to the 1920s (*Photography by Anna Wong, 2007*).

7.38 The recreated back room at No. 58, Susannah Place (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*)

CHAPTER 8

8.1 Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*).

8.2 Foundation Plate to Government House, laid by Governor Arthur Phillip in May 1788. It is currently displayed at the Museum of Sydney.

8.3 ‘Governor’s House at Sydney, Port Jackson, 1791’ from William Bradley - drawings from the First Fleet journal titled ‘A Voyage to New South Wales’, December 1786 - May 1792, compiled after 1802 (*ML*).

8.4 View of old Government House - Sydney - N.S.W. as it appeared when vacated by Sir George Gipps in 1845 / painted by G. E. Peacock. The camels are two of three purchased by Governor Gipps in 1842 as an experiment in the introduction of camels to the colony (*ML 658*).

8.5 View of the former Government House site, the Colonial Secretary’s Building, and the terraces on Young Street in 1906. The building behind the hoarding is McGlade’s Cottage (*ML SLNSW – SPF*).

8.6 Ariel view of the excavation of the First Government House archaeological site, 28 October 1983 (*photograph by Anne Bickford*).

8.7 Mrs Nell Samson, her husband Eric and another member of the Friends of First Government House Site speaking to Anne Bickford about the excavation (*Photograph by Lindy Kerr in Department of Planning, Australia’s First Government House, 1991*).

8.8 Premier Neville Wran visiting the First Government House archaeological site in August 1983 (*Photograph by Lindy Kerr in Department of Planning, Australia’s First Government House, 1991*).

8.9 Franklin Court, Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA (*Photo by K. Ciappa, Once Upon a Nation*).

8.10 Model of final design of First Government House Museum by Denton Corker Marshall (*HHT*).

8.11 Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.12 The different façade surfaces of the Museum of Sydney was designed to represent the historical development of Sydney, from bedrock to dress stone to steel (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.13 ‘The Edge of Trees’ sculpture (by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence) replaced the original idea of flag staffs (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).
8.14 The trunks were inlaid the cultural markings of Aboriginal presence – shell middens, ochre, ash and bone – to represent of how Aboriginal culture was integrated with the environment. The metal plates represented the First Fleeters (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.15 Ghostly images from the Bond Store tales at the Museum of Sydney (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.16 Images from the ‘Eora’ installation at the Museum of Sydney. The theme of cultural continuity and connection with the environment was the predominant theme (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.17 The ‘Eora’ installation at the Museum of Sydney did not depict Aborigines with non-indigenous people in modern settings (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).

8.18 Gallipoli Mosque at Auburn, Sydney. The name was chosen to reflect the close links between Australia and Turkey. The centre of Sydney’s Muslim community, the mosque is situated adjacent the railway line in the heart of Auburn (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003*).

8.19 The public program ‘Fe’s Pasefika’ was held in conjunction with the ‘Lure of the South Seas: The Voyages of Dumont d’Uville (*IHHT Public Program Calendar, 2002*).

8.20 The program ‘Fe’s Pasefika’ included traditional Pacific Islander dancing and ceremonies (like drinking kava) (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2002*).


8.22 Nineteenth century caricatures of Chinese immigrants by Frederick Grosse in 1855. ‘A celestial delicacy picture’ and ‘Celestial happiness picture’ (*State Library of Victoria*).

8.23 ‘Catherine Pham, 2001, Cabramatta, 2001. Vietnamese woman in traditional dress with hat standing in vacant block in Western Sydney’ by Anna Zahalka (*MOS HHT*).

**CONCLUSION**

9.1 Windows to our past and present. Convict silhouettes at the Hyde Park Barracks by Heather Dorrough, 1991 (*Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007*).
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHC</td>
<td>Australian Heritage Commission</td>
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<td>AHS</td>
<td>Australian Historical Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLF</td>
<td>Builders’ Labourers’ Federation</td>
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<td>DG</td>
<td>Dixon Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>HHT</td>
<td>Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICOMOS</td>
<td>International Council of Monuments and Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTO</td>
<td>Land Titles Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAAS</td>
<td>Museum of Applied Arts and Science (Powerhouse Museum)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>Mitchell Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoS</td>
<td>Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House</td>
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<td>MVLA</td>
<td>Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association</td>
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<td>NLA</td>
<td>National Library of Australia</td>
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<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>RAG</td>
<td>Resident Action Group</td>
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<td>RAHS</td>
<td>Royal Australian Historical Society</td>
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<td>SCA</td>
<td>Sydney Cove Authority</td>
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<td>SCRA</td>
<td>Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority</td>
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<td>SLNSW</td>
<td>State Library of New South Wales</td>
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<td>SPF</td>
<td>Small Picture File</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPNEA</td>
<td>Society for the Protection of New England Antiquities</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations</td>
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<td>VPT</td>
<td>Vaucluse Park Trust</td>
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INTRODUCTION

From Brideshead Revisited to Sojourns into Heritage

What do you remember about your first visit to a house museum? Was it as a child being dragged through some grand old mansion by your grandparents? Or being reprimanded for touching everything in sight, despite signs instructing ‘Do Not Touch’?

For me, it was on a school excursion as a ten-year old. We went to Experiment Farm Cottage at Parramatta, the former home of Surgeon John Harris who arrived to New South Wales on the First Fleet – not that I remembered anything about Harris from the visit. As a child, the names of our national forefathers were irrelevant. What remained etched in my memory was the wonderment of seeing how differently people lived in the past, the stories behind each object, and the experience of being ushered solemnly through quiet rooms filled with dusty old furniture by ladies of a similar description. And yes, much to the despair of our guide, the temptation to touch everything was irresistible.

Three things in particular stuck in my mind from that day. I recall the chamber pot in the main bedroom, how it sparked a round of childish giggles as we were told what went into it, and conversely sounds of revulsion as we imagined being the servant who emptied it each morning. I was enthralled by the smooth concave sandstone dripstone under the rear verandah that was used to purify water – drop by drop. And for a ten-year old, the gnarled century-old plum tree at the rear of the house seemed to span eternity.

From the reverberating sounds of silence through dusty rooms, to the nostalgic yearnings for a mythical golden age long past or home renovation aspirations of cottage shabby chic - house museums conjure up particular images, memories and
expectations. Regardless of whether such responses are positive or negative, it is the experiential and three-dimensional aspects of house museums through the combined practices of architectural design, history, decorative and fine arts, which makes them such a powerful interpretative medium. The presentation of a complete historic environment that includes buildings, furnished rooms and gardens, provides a window into a past that is both familiar and easily recognised.

But what do visitors really see? Reflecting back to my first visit to Experiment Farm Cottage, did I really step back in time to the home of John Harris? Or was it a life size doll’s house?

This thesis examines how seemingly realistic presentations of past environments mask a social arena where definitions of heritage and history are constructed and contested. The study of the historical milestones of the house museum movement will illustrate how the Australian house museum played a central role in the heritage movement, both philosophically and methodologically; and how house museums reflected and shaped particular perceptions of Australia, its past, and its cultural identity over the past century.

This thesis begins with two seemingly unrelated cultural developments in the mid-nineteenth century that spanned two continents – the development of an Australian historical consciousness; and the opening of George Washington’s Mount Vernon as a house museum, in America. The integration of Australian and American heritage ideals culminated with the opening of Australia’s first house museum in 1915 - Vaucluse House. The next milestone of the house museum movement was the formation of the National Trust in 1945 and the opening of Experiment Farm Cottage in 1963. This was the golden age of the period room house museum in Australia. The formation of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust in 1977 heralded the birth of a new house museum form based on empirical ideals. Its expansion into the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in 1980 marked radical and rapid changes in house museum practices as demonstrated by Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill Estate in the 1980s; Hyde Park Barracks, Susannah Place in the early 1990s; and the post-modern Museum of Sydney in the 1990s.1

1 Hyde Park Barracks includes both ‘house museum’ settings, with its reconstructed convict hammocks and building finishes, and history museum displays. Museum of Sydney is a history museum built on the site of First Government House. While acknowledging that
THE HOUSE MUSEUM

The house museum is a form of history museum, which Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig described as an institution ‘that display[s] historical artefacts’. 2 Within this broad category, the house museum is distinguished by its use of historic buildings and recreated in-situ room settings. As a form of public museum (and hence in public ownership), it does not include dwellings that allowed limited public access but remained primarily private residences – as was the case with many country houses in England from the seventeenth century. 3 For example, consider Elizabeth Bennett’s awkward visit to Mr Darcy’s family estate, Pemberley, in Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice. 4 The majority of public house museums in England opened after World War II, when the burden of inheritance and land taxes forced many owners to bequeath their grand ancestral homes to the National Trust.

The different types of house museums are varied. At a basic level, a house museum is usually a residence conserved as a museum with recreated or preserved interiors and settings. What constitutes a ‘residence’, however, is wide-ranging. While Australia’s first house museum, Vaucluse House, certainly fits into the stereotype of the historic home of the rich and famous, this museum genre also includes dwellings from other social and cultural groups, like the working-class properties Susannah Place and Vienna Cottage; or the Chinese Joss House in Bendigo, Victoria. House museums also include buildings other than domestic dwellings, such as public buildings like the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney or Melbourne Gaol.

The development of the house museum in Australia did not occur within the geographical, historical and cultural confines of this continent. The house museum was an American invention and the first public house museum appeared in America with the opening of Hasbrouck House in 1850 – George Washington’s former Revolutionary War headquarters in Newburgh, New York. Of greater fame and

these museums are not technically ‘house museums’ in a traditional sense, they are important in understanding the development of the Historic Houses Trust, and also how the Trust applied and adapted the methodologies and ideas from its earlier museums to its subsequent properties.


international influence, however, was Mount Vernon - Washington's estate in Virginia. Acquired as a museum in 1858, the opening of Mount Vernon sparked the exponential rise of the house museum in America. Reaching twenty by 1895, there were nearly a hundred house museums in America by 1910. This figure jumped to over four hundred by the 1930s, and into the thousands by the 1970s.\(^5\)

Despite having its origins in the mid-nineteenth century, the house museum is a twentieth century phenomena. The exponential rise of this genre in the early twentieth century in America warranted the house museum being recognised as a distinct museum form. Laurence Vail Coleman, as Director of The American Association of Museums, coined the term 'historic house museum' in his 1933 publication, *Historic House Museums*.\(^6\) He defined historic house museums as 'agencies of instruction and inspiration':

> devoted to the care and interpretation of a house or public building preserved for its age or its association - a place that has ceased to be a home, tavern, a town hall, a church, or whatever it was at first, and has become an exhibition place for the public to see as a survival from the past.\(^7\)

His publication included a critical assessment of heritage preservation, as well as providing practical guidance for managing house museums. Combined with his later book, *The Museum in America: A Critical Study* (1939), Coleman outlined the historical and social importance of preserving historic buildings and their interiors, and their educational value as museums.

In Australia, the number of house museums (totaling some two hundred) pales in significance when compared to the thousands in America and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the house museum represents the second most numerous type of museum in Australia - second only to object-based history museums. In 2005, the 400 museums and art galleries in New South Wales recorded over 9.5 million

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visitors, of whom 2.2 million went to a Historic Houses Trust property. The role of the house museum in influencing how the public perceive Australia’s history and cultural identity cannot be underestimated.

OPENING THE DOORS: SOJOURNS INTO THE HISTORY OF HERITAGE

This thesis was part of a joint project between the University of Sydney and the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, to examine the role of the ‘house museum’ in Australia (and in particular in New South Wales). As such, there is a strong focus on the house museum movement in New South Wales, and the history of the Trust and its changing philosophies and directions as displayed through its house museums. As the founding European colony in Australia, the development of a historical consciousness and the mythological reinterpretation of the nation’s colonial beginnings were intrinsically tied to New South Wales. While acknowledging regional and state differences, the broader trends in the heritage and house museum movements in Australia are discernable in New South Wales.

A New South Wales statutory body, the Historic Houses Trust was created through the Historic Houses Act in 1980, with the specific task of acquiring historic properties and converting them into house museums for public use, education and enjoyment. Beginning with Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, the Trust’s portfolio has grown to thirteen properties to also include Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill House, Meroogal, Susannah Place, Rose Seidler House, Government House, Hyde Park Barracks, the Justice and Police Museum, the Museum of Sydney on the site of First Government House, and the Mint.

In addition to conserving the buildings, gardens and collections of its properties, the Trust also interpreted the cultural history of New South Wales through its interpretative displays, exhibitions, publications and an extensive education and

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9 Lyndhurst, a 1840s historic house in Glebe, was previously the head office of the Historic Houses Trust. It was sold in 2005 when the Trust moved to The Mint on Macquarie Street, Sydney.
public program. The Trust’s multidisciplinary staff, whose range of skills extends beyond purely heritage and museum conservation to also include the arts, broadened traditional forms of historical interpretation to include contemporary performing and visual arts. This in turn positioned the Trust presence within the tourism and arts sectors, thereby broadening its role and audience beyond the areas of heritage conservation and museums. The recipient of numerous heritage, museum, architectural and tourism awards, the Trust’s success has made house museums an accessible and high profile form of public history in New South Wales.

Beginning my research in 2001, the year when the Historic Houses Trust celebrated its twenty-first birthday, I was confronted by a fellow historian who dismissed this project because she did not consider the past twenty years as ‘real history’. It was a short-sighted comment. The Historic Houses Trust was a relatively newcomer to the heritage field, but it served as a springboard to examining not only the history of the house museum but also the developments in the heritage movement that preceded and influenced its creation. It also served as an inroad to the cultural context within which the heritage movement evolved in relation to changing perceptions of heritage of the cultural environment, both in Australia and overseas.

The opening of Vaucluse House in 1912 is an obvious marker in for the beginning of the heritage movement in Australia. The seeds, however, were sown decades before. The opening of Vaucluse House melded two seemingly disparate cultural developments that influenced the development of Australia’s heritage movement—the American heritage movement; and the emergence of a vernacular historical consciousness through popular culture and the arts in the late-nineteenth century.

The Australian heritage movement began quietly with the advent of the twentieth century. It was a community-based movement and represented by antiquarian and specialist groups like the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. Separately and in partnership, they led the first campaigns in Sydney to save buildings threatened with demolition - like Burdekin House on Macquarie Street and the Commissariat Store at west Circular Quay. Their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, these early groups set the groundwork for heritage conservation by identifying buildings that they considered important in marking key events and people in Australia’s history.
Vaucluse House opened during this embryonic phase of the heritage movement and the Royal Australian Historical Society was also instrumental in determining the initial interpretative direction of Vaucluse House as a house museum in 1915. Drawing inspiration from George Washington’s Mount Vernon and the ideals of civil religion espoused through the American heritage movement, the yearning for a similar national hero in Australia was the primary goal of the heritage movement at the time. In the midst of World War I, William Charles Wentworth was transformed into Australia’s ‘founding father’ and his home the ‘Mecca of Australia’.¹⁰

The heritage baton passed to the National Trust after World War II, the first organisation in Australia that was created with the sole objective of heritage conservation and advocacy. For a movement with limited success, the Trust was instrumental in ensuring the longevity of heritage conservation in Australia by uniting the disparate advocacy groups and individuals and broadening both public and government support. The National Trust also popularised the house museum form. Prior to the National Trust, there was only one house museum in New South Wales. The Trust opened twelve properties in its first three decades, beginning with Experiment Farm in 1963. Through its house museums, the Trust established the benchmark for heritage conservation and house museum practices.

Experiment Farm Cottage exemplified the ideals of the Colonial Revival and the period room – aspects reminiscent of American and English practices in the first half of the twentieth century. Following from Vaucluse House, America remained an influential source of heritage philosophies, but such ideas were adapted to develop Australia’s own sense of historical consciousness and cultural identity. At Experiment Cottage, the convict stain that tainted Australia’s European beginnings was transformed into a tale of redemption and nation building as Colonial Revival ideals were married with the vernacular ‘pioneer legend’.

All these community groups emerged at a time when both federal and State governments were either apathetic towards heritage conservation, or actively involved in its destruction in the name of progress. In New South Wales, community protests against government schemes to ‘modernise’ inner-city

working-class areas came to the fore with the green bans in the early 1970s – the most notable being the green ban on The Rocks. Backed by the trade unions, these protests crippled the building industry and forced federal and State governments to provide legislative protection for heritage places.

The introduction of Commonwealth heritage legislation in 1976 and the New South Wales Heritage Act, 1977 effectively disempowered the community-based heritage movement and shifted its management to the government and heritage professionals. It was within this political context that the Elizabeth Bay House Trust was enacted in 1977 – the precursor to the Historic Houses Trust of NSW. Australia’s first professional heritage architect and museum curator were employed at Elizabeth Bay House, and the Elizabeth Bay House Trust exemplified the bureaucratic, prescriptive and professionalised trademarks of the current heritage system. In 1980, the Elizabeth Bay House Trust was expanded to the Historic Houses Trust with the acquisition of Vaucluse House. The house museum movement had come full circle to its Australian origins. The advent of the Historic Houses Trust heralded a very different journey for Vaucluse House however, and the house museum movement overall.

**HISTORY, HERITAGE AND HOUSE MUSEUMS**

The Historic Houses Trust encapsulated the modern heritage movement that emerged since the 1970s. Up to this point, house museums were not intended to be historically accurate in their architectural or interior design. Instead, the restoration of buildings and the creation of period rooms promoted idealised and embellished understandings of the past. Since the mid-1970s, heritage conservation has been based on quasi-scientific practices that advocated an empirical understanding of the material world for historical research (particularly in areas traditionally silent in documentary sources).

This historiographical change also initiated self-reflective studies on the role and meaning of heritage; and how this was represented and communicated through cultural institutions like museums. In relation to house museums, such studies have focused on two main themes. First, on the empirical value of the cultural environment and the application of material culture studies to historical analysis (especially when studying historically ‘silent’ groups); and second, on house museums (and heritage sites in general) as cultural products that reflect the
ideologies and values of their founders. The underlying issues to all these studies were cultural representation, the public history dimensions of heritage places, and the tension between the practice of history and heritage.

Heritage, in its current usage, encompasses the tangible elements that represent the cultural values of a particular society or community, and as such are considered worthy of protection from destruction or decay. This direct correlation between physical elements of the cultural environment and cultural ideals gained popular currency in the mid-1970s through international organisations like UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention. Such a seemingly universal understanding of heritage reflected the increasingly standardisation of heritage practices on a global scale and overlooked the subjectivity of heritage that altered over time and between different groups.

The introduction of heritage legislation in the 1970s produced a substantial body of professional guidelines that has standardised heritage and museum practices. Based on the principles espoused by national and international charters, like the World Heritage Convention, the Venice Charter and the Burra Charter, the concept of 'cultural significance' is central to the current management of historic places and museum collections. Under the New South Wales Heritage Act, 1977, cultural significance is defined as the 'historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological,

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architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item. The assumption that such cultural values can be determined through a seemingly objective analysis of physical and historical evidence further reinforced the presentation of house museums as accurate documents of the past.

This shift in the definition of heritage was initiated through the ‘new social history’ of the 1960s, and the adoption of an anthropological understanding of culture in historical research in the 1970s. Social historians challenged conventional historical bias towards political and male histories through the introduction of new sociologically inspired historically categories like gender, race and class; and the use of quantifiable empirical data. The boundaries of social history were extended with the anthropological analysis of objects as cultural artefacts. This paradigm shift was forged by James Deetz and Henry Glassie, where everyday objects were recognised as legitimate and valuable sources of historical evidence for the first time. In combination, material culture studies emerged as a new discipline in the 1980s with enormous ramifications for the house museum movement.

A new generation of historical research emerged. The potential of the home setting and domestic objects as evidence provided a new source for researching the history of gender relations, domesticity and the working-class – subjects and groups previously silent in documentary records. The first wave of material culture studies demonstrated the value of the domestic environment in historical research, including Ken Ames’ study of hall furnishings in Victorian America, Ruth Cowan’s study of how advertisements and household appliances affected women and housework; and Lisabeth Cohen’s study of working-class interiors and furnishings. In Australia, this artefactual framework for studying the material

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13 Heritage Act, 1977, Section 4A (1).
world became the philosophical and methodological basis of the modern heritage system created in the 1970s, including the Historic Houses Trust of NSW.

Studies in material culture were important in recognising the research potential of the cultural environment. When applied to the conservation and interpretation of heritage places, however, the empirical basis of material culture studies overlooked the subjective process of heritage conservation. The assumption that heritage should and could be objective blurred the boundaries between history and heritage to the point that the terms were considered interchangeable. For example, the NSW Heritage Office promoted 'heritage as history' in its guidelines.  

As Graeme Davison noted, 'heritage is, above all, a political concept'. Examined within the broader fields of public history and heritage studies since the 1980s, scholars like David Lowenthal, Graeme Davison, Chris McConville, Elizabeth Cromley and Linda Young, have questioned the political dimensions of heritage conservation. In Cromley's study of the American planning system and the creation of 'historic preservation districts', she found that the heritage movement produced two forms of public history. First, through saving particular parts of the built environment, it has defined what is 'significant' by setting certain buildings and areas apart from the rest. Second, heritage conservation also provided a record of the past. As Cromley surmised, 'preserved buildings can and will tell public stories about who made them, who used them, what kind of life they were erected to support, and what lives, if any, are lived in them today. Even if this kind of


16 NSW Heritage Office, Historical Research for Heritage, 1.


storytelling is not the intended aim of preservation efforts, preserved buildings cannot but help make stories visible'.

In Australia, historians in the 1980s embraced the material culture studies framework to challenge the preoccupation with architectural aesthetics or associations with famous individuals within the heritage movement. For example, Davison noted how the prevalent narrow definition of 'historic' as 'an important part or item of history', or something that was 'noted or celebrated in history' resulted in the historical importance of buildings being determined by their age, style or associations. Such bias was reflected in the range of buildings listed on heritage registers up until the 1990s. For Davison, a building was historically important because:

it throws light on significant aspects of the lives of people in the past. It is not just an antique, nor as a shrine, but a document, as a piece of vital evidence about the past society that created it, that a building serves to be regarded as 'historic'.

Both Linda Young and Marilyn Lake adopted a similar stance in their studies of historical homes. Examining the range of houses listed on heritage registers (such as the Register of the National Estate and the Victorians Historic Buildings Council Register), Lake found that the dominance of architectural historians in the listing of buildings of heritage registers limited their historical importance to purely stylistic concerns. She cited the Statements of Significance of two houses to demonstrate how the role of women was completely overlooked, despite domestic spaces being a

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20 Ibid., 30.
23 Ibid., 71.
24 Lake, "Historical Homes"; Young, "House Museums in Australia".

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female realm. Instead, the analysis of each house was restricted to their architectural form and designer, date of construction and male owner.\textsuperscript{25}

Young's survey of 199 house museums found that they were over-represented by grand country homes from the colonial period at the exclusion of houses from other periods or social groups.\textsuperscript{26} Combined with the generally non-professional practice of recreating historically inaccurate period rooms, most of these house museums presented a romanticised vision of Anglo-Australian colonial life. Young concluded by recommending a more conscious selection of heritage places that provided a balanced representation of Australia's past, included houses from the twentieth century, and Aboriginal and non-Anglo-Australian communities.\textsuperscript{27}

The second public history dimension of heritage transformed the process of heritage conservation into a historical subject. A popular theme was examining how the public museum was created as a tool of cultural governance to promote social and political agendas using Michel Foucault's concept of the 'disciplinary society'.\textsuperscript{28} As a cultural product, heritage places and collections not only provided a selective record of the past, but also a record of the values and ideals of those who conserved them.

The most comprehensive study on the house museum to date, Patricia West's Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums (1999), was written within this framework of the museum as a cultural product.\textsuperscript{29} West traced the institutional histories of four house museums to show how each property was more a reflection of the political and cultural context in which they were established, than as 'historical documents' of the people they were intended to interpret. Her case studies included Washington's Mount Vernon, Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and the Booker T. Washington National Monument. For West, these museums were conceived as monuments to social issues of their time, such as sectional divisions between the

\textsuperscript{25} Lake, "Historical Homes," 46.
\textsuperscript{26} Young, "House Museums in Australia", 168-170.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. 183.
\textsuperscript{28} Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (London: Allen Lane, 1977).
\textsuperscript{29} Patricia West, Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museum (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).
North and South on the eve of the Civil War in America, the suffragette movement in the late-nineteenth century, the rise of the Democratic party and its links to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation in the 1920s and '30s, and the resistance to segregation in schools in Virginia in the 1950s.

These studies of house museums in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the architectural and monumental bias of heritage conservation; and the interpretation of heritage buildings and domestic collections as material evidence that 'documented' the lives and values of the people who designed, used or conserved them. Peter Vergo labelled this body of critical study as the 'new museology', where museums were examined in relation to their historical, cultural and social context, and their cultural meanings and roles.³⁰ The first generation of the 'new museology' viewed museums as cultural products. For example, Patricia West's study assumed a direct correlation between the form and content of house museums (cultural expression) and the cultural system of their creators.

Since the 1990s, scholars have shifted away from the one-dimensional approach to heritage and museum studies. This was sparked by the apparent limited impact of social history on museum interpretation, despite being enthusiastically adopted by curators. In his examination of nineteenth century house museums, like Mount Vernon, The Hermitage and Hasbrouck House, J.H. Herbst observed that the new generation of house museum professionals often encountered resistance when attempting to introduce new historical interpretations that differed from the museum founders or stewards. The antiquarian beliefs and values that motivated the preservation of a particular historic house continued to influence its management and interpretative direction for subsequent generations.³¹

Although the cultural intention of museum curators was certainly a key factor in how a museum was interpreted, Leon and Rosenzweig noted, 'museums cannot be isolated from the complex social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are situated'.³² They identified a range of factors that influenced the choice of subjects, content and format of exhibitions, ranging from institutional constraints (staffing, ³⁰ Peter Vergo, "Introduction," in Peter Vergo, (ed.), The New Museology, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1989), 1.
³² León and Rosenzweig, "Introduction," xix.
resources, sponsorship), external pressures (like funding, government policies and visitor expectations), to changing research paradigms. All these combined to mould the form, content and role of museums.

Richard Handler and Eric Gables’ study of Colonial Williamsburg in 1997, found that the introduction of social history curators to provide a more critical and democratic history in the 1970s had limited success.\textsuperscript{33} The ‘discovery’ of slavery at this time presented a ‘dirtier’ past, but this area of American colonial history was interpreted separately from the main interpretation of the site. The issues of conflict and social interaction between planters and slaves were not fully explored because marketing and business concerns, visitor expectations and a lack of communication between curators, researchers and guides, all combined to weaken the critical potential of social history.

Unlike earlier studies that concentrated on the messages and ideologies expressed through objects and displays, Handler and Gable focused on the active process of how particular interpretative messages were developed. By viewing the museum as a ‘social arena’, the combination of the museum’s past and present politics as expressed through the organisational structure, staff and visitors, were of greater impact in shaping museum practices than the new social history scholarship – despite its official adoption by the organisation.

In Australia, Charlotte Smith’s doctoral study, \textit{The House Enshrined: Great Man and Social History Museums in the United States and Australia}, examined changes in house museum practices as an outcome of social history scholarship.\textsuperscript{34} This study examined the origins of the ‘Great Man’ and ‘Social History’ house museum. By comparing two ‘Social History’ museums (Susannah Place and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum) with two ‘Great Man’ examples (Vaucluse House and Monticello), Smith assessed how the house museum movement has responded to social history by creating a new category of house museum. She found that despite the ideals of social history, the hero worship tendencies of the ‘Great Man’ house museums were transferred to the new genre. Social history house museums


\textsuperscript{34} Charlotte Smith, \textit{The House Enshrined: Great Man and Social History House Museums in the United States and Australia} (PhD Dissertation, University of Canberra, 2002).
interpreted the lives of ‘ordinary’ people, but their tendency to present them as national heroes were reminiscent of earlier house museums. Like Herbst, Smith concluded that the values from previous generations continued to influence current museum practices.

This second generation of the ‘new museology’ marked a new chapter in house museum research, where the museum was situated at the centre of converging social and physical influences instead of a linear triadic framework of ‘cultural producer – cultural product – cultural consumer’. Handler and Gable called this the ‘social arena’. James Clifford’s popularly cited study presented museums as ‘contact zones’. What connected all these models was the understanding that house museums were not merely products or reflections of a unitary cultural system. Multiple factors influenced (but did not determine) the form, role and content of museums – both past and present.

In combination, studies of the house museum since the 1970s have influenced the dramatic changes in house museum practices over the past thirty years. Each area of study has contributed to a greater understanding of the historical and methodological development of house museums, but by examining the individual components of the house museum, they failed to understand the house museum as a whole. What was absent was an examination of the house museum across all these areas of historical and museological research, and within the broader historical context of the heritage movement.

STUDYING THE HOUSE MUSEUM AT THE CENTRE OF CONVERGING FORCES: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis belongs to the second generation of the ‘new museology’ and historiography. Rather than studying museums in a linear framework of ‘producer-product’, this thesis uses the notion of the museum as a ‘social arena’ or ‘contact zone’ to situate the house museum at the centre of converging cultural, social and physical factors, from both its past and present environments.

Studying the history of the Historic Houses Trust, my research initially began with the opening of the first house museum in this country – Vaucluse House. As the beginning of the heritage movement, this event was an obvious starting point. It soon became apparent, however, that the history of the house museum in Australia extended beyond our shores. The strong parallels between Vaucluse House and Mount Vernon reflected the similar ideological basis from which heritage conservation developed in each country and how Australia looked to American ideas to fully express the sense of Australian historical consciousness that emerged from the 1870s. The strong influence of American practices and idea since the beginning of the Australian heritage movement, and its ongoing influence throughout the twentieth century, demonstrated how the Australian house museum was part of a global phenomenon.

This thesis examines the history of the Australian house museum through Vaucluse House, Experiment Farm Cottage, Elizabeth Bay House, Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill Estate, Hyde Park Barracks, Susannah Place and the Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House. The political, social and cultural context in which each of these historic properties were transformed into house museums, revealed the cultural trends, influences and developments of the heritage movement over the past century.

In researching the histories of these house museums, my main historical sources were the National Trust Archives, the Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW and the house museums themselves as interpreted through their displays, public programs and publications. I was also fortunate to have access to the Minutes of the Historic Houses Trust and Historic Houses Trust departmental files – documents normally not publicly accessible. Contemporaneous information was obtained through newspapers, journals, parliamentary papers and secondary sources. My assessment of various museums, exhibitions and public programs were based on visits from 2001 to 2005.

An advantage of studying the recent past was the opportunity to interview people who were instrumental in shaping heritage and museum practices since the 1970s, including museum staff and trustees, former government ministers and the museum community. These interviews were undertaken with permission from the Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis is divided into three parts mirroring the three main phases in the heritage and house museum movements in Australia.

Divided into three chapters, Part I explores the beginnings of the community-based heritage and house museum movements in Australia from the beginning of the twentieth century to the early-1970s.

Vaucluse House was Australia’s first house museum, but the genesis of the house museum movement lay in the nineteenth century. Chapter 1 draws together two seemingly unrelated but parallel developments that led to its opening. Vaucluse House was a culmination of the emergent historical consciousness in Australia from the 1870s and the ideals of the American heritage movement as represented by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in the 1850s and the first house museum, Mount Vernon; and William Appleton’s ‘Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities’ (SPNEA) at the start of the twentieth century. As Australia sought to establish its own history and identity from the late nineteenth century, it aligned itself more towards America as a ‘new world’ and adopted American heritage practices in the search for its own heroes and history.

Chapter 2 examines the beginning of the house museum and heritage movements in Australia through the opening of Vaucluse House. The use of Mount Vernon as a model for Vaucluse House was not coincidental. As the first house museum, its emergence in the New World and the beginning of the heritage movement in America was meshed with the ideals of civil religion and the construction of a national identity. Against the backdrop of World War I, these aspects were central to the interpretation of Vaucluse House as the Mecca of Australia, and the elevation of William Charles Wentworth as Australia’s founding father in 1915. It was a pivotal point in the development of an Australian identity and the heritage movement, at a time when conservation was not a widely supported cause.

Chapter 3 charts the blossoming of the heritage movement under the National Trust. Established in 1945, the Trust united the various groups and ideas that made up the heritage movement prior to World War II. For a movement that had limited success and a relatively low public profile for many decades, the National Trust was also responsible for broadening public and government support for heritage conservation.
As the Trust’s first house museum, the conservation and interpretation of Experiment Farm Cottage reflected the ongoing influence of American ideas in Australia, including the progressivist-inspired quasi-scientific empirical methods promoted by SPNEA and its Colonial Revival inspired period rooms. This does not suggest that Australia adopted American practices without question. At Experiment Farm, the Colonial Revival movement was transplanted onto the ‘pioneer legend’ that explained how Australia was built through the collective efforts of hardworking individuals on the land. It reshaped Australia’s past into a mythical golden age that was based on a Georgian agrarian social order and exonerated Australia from its convict stain. At Experiment Farm, James Ruse rose above his status as a convicted thief to a national hero, by working honestly on the land to become Australia’s first farmer, and ensuring the agricultural future of this country.

Discussed over two chapters, Part II assesses the politically and culturally turbulent context from which heritage legislation (including the Historic Houses Act) was introduced in the 1970s, and how this changed the way heritage was defined and conserved.

Chapter 4 reviews the dramatic transformation in the 1970s that shifted the heritage movement from the community to the government. This decade marked the peak of environmental politics in Australia, where increasing public opposition to government proposals to redevelop historic and natural areas resulted in the green bans movement from 1971 to 1974. Within this context, this chapter examines how changing cultural, political and professional attitudes towards heritage shaped how Elizabeth Bay House was conserved and converted into a house museum. It was through the enactment of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust in 1977, that the New South Wales government cemented its role as the leader of the heritage movement and weakened the political power of community heritage groups by stipulating that heritage conservation was the realm of trained professionals.

Chapter 5 explores the expansion of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust into the Historic Houses Trust of NSW in 1980 in relation to the rising status of heritage professionals in the 1960s, and their role in creating a heritage bureaucracy in the 1970s. The Historic Houses Act cemented the transformation of heritage conservation from an amateur arena to one dictated by ‘experts’ and the government. Central to this process was the dismissal of the voluntary Vaucluse Park Trust. This
chapter also considers how the Historic Houses Trust defined ‘heritage professionalism’ through its management and re-interpretation of Vaucluse House in the early 1980s, using the quasi-scientific empirical principles of the Burra Charter. The systems developed at Vaucluse House became the prototype for how the Historic Houses Trust managed its future properties, and redefined the house museum.

**Part III** examines the development of the house museum genre since 1980 through five house museums managed by the Historic Houses Trust, including Elizabeth Farm, Rouse Hill Estate, Susannah Place, Hyde Park Barracks and the Museum of Sydney on the site of First Government House. These properties represented the major changes in house museum practices over the past three decades, from the emphasis on objectivity, empiricism and social history, to the esoteric post-modern concept of the anti-museum.

**Chapter 6** presents how the Historic Houses Trust rejected the idealised architectural restorations and period rooms of its predecessors and redefined the house museum through Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House. When comparing the two properties, the philosophical basis of each house appeared diametrically opposed. Elizabeth Farm, the former home of John and Elizabeth Macarthur, was furnished with ‘fake’ reproduction nineteenth furniture, while Rouse Hill House and its intact collection was ‘frozen’ in time and not restored.

As curator of both museums, James Broadbent was guided by the same empirical philosophy espoused in material culture studies where the objects and buildings were part of the historical record. For Broadbent, each house represented ‘two sides of the same coin’, where ‘the distinction between real and fake, between conservation and interpretation, between historical artefacts and explanatory props, was explicit’. The success of these two properties confirmed the Historic Houses Trust as the leader in house museum and heritage practices.

Despite the use of historic buildings and objects as forms of historical evidence, the supposed objective process of empirical research was not universally accepted. The range of places classified as heritage represented a small portion the cultural

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36 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
environment considered important and worthy of protection. Examining the public history dimensions of house museums, whose history was being promoted?

Chapter 7 considers how the Historic Houses Trust addressed claims of cultural and historical bias by acquiring a more socially representative range of house museums that extended beyond the ‘great man – great house’ mould. The Trust also attempted to become more transparent by incorporating the conservation and interpretation process as part of its house museum displays. At Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place, the Trust adopted historical archaeology as means of justifying conservation decisions, and for interpreting the entire history of each property. The seemingly odd marriage of house museum curatorship and historical archaeology reflected broader trends in the heritage field, where historical archaeology was perceived as the ‘conscience of heritage management’. The underlying assumption that heritage conservation could be an objective process remained.

The real challenge to the Trust’s empirical stance came with rise of post-modernism and its impact on museum studies. In the 1990s, museums were no longer perceived as objective storehouses of knowledge, but rather, cultural products with inherent bias. Chapter 8 assesses how the Trust developed the Museum of Sydney on the site of First Government house within the context of the ‘new museology’. Under the guidance of Peter Emmett, the Trust developed the first ‘post-modern’ museum in New South Wales. It was meant to be an anti-museum, which rejected the practices of classification, instruction, and provision of a master narrative that underpinned traditional museums. Yet, an assessment of the Museum’s exhibits and public programs revealed that despite the Trust’s aim to be culturally neutral, it was providing alternative national myths through its representation of Aboriginality and ethnicity that mirrored government cultural and social policies.

These eight house museums signify the key milestones in the house museum movement. Their histories provide a greater understanding of the origins of our current heritage system, and how it was the culmination of the preceding century of history making. As a ‘new world’ like America, Australia aspired to create a distinctive national history and cultural identity. As a microcosm of the heritage movement, the house museum was an integral part of this complex, and at times, contradictory process.
Figure 1.1
George Washington’s Mount Vernon, in Virginia, USA (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).
MELDING NEW WORLDS AND OLD:
Creating an Australian Heritage
from American Modernity and British Traditions

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the house museum movement in Australia preceded the public opening of Vaucluse House in 1912 and its conversion into a house museum in 1915. Australia may have been a British colony, but the house museum was an American creation. The opening of George Washington’s home ‘Mount Vernon’ in the 1850s signaled the beginning of the modern public house museum and the American heritage movement in general. Under the direction of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association (MVLA), Mount Vernon became the archetype for all house museums in the nineteenth century and continues to epitomise this genre. Mount Vernon’s success reinforced George Washington’s demi-god status and the enshrinement of his home as the ‘Mecca of America’. A stone’s throw away from the national capital, Washington DC, Mount Vernon remains the most visited house museum in America with over one million visitors each year.¹

With its legendary status, it was not surprising that when Vaucluse House, Australia’s first house museum, opened in 1912, its founders cited Mount Vernon as their role model. Yet, it was more than merely adopting the house museum genre. Led by the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), the budding heritage movement in Australia was turning to America for philosophical and methodological leadership. England also had a strong heritage movement in the late nineteenth century, with influential leaders like John Ruskin and William Morris (and his Society for the Protection of

Ancient Buildings). So why did the Australian heritage movement follow America’s lead, rather than that of England, the mother country?

This chapter examines seemingly disparate but parallel developments that led to the opening of Australia’s first house museum in 1912. Vaucluse House was a culmination of the emergent historical consciousness in Australia from the 1870s, the ‘civil religion’ ideals of the American heritage movement as forged by the ‘Mount Vernon Ladies Association’ (MVLA) in the 1850s, and the ‘progressivist’ aspirations of William Appleton’s ‘Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities’ (SPNEA) at the start of the twentieth century. As Australia sought to establish its own history and identity from the late nineteenth century, it aligned itself more towards America as a ‘new world’ and adopted American heritage practices in the search for its own ‘new world’ heroes and history.

From the 1870s, Australian history was repositioned from being defined by British figures who ‘discovered’ or explored Australia (like Captain Cook, Gregory Blaxland, John Oxley and William Hovell), to settlers who forged the colonial frontier through pastoral and agricultural enterprise. It was the celebration of these early, and mostly faceless, settlers that fashioned the ‘Australian legend’ and ‘pioneer legend’, as conceptualised by Russell Ward and elaborated by J.B. Hirst, Graeme Davison and Richard Waterhouse. Pivotal to the popularisation of a vernacular bush and rural character were the International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, the writings of poets like Henry Lawson, A.B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson and Dorothea McKellar, and the emergence of a distinctive Australian artistic movement led by painters such as Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin and Arthur Streeton from the Heidelberg School.

The identification of a distinguishable Australian character was fundamental in the opening of Vaucluse House as a house museum. Nevertheless, it was through the example and ideologies of the American heritage movement that Australians began associating the notion of vernacular but faceless heroes with specific individuals.

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and places. The nineteenth century ideologies of ‘civil religion’ as espoused by the MVLA at Mount Vernon, and the transition of the American heritage movement to the ideals of ‘progressivism’ and the ‘Colonial Revival’ as represented by SPNEA and the period room at the beginning of the twentieth century, were selectively integrated and mirrored by the Australian heritage movement. Central to this process was the search for local national heroes, as opposed to British figures, and the creation of a discernible Australian identity and history – however idealised or mythologised. It was a turning point in the making of an Australian history and heritage.

MOUNT VERNON: THE AMERICAN HERITAGE MOVEMENT AND THE FIRST HOUSE MUSEUM

The house museum and heritage movements in America were sparked during the 1850s by the conservation of Hasbrouck House, Washington’s headquarters in New York State, as a historic site; and the transformation of Washington’s family estate, Mount Vernon, into a house museum. As such, the history of the American house museum and heritage movements in the nineteenth century went hand in hand.

Mount Vernon was pivotal in establishing the direction and constituency of the heritage movement in the nineteenth century. The MVLA provided the template for subsequent heritage conservation groups in the nineteenth century. This first generation included ancestry and patriotic societies, and was notably a private female domain - an attribute that contrasted sharply to the predominantly male heritage professional in the twentieth century. The conversion of Mount Vernon into a house museum was symptomatic of the mythologising of George Washington (and American revolutionary figures generally) as a ‘founding father’ since the early nineteenth century. This was also a fundamental factor in the creation of Vaucluse House as a house museum and William Charles Wentworth as a national hero in Australia.

The campaigns to preserve Hasbrouck House and Mount Vernon in the 1850s defined the character and direction of the heritage movements for the rest of the nineteenth century. Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York, was George Washington’s military headquarters (Figure 1.2). It opened as a house museum on
the fourth of July in 1850 - a date that reflected the interpretative focus of subsequent house museums in that century.

Unlike Mount Vernon, the conservation of Hashbrouck House was supported by the State of New York, which contributed over eight thousand dollars towards its purchase. Its acquisition signalled a new attitude towards the built environment - one that attributed cultural meaning to historic sites and recognised their political potential to forster public unity in the face of an impending civil war. Reviewing the proposition to acquire the house, New York legislators expressed:

If our love of country is excited when we read the biography of our revolutionary heroes, or the history of revolutionary events, how much more still the flames of patriotism burn in our bosoms when we tread the ground where was shed the blood of our fathers, or when we move among the stones where were conceived and consummated their noble achievements... No traveller who touches upon the shores of Orange County will hesitate to make a pilgrimage to this beautiful spot, associated as it is with so many delightful reminiscences of our early history. And if he has an American heart in his bosom, he will feel himself to be a better man; his patriotism will kindle with deeper emotion; his aspirations for his country's good will ascend from a more devout mind, for having visited the "Headquarters of Washington".

As a museum, Mount Vernon was more influential and attracted greater public attention, but Hasbrouck House established the social agenda of the heritage

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movement that was based upon the nineteenth century social reform ideology of ‘civil religion’ and the ‘cult of domesticity’.

‘Civil Religion’ and the Deification of George Washington

Washington was embraced as a national figure during the nineteenth century, but the initial pre-occupation with Washington, and subsequently with other American Revolutionary leaders, was indicative of Southern sentiments and sectional political interests that emerged on the eve of the Civil War. These male figures were enshrined and mythologised into god-like figures, a concept described as ‘civil religion’. This, according to Robert N. Bellah, was:

an ideology that draws upon traditional religious symbols and practices to encourage citizenry participation in patriotic activities so that America may be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it.  

In the mid-nineteenth century, the traditional social order that had been based on an assumed white-male suffrage and property ownership was threatened from the effects of electoral expansion, industrialisation, mass immigration and increasing class stratification. Such changes were more apparent in the North and were perceived as a threat by the largely conservative and pre-industrial South. In the midst of this social flux, the presentation of a seemingly shared past through a universally recognisable figure like George Washington, provided a socially inclusive and unifying force. The underlying effect however, was the promotion of a traditional landholding social hierarchy.

The transformation of Mount Vernon into a national shrine was part of a broader movement that deified Washington. In his discussion of America’s ‘search for symbols’, Daniel J. Boorstin observed how the creation of the Washington legend

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6 *West, Domesticating History*, 3.
was a self-conscious process to separate the identity of the new world from the old despite the brevity of American history:

When the modern national of Italy, France, England and Spain became self-conscious, the challenge to national historians was to give the hazy figures... like Romulus and Remus, Aeneas, Charlemagne, Boadicea, King Alfred, St. Louis, St Joan, and the Cid... some historical reality, to make them more plausible by clothing them in historical fact. These nations, which had attained their nationality gradually over the centuries, already possessed legendary founding heroes when they became nations. The challenging task was to historicize them.

Not so in the United States. Here a new nation sprang into being almost before it had time to acquire a history. At the outbreak of the Civil War, there were men alive who could remember the death of Washington; he was still an emphatically real person. The national problem was not how to make Washington historical; quite the contrary: how could he be made into a myth?7

For Boorstin, the transfiguration of Washington into a ‘demi-god’ within a few decades of his death was testament to the desperate need by American for a dignified national hero. In doing so, the public were willing to overlook history itself.

In life, George Washington was not a universally popular leader. His presidency attracted criticism from his contemporaries, including Thomas Jefferson. His terms of agreement in the Jay’s Treaty with Britain to resolve differences and structure trade arrangements after the American Revolution proved widely unpopular, and precipitated objections from both the North and South. As one of Washington’s greatest critics, Benjamin Bache (Benjamin Franklin’s grandson) wrote in the Philadelphia periodical Aurora in 1775, ‘The American People, Sir, will look to death the man who assumes the character of a usurper’, and added in 1796, ‘If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been by Washington’. 8

When Washington left office in 1797, Bache wrote:

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8 Quoted in Ibid., 339.
Every heart, in unison with the freedom and happiness of the people, ought to beat high in exultation, that the name of Washington ceases from this day to give a currency to political iniquity and to legalize corruption.\(^9\)

Despite having such vehement enemies in life, the metamorphosis of Washington into a demi-god commenced before his death in 1799. Mason Locke Weems, an Anglican minister turned traveling book salesman, recognized the untapped public interest in American leaders and the potential of Washington as a bestseller. He prepared a short booklet titled, *The Beauties of Washington*, which was ready to go to press upon Washington’s death. Within two months of this event in December 1799, Weems’ eighty-page publication was on the market.

In 1808, he enlarged this into the two-hundred paged book, *Life of George Washington: With Curios Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself and Exemplary to His Young Countryman*. Over 50,000 copies were sold in the first decade of its release, making it one of the most widely read, and possibly most influential books written about American history.\(^10\) Weems established the mould from which all representations of Washington would be cast. Historical facts were conveniently overlooked to elevate Washington into a man of religion, benevolence, industry and patriotism. It sparked a new generation of biographies, all feeding into the Washington cult.\(^11\)

The Washington legend was further reinforced through other commemorative forms. He was the immortal subject of numerous artists. The most noted portraits of Washington were by Gilbert Stuart (Figure 1.3). Other artists included Charles Wilson James, Rembrandt Peale, William Dunlap, Edward Savage, and the sculptor Horatio Greenough.\(^12\)

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\(^9\) Quoted in Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid., 342-343.
Figure 1.3
On a national level, America's capital was named in Washington's honour, and the seat of government was transferred from Philadelphia to Washington on 1 December, 1800. In the same year, Congress approved the erection of a marble monument in the Capital with the intention of interring Washington's remains there (although this was never done). The creation of a national hero was near completion. The next step was the transformation of Mount Vernon into a national shrine through the sanctification of Washington's home.

Middle-Class Reform and the 'Cult of Domesticity' in Nineteenth Century America

Parallel with the development of 'civil religion' in America, was the reinforcement of middle-class values through domestic reforms. Described as 'domestic moralism' or the 'cult of domesticity', this movement related to broader social reforms that identified the female domestic environment as the basis for a stable society according to middle-class sensibilities. It was a movement born out of the industrialisation of America. From 1780 to 1835, America shifted from a pre-industrial and primarily agricultural base to a more urbanised society. The 1870 census revealed that, for the first time, the majority of Americans lived in cities and were employed in either manufacturing or office-related professions. Home and work became distinct spheres, with the home no longer meshed with the economic livelihood of the family. As Nancy Cott observed, 'the central convention of domesticity was the contrast between the home and the world'.


14 England also experienced a similar transformation of social roles during the Victorian period. Australia adopted aspects of the 'cult of domesticity' to a lesser extent when it shifted from a pre-industrial to a more urbanised society from the 1840s.


16 Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835, 64. Also quoted in Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870, 58.
The home evolved into a bastion for traditional values against the effects of industrialisation. For the nineteenth century English aesthete, John Ruskin, the home became a symbolic refuge from external forces because:

This is the true nature of home – it is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home.17

The new status attributed to the home also redefined the role of women, who were ascribed with the special social responsibility of mitigating the negative effects of industrialisation. Women became synonymous with morality and social stability – the embodiment of purity and virtue.

All aspects of the home became enmeshed with these social ideals. House design and decoration were no longer merely about taste and aesthetics – they became intrinsically linked to morality. A range of domestic manuals and architectural pattern books supporting the ideals of domestic moralism appeared from the 1850s. Based on the assumptions of environmental determinism, architectural and decorative styles were promoted as the basis of morally sound home environments.

For example, Andrew Jackson Downing’s 1850 The Architecture of Country Houses guided the ‘moral uplift’ of America from ‘rudeness to civility’ through domestic architectural forms.18 Instructing ‘young householders’ on the social purpose of their homes in an 1888 manual, Mrs Patton described the parlour as the ‘teacher to the untidy or unmethodical’ because:

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Fine manners are a necessity, and a certain amount of fine manners is maintained by use of a room that holds our dearest treasures, and sees little of the seamy side of life. It is on little things that our lives depend for comfort, and small habits, such as a changed dress for evening wear with a long skirt, to give the proper drawing-room air, the enforcement of the rule that slippers and cigars must never enter there, and a certain politeness maintained to each other in the best room, almost insensibly enforced by the very atmosphere of the chamber, will go a long way towards keeping up the mutual respect that a husband and wife should have for each other, and which is a surer means of happiness than anything I know.  

The parlour was a creation of the Victorian era and referred to the front room where visitors were greeted and entertained by the 'lady of the house'. It served as an interface between the public sphere of the outside world and the private area of the home, providing an acceptable forum for women to interact with friends, acquaintances and strangers according to strict codes of social etiquette. The metamorphosis of the drawing room into the parlour epitomised the idea that the home was the heart of social conventions and harmony (Figure 1.4 and 1.5).

The strengthening of social reforms through the home environment was not restricted to the middle-class. From the 1880s, many of these publications were targeted at migrants and the working-class. Domestic manuals were written with specific reference to the accommodation typical of these less affluent groups, and included such titles as, *Housekeeping Notes: How to Furnish and Keep House in a Tenement Flat: A Series of Lessons Prepared for Use in the Association of Practical Housekeeping Centers of New York.* The purpose of these manuals was to 'Americanise' these groups according to middle-class values.

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Figure 1.4
James Hayllar's *The Only Daughter* (1875) provided the picture of domestic virtue within the setting of the parlour. The strength of the family's bond was depicted by the physical chain between the father, daughter and her fiancé. The family's gentility was symbolised by the piano, and its industriousness by the sewing machine on the floor and the mother's sewing on her lap (Forbes Collection, Battersea House, London).
Figure 1.5
Victorian artists often used the drawing room as the setting for showing the moral standing of a family.

In the first painting of the triptych, *Past and Present* (1848), Augustus Egg presented the breakdown of a family caused by the adulterous actions of the wife within the setting of the drawing room. The moral disorder of the household was signified by the two paintings flanking the fireplace, one of a shipwreck and the other the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The apple sliced with a knife on the table and the fallen half on the floor reinforced the notion of original sin. Her daughters were painted playing with cards — a sign of gambling and a reflection of the mother’s incompetent parental skills.

(Tate Collection, London)
Mount Vernon: Melding Civil Religion and the Domestic Reform

Figure 1.6
View of Mount Vernon from the Northeast, attributed to Edward Savage, c.1792 (MLVA).

The house museum was the ideal medium to express the combined values of civil religion and domestic moralism. The use of Washington's home, Mount Vernon, as a museum provided the perfect platform for promoting and symbolising pre-industrial America (Figure 1.6). As the first public house museum, much has been written about Mount Vernon and its founders, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA). More recently, Patricia West and Charlotte Smith examined Mount Vernon to assess the ideological and political origins of the house museum movement. Rather than providing a history of Mount Vernon, this

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22 Charlotte Smith, *The House Enshrined: Great Man and Social History House Museums in the United States and Australia* (PhD Dissertation, University of Canberra, 2002); West, *Domesticating History*. 

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chapter identifies the main attributes of the museum and its creators that shaped the house museum movement.

As the first heritage organisation in America, the MVLA defined the cultural role of nineteenth century house museums, and the cultural and social traits of their founders (Figure 1.7). First and foremost, the MVLA was a non-government organisation that consisted primarily of women. Secondly, it memorialised an agrarian past, based on the plantation system, by mythologising a white Revolutionary political figure (notably George Washington) through the preservation and recreation of the domestic environment in the form of the house museum.

![Figure 1.7](image)

*The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1873. Pamela Ann Cunningham is seated fourth from the right, gazing at the Houdon bust of Washington (MVLA).*

Ann Pamela Cunningham was central to the creation of Mount Vernon. Born in 1816 and raised on a South Carolina plantation, her ancestral lineage to Washington ensured her position within the social elite of the South. Mount Vernon was already a site for patriotic visitors before the 1850s, but Cunningham elevated its status to that of a national icon, a status that continues to this day. Her work conformed to the ideas of the civil religion and domestic moralism movements.
After Washington’s death in 1799, Mount Vernon remained in the family and eventually passed to his grand-nephew, John Augustine Washington, in 1829. The decision of this impoverished relative to sell the property ignited great public concern that it would be purchased by ‘some Turk or other Foreigner’ or ‘Northern Capitalist’. In 1846, a public petition to the Federal government to purchase Mount Vernon was rejected. This event spurred Cunningham into action and she launched her ‘Appeal to the Ladies of the South’ in 1853. Published in different newspapers, she called upon women’s sense of social duty to maintain the moral foundations of America, stating that:

Should there ever again be times to try men’s souls there will be found among you, as of old, heroines superior to fear and selfish consideration, acting for country and its honour?  

Despite Cunningham’s claims of national unity, her work to ensure Mount Vernon remained under Southern public ownership was a cultural, economic and political stance against the growing commercial strength and foreign influence of the North. By structuring her work within the socially acceptable form of women’s philanthropy, she was able to partake in political and fund-raising campaigns that were normally associated with the male public realm. Furthermore, Cunningham managed to gain support across territorial lines, claiming that:

We neither desire nor intend sectionality. We feel none towards those whose patriotism knows no North, South, East, or West. If ever in the future period of our national history, the Union should ever be in serious danger, political storms rocking it to its base, or rendering it in twain, there will be such a moral grandeur (perhaps assuaging influence we cannot now estimate) in the mere fact that the tomb of Washington rests secure under the flag of his native state, enshrined in the devotional reverence of the wives, mothers, and daughters of the Union.

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25 Ann Pamela Cunningham, "An Appeal for Mount Vernon by the Mount Vernon Association for the Union", Washington Circular, November 24, 1854, (MLVA Archives); quoted in West, Domesticating History, 10.
In effect, the female realm of the home was equated with the traditional (and virtuous) social hierarchy of the South, whereas the immorality of the male public sphere was likened to the economic developments in the North.

In addition to her rhetoric on universal female virtues, Cunningham also advanced her political cause by promoting Washington as a national hero, whose qualities transcended both time and place. Washington may have been the ‘Father of American Independence’, but it was the image of Washington as a hardworking farmer that appealed to the public. He was elevated above his historical and social context, where his wealth and status were derived from slavery. Instead, Cunningham depicted Mount Vernon as a cradle of righteousness, based on an idealised agrarian system where:

The farms were thoroughly worked. George Washington was a wise, industrious, thrifty farmer; he was not a man to be content with meagre returns from the soil; he spared no pains to bring the very best crops from his fields . . . It would not be easy, dear children, to imagine a more happy, a more honorably peaceful way of life, than that led at Mount Vernon during those quiet years; the active usefulness, the many exercises without – the generous hospitalities, the neighborly charities, the happy family circle within – these gave Colonel Washington what his heart most enjoyed.²⁶

The issue of slavery was not discussed, probably because Cunningham did not consider this unusual.

The success of the MVLA lay in its ability to articulate its objectives within the rhetoric of non-sectional nationalism, and by presenting a history that had universal appeal. The combination of a predominantly female organisation and its use of the home environment to support a particular social agenda were not coincidental. The underlying premise of the nineteenth century house museum movement was the melding of ‘civil religion’ and the ‘cult of domesticity’. The private home was the moral base for the family, but the opening of Mount Vernon provided a guiding light for the entire nation.

The MLVA purchased Mount Vernon in 1858 and its ensuing achievements inspired a plethora of late nineteenth century patriotic and ancestry societies with a similar mission to preserve the threatened homes of former Revolutionary leaders (Figure 1.8). The Ladies' Hermitage Association, formed in 1889, directed its energies to preserving President Andrew Jackson's home, The Hermitage. The universal appeal of the MVLA even transcended racial differences, with the National Association of Colored Women campaigning from 1896 to save Frederick Douglass' Cedar Hill. These later female-based societies aspired to attain the same level of success of the MVLA, but as Hosmer aptly noted in his history of the American heritage movement, they were forever 'under the shadow of Mount Vernon'.27 As Patricia West remarked, 'by claiming to provide a “rootless” populace with a shared ancestral home and sacred heritage, the house museum found a permanent niche in American political culture'.28

Ann Pamela Cunningham always maintained that Mount Vernon rose above politics, but the process of transforming the house into a museum was enmeshed with cultural values and bias. As a museum, it was not created to provide a historically accurate insight into the workings of an American plantation, or that of its owner. Instead, the purpose for its creation was to impart the superiority of a pre-industrial society, with particular reference to the South. The notions of 'authenticity' and historical truth' did not feature in Cunningham's campaign, and was generally absent from the aims of the heritage movement during this period. It was only in the twentieth century that such ideas were considered important aspects of heritage conservation, and used to differentiate the 'professional expert' from the seemingly "amateur" approach of Cunningham and her progeny.

27 Hosmer, Presence of the Past, 41.
28 West, Domesticating History, 3.
Figure 1.8
(Above) Front of Mount Vernon, 1858 (MVLA).
(Below) The Home of Washington” (ca. 1858), by Currier and Ives, color lithograph, (MVLA).
A photograph of a dilapidated Mount Vernon in 1858 when the MVLA purchased it, and a more pleasing image produced that same year. The MVLA produced postcards and lithographs to raise funds for the purchase and restoration of the property.
THE NEXT GENERATION: AMERICAN PROGRESSIVISM AND THE COLONIAL REVIVAL

The house museum that opened at Vaucluse House in 1915 entailed more than the form and ideals of Mount Vernon. It also encapsulated the philosophical and methodological changes within the American heritage movement since the 1850s. The legend of Washington firmly established Mount Vernon at the heart of the house museum and heritage movements, but the dominance of the MVLA waned as the new century unfolded.

Museum and heritage practices underwent a period of dramatic change between the 1870s and 1920s. During this period, professional curators from large metropolitan museums, and new "professional" heritage organisations (as exemplified by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA)) introduced new heritage practices that were guided by the scientific and corporate ideals of modernism, and the academic disciplines of history, architecture and archaeology. Like the civil reforms of the nineteenth century, this new generation of heritage practitioners also advocated a particular social and cultural agenda. It resulted in the strange marriage between the supposedly objective ideals of progressivism and the mythical social ideals of the Colonial Revival. Epitomising this union was the period room, an interpretative genre that dominated history and house museums for much of the twentieth century.

The Advent of the Period Room and the Colonial Revival

The display of historical domestic objects in recreated room settings first appeared in the 1860s at Sanitary Fairs, and the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. The Union Government established the US Sanitary Commission in 1861 to provide services for soldiers including setting up hospitals, employing nurses and educating troops on hygiene and food preparation, and fund raising. The Commission was run by men, but largely staffed by women. One of the main fundraising events organised by the women was the ‘Sanitary Fairs’, which were held in major cities throughout the country.
At these fairs, the female staff was responsible for devising the popular attractions of the recreated 'colonial kitchen' and 'relic rooms' (Figure 1.9). Such displays reinforced the role of women in civil reform, and also presented American history (however idealised) in a highly visible and accessible medium. As West surmised, along 'with Mount Vernon, the Sanitary Fair exhibits and period rooms would provide the groundwork for the late-nineteenth century historic house museum movement'.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 1.9*

At the Brooklyn and Long Island Sanitary Fair in 1864, one of the attractions was the "New England Kitchen." In recreating the 'historic' kitchen, women also dressed in colonial costumes and demonstrated the kinds of activities done by women in the years before the American Revolution of 1776. This type of display was also featured at other Sanitary Fairs in the North (Sanitary Fair, February 22, 1864, Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection).

Following the popularity of the Sanitary Fairs, the 1876 Centennial Exposition extended the concept of the recreated colonial kitchen to an entire homestead. Different American states and regional areas exhibited their particular version of the 'home'. Examples ranged from 'colonial' homesteads from Connecticut and

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30 West, *Domesticating History*, 40.
Massachusetts to the New England ‘Log-House’, with food served from ‘Ye Olden Time’ kitchen.\textsuperscript{31} The period room and house museum were merging.

Attended by nearly ten million people, these historical displays precipitated great public interest in American colonial history and influenced the house museum movement in two ways. First, it generated an increasing public demand for more house museums that were associated with American Revolutionary leaders and early presidents, such as Andrew Jackson’s home, The Hermitage, which was opened by the Ladies’ Hermitage Association in the 1880s. Other house museum societies included the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and The Colonial Dames, all of which were modelled on the MVLA. At least two house museums opened each year in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{32}

Amidst this seemingly endless mimicking of Cunningham’s work was a shift in the house museum movement. The historical displays at the Centennial Exposition generated not only greater interest in Revolutionary heroes, but also the history of colonial America generally. The decade of the 1870s saw the beginnings of the Colonial Revival, a movement that sought to emulate the social hierarchy and values of the colonial ‘golden age’ through the replication of the arts, architecture and decorative arts from ‘the Pilgrims’ arrival at Plymouth Rock to the death of Thomas Jefferson’ on the fourth of July in 1826.\textsuperscript{33}

The movement was a response to ‘the crisis of American culture in the late nineteenth century’.\textsuperscript{34} As Harvey Green explained in his paper about the origins of the Colonial Revival, the latter decades of the nineteenth century were marred by economic and social instability.\textsuperscript{35} The onset of the economic depression in 1873 sparked social tensions, and culminated with a series of violent organised strikes in

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
1877. The press inflated these events as signs of a disintegrating society and accompanied their stories with artistic images of cities burning to the ground, overrun by menacing mobs of workers.\textsuperscript{36} Fears of social collapse were also compounded by the influx of immigrants, who were supposedly poised to assume control during a period of social weakness in America.\textsuperscript{37}

Against this backdrop of social unease, the Colonial Revival emerged as one of many palliative solutions – one that became all-encompassing and long-lasting. It influenced nearly every facet of American culture from architecture, furnishings, decorative arts, theatre and publications. As Kenneth L. Ames explained:

\begin{quote}
The colonial revival could be viewed in the conventional and relatively narrow sense of a discrete phase of American architectural and furnishing history usually thought of as beginning about the time of the Centennial and dying out with the advent of the modern movement in the early twentieth century. But the phase could also be given broader meaning, encompassing virtually every variety of artifactual interaction with visions of colonial America. Defined in a broader sense, the colonial revival might be seen less as a time-bound episode in American cultural history and more as a persisting and pervasive component of the American past.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Major proponents of the Colonial Revival included large metropolitan museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. With increasing public interest in the colonial past, these institutions began collecting American historical objects, antiques and decorative arts, and displaying them in period room settings.

In 1875, the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts opened one of the first exhibitions of colonial objects. It was largely organised by the Salem Ladies Centennial Committee, but the museum's (male) curator, George Francis Dow, was

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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.; Green noted the front cover of Harper's Weekly (August 11, 1877) as a good example of the press' representation of the workers' strike as a sign of societal degeneration. The front cover of the issue was filled with an illustration of the strikes in Baltimore. The inside stories tell of the strikes in Pittsburgh and how the city had fallen into the "hands of the mob".

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 6.

credited for the work.\textsuperscript{39} The Essex Institute continues to attribute America’s first period room and the museum acquisition of historic buildings to Dow.\textsuperscript{40}

Under the direction of Dow in 1910, the Essex Institute acquired the John Ward House by splitting it into two pieces and moving it on ox-drawn logs to its current location on the grounds of the Peabody Essex Museum (Figure 1.10). Built in 1684, it is considered one of New England’s best examples of a wood-frame and clapboard dwelling. Dow interpreted the interiors to reflect ‘First Period’ New England architecture, arts and domestic life.\textsuperscript{41} Opening to the public in 1911, it became America’s first outdoor museum of architecture in America. Since then, the Museum’s collection has grown to more than twenty antebellum buildings.

\textit{Figure 1.10}
\textit{John Ward House and its recreated kitchen (1684) (Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts).}

The Colonial Revival was not isolated to America. As Ames noted:

What tends often to be ignored in looking at the American colonial revival are its parallels with behaviour in other parts of the world. A narrow obsession with American exceptionalism obscures the strands that tie American cultural experience to concurrent, antecedent, or subsequent behaviour elsewhere. This is particularly true if we examine colonizing behaviour as a response to modernization.

Central elements of the response to modernism are an orientation toward either preindustrial times in the past or nonindustrial alternatives in the present, an emphasis on handicraft, an

\textsuperscript{39} West, \textit{Domesticating History}, 18.
\textsuperscript{40} http://www.pem.org/visit/historic_houses.php, cited 10 June 2006.
\textsuperscript{41} First Period or Post-Medieval is the earliest architectural style brought to New England by English colonists.
anturban bias – which usually translates into an emphasis on rural life – and an inclination to stress simple rather than complex social structures, homogenous, cooperative folk rather than diverse, competitive people. Similar patterns with only minor variations can be found in most western European nations.42

Similar trends were evident in England. William Morris and John Ruskin headed the anti-modernist Arts and Craft Movement in England during the late nineteenth century, and the collection of pre-industrial domestic crafts and their interpretation within the period room genre by English museums also began in the twentieth century.

Opening in 1914, the Geffrye Museum in London was the first collecting institution specialising in the history of English domestic interiors. In 1910, the London County Council purchased the former almshouses of the Ironmongers’ Company built in 1714. For the Council, the primary purpose of the purchase was to open the garden as a public space in a densely populated area of London. Supporters of the Arts and Crafts Movement lobbied the Council to convert the buildings into a museum that would include a reference collection of furniture and woodwork to educate artisans from the local furniture industry.

The Museum duly opened in 1914, but a changing workforce in the area meant that the museum redirected its education to schools. In 1935, the collection was reorganised into a series of period rooms, a practice that continues today. The current collection includes furniture from the 1600s to the present day (Figure 1.11). The Colonial Revival was also evident in Australia and its profound impact on our heritage movement is discussed in subsequent chapters.

In America, the heyday of the period room in the 1920s was characterised by the creation of iconic museums dedicated to this genre. Henry Du Pont’s creation of 175 period rooms at Wintherthur from 1928, John D. Rockefellow’s Colonial Williamsburg and the Metropolitan Museum with its American Wing (which opened in 1924) were all testaments to this era (Figure 1.12). These early period rooms were connected by their romanticised interpretation of the past, rather than as authentic historical displays.

Figure 1.11
The Geffrye Museum was one of the earliest period room museums to open in England. While retaining its traditional room settings, like the late Georgian (1770-1880) room on the left, it also includes twentieth century settings, like the 1990s room on the right (Geffrye Museum).

Their creation of ‘Early American’, ‘Colonial’ and ‘Federal’ interiors are themselves cultural relics of the Colonial Revival. When the American Wing of the Metropolitan re-opened in 1980, following the expansion of the galleries, its curators decided to maintain some of the Colonial Revival settings. The eighteenth-century Powell Room became an acknowledgment of this earlier interpretative approach, despite changing museum philosophies calling for greater historical accuracy (Figure 1.14).\textsuperscript{43} Adopting a similar stance, curators at Winterthur have maintained the period rooms that were assembled by Henry du Pont as a record of his amazing vision and mission of preserving America’s colonial past (Figure 1.13).\textsuperscript{44} As the Director of the Metropolitan Museum, Phillipe de Montebello commented:

It is not surprising that the first curators working on our period rooms were often as influenced by their own time as by the period they were attempting to re-create.\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{44} Jay E. Cantor, \textit{Winterthur} (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987).

In the face of changing museum philosophies and greater emphasis on historical authenticity, period rooms have since been re-interpreted as cultural artefacts.

Figure 1.12
Winterthur, c.1884 (Winterthur Museum). The two children are Henry Francis du Pont and his sister, Louise Evelina. Winterthur was the Du Pont family estate in Delaware, USA. When Henry Francis inherited the estate in 1927, he extended the house and began furnishing the interiors with his extensive colonial American decorative arts and furniture. Interiors were also obtained from other American historic houses Du Pont opened Winterthur as a house museum in 1951. With 175 period room displays, Winterthur remains the largest house museum in America.
Figure 1.13

Named after its lavish wallpaper, the room was designed to fit the full length of the wallpaper. The Asian inspire Chippendale furniture, Chinese porcelains and lacquered ware reflected the Western fascination of China in the 1700s. This room was furnished by Henry Francis du Pont and used by the family for entertaining.

(Below) The Chinese Parlour has been maintained as a permanent display at Winterthur to show du Pont’s Colonial Revival tastes.
The interior joinery and fixtures were taken from a mid-18th century house in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1917 (right). Samuel Powell was a wealthy man from a well-established family. He was the last mayor of Philadelphia under British rule and the first after the American Revolution.

The Museum purchased the timber interiors for its association with a 'revolutionary leader and the high quality Georgian-style woodwork'. Like Winterthur, the room was furnished according to early twentieth century Colonial Revival ideals. For example, none of the furniture used by the Museum was owned by the Powell family, and there was no evidence that the room had Chinese wallpaper. The Powell Room has become a cultural artefact of early twentieth century curatorial perceptions of colonial tastes.

While calls for historical accuracy, and a scientific and standardised heritage system typify current heritage practices, its genesis belongs to the rise of progressivism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation saw the development of quasi-scientific systems and the parallel growth in professional services. It was the era of the new middle class, and as Hugh Brogan noted:

society was now rich enough to pay for professional services ... Hence in the last decade of the nineteenth century there was a mushroom growth among the professions. Doctors and lawyers, of course; but also engineers, dentists, professors, journalists, social workers, architects. This was the age of the expert.  

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The heritage professional could also be added to this list. The rise of the predominantly male museum curator heralded this change to the heritage and house museum movements, and leading the charge was William Sumner Appleton and his Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).

**Progressivism and Professional Heritage Practices: SPNEA and William Sumner Appleton**

Appleton established SPNEA (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities) in 1910 for “the purpose of preserving for posterity buildings, places and objects of historical and other interest”. It was the first regional heritage organisation in America, unlike the nineteenth century ancestral and patriotic groups that focused on saving single historic sites and buildings. SPNEA dominated the American heritage movement in the first part of the twentieth century, and was the largest society of its kind in 1940.

Appleton is often credited with launching the heritage movement into the twentieth century. Examining the history of preservation in America, William O. Murtagh wrote glowingly of how “today’s broadly accepted standard professionalism on how one treats buildings in the restoration process owe its basis to Appleton”. What set Appleton apart from his predecessors was his melding of progressivist ideals with the Colonial Revival. His work through SPNEA marked a turning point in the American heritage movement and characterised twentieth century professional practices.

Progressivism was part of the intellectual development of modernism in the 1890s. It generated new ideas that had a profound impact on twentieth century environmental politics and management. Modernism represented a rejection of determinism and materialism. It was based on the assumption that people possessed the ability to shape their future and the notion that social and environmental problems could be solved through rational analysis.

47 http://www.historicnewengland.org/collections/
As Michael Roe wrote, progressivism was ‘a movement of the established and possessing classes, seeking to save society from its excesses’.\(^{50}\) It influenced the cultural value attributed to the physical and cultural environment, and its relation to the well-being and progression of society. Society, environment and economics were considered as inter-related elements that required a uniform management system. Politically, progressivists encouraged governments to accept a greater responsibility in formulating socially-inclusive policies and programs in the areas of health, education, working-conditions and urban and regional planning. It was not limited to America, with Australian social reformers like John Fitzgerald, Miles Franklin and J.S.C. Elkington, advocating progressivist ideals in their work.

While supporting the notion of the ‘common good’, progressivism was an elitist movement. Supporters maintained the political status quo of a democratic government, but believed that social advancement and wellbeing required the leadership of individuals who displayed ‘skill, energy and altruistic devotion to the common weal’.\(^{51}\) The role of the professional, expert, technician and bureaucrat was vital in this process, as these individuals possessed the necessary skills and knowledge to solve social and economic problems. They provided the means for political leaders to develop and implement the necessary systems that were considered beneficial for maintaining social stability. Efficiency, standardisation and professionalism became the catch-cry of twentieth century governments and corporations.

The seemingly inclusive social attitude of progressivists was driven in part by political expediency. Similar to the nineteenth century reform movements that were framed around the ideas of domestic moralism, progressivism also promoted the position and values of middle-class conservatives. The issues of immigration and social homogeneity were as pertinent at the beginning of the twentieth century as in the preceding half decade. As Roe observed, the progressive social programs initiated in the areas of health, education and employment were intended to encourage conformity to middle-class notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority.\(^{52}\) An

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 12-13.


\(^{52}\) Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 11.
underlying theme of this movement was to control the entry of 'inferior immigrants, especially Asians, and to 'Americanise' foreigners and the working classes.

The influence of progressivist politics is often examined through the areas of education, health, labour and environmental conservation.\(^\text{53}\) The movement also had a profound effect on house museum and heritage practices – the effects of which are still apparent today. For Appleton, the ideals of rationalism and scientific rigour underlying progressivism provided an alternative to accepted heritage practices of his time. They also served to justify his Colonial Revival based perception of what should be conserved as America's heritage.

In many ways, Appleton was the product of various influences by making selective references to practices in England, France, Sweden and his own contemporaries in America. He did not follow the accepted method in America of restoring and reconstructing buildings to idealised architectural forms. Nor did he adhere to the purist approach of John Ruskin, who attacked the excesses of the Gothic revival of the Victorian period. In his 1849, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin criticised the overzealous methods of conserving public monuments and thought 'restoration' was:

> The most total destruction which a building can suffer: a destruction out of which no remnants can be gathered; a destruction accompanied with false description of the things destroyed... As for direct and simple copying, it is palpably impossible... Take proper care of your monuments, and you will not need to restore them... Watch an old building with anxious care... and at any cost from every influence of dilapidation.\(^\text{54}\)

For Ruskin, conservation was limited to stabilisation and maintenance.


Appleton was situated mid-way between these two opposing conservation philosophies. He supported restoration, but believed that it should be an informed process that was guided by the scientific rigour of architectural knowledge and archaeological practices of investigation. This philosophical goal was expressed through three strands of his work, being the development of a systematic method for recording and documenting buildings; using empirical evidence as the basis of restoration; and actively acquiring historic buildings, books and pictorial material.

The Beginning of a Standardised Heritage System

The systematic collection of documentary material and the recording of buildings were central to Appleton’s goal to conserve New England’s heritage. His methods were influenced by the relatively new discipline of historical archaeology and its techniques in documenting and analysing material evidence. From the beginning, Appleton focused on the architectural and structural composition of buildings, and emphasised the necessity of measured drawings and photographs as part of the conservation process.\(^{55}\)

Spurred by empiricism, Appleton followed Europe’s lead in creating an inventory of historic buildings. In France, the Commission des Monuments Historiques was undertaking an inventory of French antiquities. A few decades earlier in 1877, William Morris’ Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings also surveyed ancient buildings in London. Appleton established a library of measured drawings and pictures of over 50,000 New England buildings, as well as collecting books, and antiquities relating to the historic environment.\(^{56}\) He even studied the registration methods used by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for cataloguing art objects.\(^{57}\) The idea of a building inventory was later adopted by fellow progressivist President Roosevelt as part of his nationwide Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) project during the Great Depression in 1933. It was the first and remains the only nationally based historic architectural survey of its type in America.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Hosmer, Presence of the Past, 239.
In addition to collecting 'data', Appleton influenced heritage practices by leading through example. Unlike the preceding nineteenth century heritage organisations that were each concerned with one historic site, SPNEA actively sought numerous properties. It acquired forty buildings in its first thirty years and had acquired fifty-one by the time of Appleton's death in 1947. By restoring some of these buildings into house museums, Appleton was able to demonstrate the systematic approach he advocated.

Building conservation was still a relatively new concept in America at the start of the twentieth century. Appleton realised the lack of guidance when he wrote:

the work of owning and maintaining a number of widely scattered old houses, and keeping them all as nearly as practicable in their original condition, is an experiment in this country. We have no signposts to guide us and from the beginning have had to feel our way along.\(^{58}\)

Rejecting romanticised restorations of the nineteenth century that were based on conjecture, Appleton documented and analysed the physical development of his acquired buildings as part of the restoration process.

SPNEA's acquisition of numerous properties also broadened the definition of heritage. Describing historical and ancestral societies as 'one-house' organisations, Appleton believed that their sole concern with family associations meant that such groups rarely extended their efforts beyond rescuing more than one building to the detriment of other historic places.\(^{59}\) He promoted SPNEA as the pro-active alternative, declaring that:

The situation requires aggressive action by a large and strong society, which shall cover the whole field and act instantly wherever needed to lead in the preservation of noteworthy buildings and historic sites. That is exactly what this Society has been formed to do.\(^{60}\)

Moving away from the preoccupation with Revolutionary leaders, Appleton adopted a wider outlook that included buildings that reflected 'everyday' life. This included vernacular and modest structures that were not necessarily associated with a famous person or historical event.


\(^{60}\) *Bulletin of the S.P.N.E.A.*, 1 (May 1910), 1, quoted in Ibid.
Using Science to Create an Alternate Idealised Past

Although Appleton’s concept of heritage may have extended beyond the memory of Washington, it was similar to his predecessors, in that he also wanted to present a particular version of American history through the buildings that SPNEA acquired and restored. His preference for colonial buildings reflected an adherence to the values of the Colonial Revival. In his 1913 pamphlet, *The Colonial Homes of New England, Shall They Be Saved*, Appleton openly stated his bias, explaining how:

> The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities was organised on the theory that eternal vigilance is the price of the preservation of our remaining colonial houses. Its chief purpose is to save for future generations structures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the early years of the nineteenth, which are architecturally beautiful or unique, or have special historical significance.61

At the heart of Appleton’s work was the desire to maintain conservative values and the hierarchy of colonial America. Belonging to Boston’s social elite, Appleton’s family wealth was established by his grandfather, Nathan Appleton. A farm boy from a Puritan family in Ipswich Massachusetts, Nathan rose to become a merchant and industrialist.62 In 1828, he established one of the first integrated mills in America, a venture that secured the family’s fortune for several generations. Although he was part of the new order of industrialists, Nathan Appleton attributed his success to an adherence to Puritan ideals of ‘self-discipline, abstemiousness, hard work, and prudence’.63

By the time William Sumner Appleton was born, the family were securely established on the exclusive Beacon Street in Boston. Neighbours included authors Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott. Educated in Harvard, Appleton was inspired by his teacher, Charles Elliot Norton, who equated Classical art and architecture with the embodiment of civilisation. Transferring this concept to colonial New England architecture, Norton believed that the homes of old American families were considered to be one of the ‘strongest forces in the never-ending

contest against the degrading influences of the spirit of materialism', and their preservation was vital because they were 'the inheritance of memories and association which dignify and exalt life, which connect it by visible monuments with the past and the future'.

Ironically, it was the material effects of industrialisation that ensured Appleton's charmed life as a gentleman. His working-life was restricted to three years, from 1898 to 1901, when apparent ill-health necessitated his departure as a partner of a Boston real estate firm. Appleton did not seek paid employment again. When he turned 31, he became the life-time recipient of a comfortable income from a trust fund established by his father.

Despite advocating the scientific rigour of documentation and empirical study, Appleton promoted an imagined past as a solution to modern problems. Imbued with a sense of objectivity, his work was made credible through the structuring of SPNEA according to corporate models and the adoption of seemingly scientific and socially inclusive definitions of heritage. Appleton was willing to accept technological and economic changes associated with industrialisation, but only when it benefited the traditional upper classes and did not threaten the social hierarchy of pre-industrial America.

Despite being tinged with contradictions, Appleton's work was important because he established a systemised process to the study and conservation of historic buildings, which would re-surface with the new 'social history' in the 1960s. His treatment of buildings and objects as forms of empirical evidence meant that it could be recorded, classified and studied, in a similar way to specimens from the natural world. Through SPNEA, Appleton created the fundamental elements of current heritage practices. As West noted, 'the increasing role of... “professional” organizations like the SPNEA in historic preservation mark a watershed in the history of house museums'.

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65 Hosmer, Presence of the Past, 237.
66 West, Domesticating History, 48.
SEARCHING FOR AN ANTIPODEAN HERO:
AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS FROM 1880 TO 1914

In the same year that Appleton founded SPNEA, the New South Wales government resumed Vaucluse House on the opposite side of the world. Vaucluse House was not only the first house museum established in Australia, it was also one of the earliest history museums that collected Australian historical objects. It was a pivotal point in the emergence of an Australian historical consciousness that became apparent from the 1880s.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 1.15

Up until the late nineteenth century, Australia was identified in relation to England. As a British colony, its value was determined by its potential to supply suitable natural resources for British markets and industries. Museums were important in their task of collecting, identifying and cataloguing such material, and the institutions and exhibitions from this period reflected this focus. This was demonstrated in the founding of Australia’s first museum, the Australian Museum, in 1827 for the purpose of collecting natural history specimens. Little attention
was made to the history of European settlement. Aboriginal objects were collected only because indigenous cultures were considered a part of the natural sciences and later, the social science of anthropology.

The absence of history museums or historical collections was not due to a lack of knowledge of the colonial past. During the nineteenth century, Australian history was defined by the deeds of notable English individuals and historical events, which in turn were commemorated by plaques and statues. In 1822, the Philosophical Society of Australasia placed a brass tablet at Kurnell to mark the landing of Captain Cook and Joseph Banks in 1770. The first statue in New South Wales was erected in 1842, in honour of the colonial governor, Sir Richard Bourke (Figure 1.15). The presence of local Australian heroes was notably absent.

**Popularising Australian History**

As Kimberley Webber highlighted in her discussion on the development of Australian historical collections, the first interpretative displays on Australian history did not occur in museums, but rather at the International Exhibitions hosted in Australia between 1879 and 1900. The popularisation of Australian history and the identification of discernable Australian traits were also aided by the emergence of a distinctive Australian literary and artistic movement. These publicly accessible forms encouraged greater interest in Australia’s past and the creation of a localised heritage.

Modelled on the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, International Exhibitions were intended to promote commerce and industry, art, science, and education. Similar events were also held in Europe and America. They provided different states, colonies and nations with the opportunity to showcase examples of their manufactured goods and technological developments, as well as displays of their agricultural, natural and mineral products and specimens. It was also a venue for exhibiting artistic endeavours, such as paintings and sculptures, as well as ethnographic material from different colonies.

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For Australia, the opportunity to host such a prestigious event in 1879 was a major step in being accepted as a modern nation and equal to the previous host countries that included England, France, Austria and America. The first International Exhibition in Australia was held in Sydney. Located in the Government Domain, the city was transformed with the construction of the fantastical pavilion styled Garden Palace – an architectural feature that dominated the Sydney skyline until it was destroyed by fire in 1882. Describing the magnitude of this occasion, Peter Proudfoot noted how Exhibition ‘was an extraordinary event in the life and trajectory of the colonial city’:

Throughout 1879, ships carried the manufactures and visitors of the world into Sydney Harbour, their cargoes destined for the courts and pavilions of, literally the greatest show on earth.

Not only was it a chance to display the abundant natural resources in Australia, but also the rapid advances in establishing a civilised state within less than a century of European settlement. As the focus of the world’s attention, it gave Australia the confidence to examine its own history and identity. While this was primarily in relation to the British Empire, the historical displays also included aspects of Australia’s own local history.

At the 1879 International Exhibition, the Australian historical content was quite disparate, and included a replica of a statue of Captain Cook by W.G. Nichols, and a piece of charred bark from the recently discovered headstone of Le Receveur (who was a naturalist who accompanied La Perouse). Exploration, and more specifically Captain Cook, continued to be the primary theme for historical displays. In the 1888 Melbourne International Centennial Exhibition, the New South Wales
court again featured a historical display commemorating Captain Cook and the landing at Botany Bay as its centrepiece. It did not include any historical material, but a Melbourne journalist described the life-size scene consisting of wax figures and papier-mâché background as:

The landing of the great navigator and discoverer is as realistic as picturesque. The background shows Botany Bay. The Endeavour is seen off the shore, and the foreground is a bit of the Botany coastline wrought in rock work, with indigenous plants and foliage. The life group consists of twenty-two full-sized figures modelled in wax. Chief amongst them is Captain Cook in the act of hoisting a British flag and claiming the country for King George, while in honour of the event, the historical significance of which was then so faintly comprehended, a file of marines are about to fire a volley . . . Banks and Solander are also represented . . . and from a native gunyah close at hand, the original owners of the soil watch in wonder as the corner stone of the Empire is modestly laid out.  

These historic exhibits addressed Australia’s past, but postulated on how Australia fitted into the broader history of the British Empire. They also implied that civilisation and progress were concepts that were brought to Australia.

The celebration of Captain James Cook as a national hero in his exploration and ‘discovery’ of Australia remained the prevalent theme throughout the nineteenth century. A home-grown sense of national identity was developing however, and new heroes were sought from the Europeans who first settled the colonies. This was not restricted to the new class of landed gentry, like Wentworth, Blaxland or Macarthur, but also the faceless farmer, pastoralist, and itinerant worker who pushed open the colonial frontier. Along side of Captain Cook, the work of these individuals was recognised at the 1880 International Exhibition in Melbourne (Figure 1.16). Here, the South Australian court displayed a Digger’s hut against a backdrop of the ranges, which the catalogue described as:

The figure of the Digger himself, washing his gold in close proximity to an Aboriginal Camp, presents a very natural appearance. On the walls will be found some interesting lithographs illustrative of early bush life.

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72 A Melbourne Journalist, “The Centennial Exhibition” Centennial Magazine No. 1: 61, also quoted in Ibid., 159.
73 Quoted in Ibid., 161.
This display was one of many popular expressions that symbolised the newly fashioned 'Australian legend' at this time. Russel Ward's seminal study, *The Australian Legend*, attributed the origins of an Australian cultural identity to the 'bush' ethos of resourcefulness, mateship and egalitarianism that developed on the nineteenth century frontier, and popularised during the 1880s and 1890s through the writings of Lawson, Paterson, and the influential Sydney *Bulletin*.\textsuperscript{74} Richard Waterhouse extended Ward's discussion to include the influence of the theatre in the romanticising of rural Australia. From 1870s, locally developed dramas featuring colonial themes, characters and locations were performed, and contributed to the romanticising of a former colonial past.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{74} Ward, *The Australian Legend*.
\textsuperscript{75} Waterhouse, "Australian Legends: Representations of the Bush, 1813-1913".
\end{flushright}
Parallel to creation of the ‘bush’ legend was the ‘pioneer’ legend. Similar to the ‘bush legend’, the ‘pioneer legend’ was also popularised through the writings of poets like Henry Lawson, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson and Dorothea McKellar, and through artists, like Tom Roberts, Fred McCubbin and Arthur Streeton (Figure 1.17). According to J. B. Hirst, the pioneer legend referred initially to the early immigrants to the colonies. From the 1890s, however, it applied specifically to ‘those who first settled and worked the land’. In celebrating the contributions of these early settlers, the pioneer legend promoted reverence for the past. By focusing on the theme of land settlement however, it measured achievement according to the merits of work, rather than on social standings. As such, it recognised the contributions of the ‘ordinary man’ towards nation building, based on ‘the requisite qualities of diligence, courage and perseverance’. More importantly, it paved the way for ‘ordinary’ individuals to be recognised as national heroes. This was an important factor in the valourisation of James Ruse and the establishment of Experiment Farm Cottage into a house museum in 1963.

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76 Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend": 317-318.
77 Ibid.: 330-331.
Both legends promoted stereotypes and symbols that stemmed from nostalgic understandings of the Australian rural past. They were intended to identify distinctive Australian characteristics that were derived from experiences forged in this country. These legends were refined to create the ANZAC legend after World War I. The same pioneering attributes acquired during the early settlement of Australia became the basis of the ANZAC spirit. The same language describing the colonial pioneers was applied to their twentieth century counterparts in Gallipoli. In 1917, Mary Gilmore wrote in ‘Old Botany Bay’:

I was the conscript
Sent to hell
To make a living
The living well

I split the rock;
I felled the tree;
The nation was –
Because of me.


They cleared the earth, and felled the trees,
And built the towns and colonies;
Then, to their land, their sons they gave,
And reared them hardy, pure, and brave.

They made Australia’s past to them
We owe the present diadem;
For, in their sons, they fight again,
And ANZAC proved their hero strain.

The idealised image of the Australian pioneer – the bushman; the farmer and pastoralist, the Anzac Digger; the courageous individual who, through hard work

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78 Mary Cameron Gilmore, *The Passionate Heart* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1918).
succeeds despite hardship or social injustice – was later integrated into the histories of Vaucluse House and Experiment Farm Cottage. The 'bush' and 'pioneer' legends of the late nineteenth century referred to a largely anonymous group of individuals who were brought together through their universal noble traits. In the twentieth century, the values of the Australian legends were personified through specific individuals and historic sites.

Pioneering Australia’s Heritage Movement

The fusion of nationalistic sentiment with elements of the built environment became more pronounced in the twentieth century. The Australian Historical Society (AHS) was the pioneering force in the heritage movement.\(^{80}\) Established in 1901, its members included antiquarians and amateur historians. It was the only organisation of this time that was researching and promoting Australian history. The AHS also drew attention to historic places and landmarks. Frank Walker, an AHS president, wrote one of the first papers calling for their preservation, opening with the question:

> What are we doing at the present day in the way of the preservation of historic spots and landmarks in our city and country? This is an important question which every year becomes more and more insistent. And it is an important one if we are to go down to posterity as a people who, mindful of generations yet unborn, seize the opportunity now, to keep the links of our historic chain intact.\(^{81}\)

While including the obligatory references to Captain Cook and the historic sites of Kurnell and Botany Bay, he also noted other explorers, such as ‘Oxley, Allen, Cunningham, Hume and Hovell, Captain Sturt, Mitchell, . . . Leichhardt, Burke and Wills’, identifying them as ‘Australians’. Reference was also made to the historic sites of Observatory Hill, Dawes Point, Macquarie Place and the site of the old Government House.\(^{82}\)

Walker's paper followed similar historical themes of European exploration, settlement and enterprise as the historic displays at the International Exhibitions in

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\(^{80}\) The Society was granted the right to prefix the title 'Royal' to its name in 1918, and is currently known as the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS).


\(^{82}\) Ibid.: 88-89.
Melbourne and Sydney. His description of the explorers as 'Australians' who contributed to the 'making of Australia' however, suggested a growing sense of national pride based on local historical events and individuals.

The value of these historic landmarks was not limited to their age. For Walker, such historic figures and places were sources of virtue and moral inspiration, and their commemoration would:

convey a more striking lesson to our youth and possibly arouse some patriotic feeling and interest in the lives of those who had their part and parcel in the "making of Australia". 83

This patriotic aim was reflected in the recommendations provided by the AHS when it became involved with the historical interpretation of Vaucluse House in 1915.

History Museums and Hero-making in the 'Future America'

The timing of Vaucluse House's transformation into a historic house museum, with the onset of World War I was not coincidental. Like America, it reflected the unifying effect of 'civil religion' on the eve of war and the similar process of identity building. Australia's involvement in the Great War confirmed its status as a modern nation, and not merely an antipodean colony. Examining the stunted development of a national Australian history museum, Anderson and Reeves observed that for the politicians at the beginning of the twentieth century, 'history' effectively meant war history. 84

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the bush and pioneer legends that emerged from the 1880s promoted the early settlers of Australia as unknown heroes who built the nation. This, as the mid-nineteenth century poet Henry Kendall wrote, was the celebration of Australia based on 'honest toil and valiant life' rather then the events of 'hot blood spilt. 85 Richard White noted how the defeat in Gallipoli and the huge loss of life in the Middle East and in France was reconstructed by the Australian government and public as a rite of initiation for Australia and a display of

83 Ibid.
85 Quoted in Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend": 319.
“Australian manhood” that effectively separated this country from mother England.\(^{86}\) The validity of the Australian legends from the 1880s was substantiated, and Australian local events and individuals were deemed worthy historical subjects.

Not surprisingly, the first national historical museum collection was derived from the events of World War I. C.E.W. Bean, the official war historian, called for a national war museum in 1916. The Commonwealth government accepted the idea in October of the following year, and the Australian War Records Section commenced collecting objects, even as the war was continuing. It was literally history in the making! Appealing for donations, the range of objects collected included trophies, relics, letters, diaries, photographs, souvenirs and soldiers’ uniforms and kits.\(^{87}\)

It was a conscious process of making history. Supporting the programme, the British Secretary of Defence wrote:

> Britain already has a history and traditions and relics and trophies extending back for centuries . . . whereas Australia has none other than what she draws from the mother country. A nation is built upon pride of race and now that Australia is making history of her own she requires every possible relic associated with this to help her educate her children in that national spirit thereby ensuring loyal adherence to and defence of the Empire of which she forms part of.\(^{88}\)

The purpose of the collection was not limited to it being a physical record of an event. It was intended to generate nationalistic support for the war, and Australia in general. When part of the collection was displayed in Sydney in 1924, the Daily Telegraph observed that:

> The true significance of the greater part of the exhibits lies not in their character as battlefield curios but in their part as emblems of those splendid qualities which made the Australian . . . the greatest individual fighter in the war.\(^{89}\)


\(^{87}\) Webber, “Constructing Australia’s Past: The Development of Historical Collections 1888-1938,” 166.

\(^{88}\) ‘Cable from Secretary of Defence to AIF headquarters 3 December 1918’, quoted in Ibid., 165-166.

\(^{89}\) *Daily Telegraph*, 7 October 1924, quoted in Ibid., 166.
Through a process of transfiguration, the ‘ordinary’ acquired extraordinary importance and became symbols of twentieth century patriotism.

Australians were keen to define their identity through the cultural environment—past, present and future—but this did not mean severing ties with the Mother Country. As a key member of the Australian Historical Society and early promoter of Australian history, Karl R. Cramp was instrumental in presenting William Charles Wentworth as Australia’s ‘greatest son’ but was also quick to mention Wentworth’s supposedly fine English ancestry (while conveniently overlooking his immediate convict connections).  

Writing in 1918, he extolled how Wentworth was ‘the greatest architect of the edifices of Australian political freedom and intellectual culture’, but:

It is fitting that Australia’s greatest son should find a connecting link with the Mother Country in a family so distinguished in the public life of that country. Though not in direct lineal descent, Wentworth can claim, through his forebears, relationship with Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, the ill-fated adviser of Charles Stuart.

Such confirmation of Australia’s connection with England was not only occurring within Australia, but also by Australians who were overseas. Commenting on the proposed design of Australia House (Figure 1.18), the office of the Australian High Commission in London, Sir Littleton Ernest Groom argued:

The scheme is consistent, not only with what Australia is, but with what we hope Australia is going to be. The building and the lines on which it is designed are significant in what we think to be the proper relations between the Commonwealth and the States in the Old Country, representing as they do complete co-operation and combination of their powers for the benefit of Australia and the Empire.

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92 Ibid.

93 Sir Littleton Ernest Groom was the Member for Darling Downs and in 1911, the former Minister for External Affairs.

94 Groom in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Representatives*, 12 December 1911, 4135-4136.
While proudly acknowledging England as its forebear, Australia was also keen to be viewed as an equal and this was framed by the rhetoric of American nationalism. As will be discussed further in Chapter 2, the model of Mount Vernon, the icon of American patriotism, was transplanted directly onto Vaucluse House. While confirming Wentworth’s English heritage, Cramp was keen to present Wentworth within the mould of George Washington, and claimed how:

> Americans have venerated Mt Vernon, home of George Washington, and Vaucluse House holds for us just as much sentimental significance and epochal glamour. For it was there that the Constitution Act, our Charters of Liberty, was framed. Love of country entails an appreciation of those patriots of the last, like Wentworth, that we may have their example ever before us in future national undertakings.\(^{95}\)

Such bold declarations of nationalism in the language of the American Revolution seemed contrary to the ready support by Australia to Britain’s call for arms in World War I. Unlike America, Australia had not declared its independence from Britain, and the formation of the Australian Commonwealth in 1901 was a peaceful process. Also, as Andrew Hassam’s study of the diaries and letters of Australians

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revealed, many travelled to the ‘Old Country’ to experience their Britishness. Between 1876 and 1900, over 200,000 Australians and New Zealanders visited Britain. Hassam found that the first-hand experience of British monuments and traditions inspired reverence and appreciation of the country’s deep history.

Visiting Westminster Abbey in 1872, the Australian Margaret Tripp reflected:

It is a wonderful place, & made me realize the life of past ages, & the continuous stream of history . . . which this grand building is the embodiment, & the faith for which it witnesses is theirs, has of itself something to elevate & refine.

Nevertheless, such experiences also reinforced their feelings of being mere colonials, with Tripp adding:

We are rather rudely broken off as to history in Australia, & I now quite understand from my own experience the fascination everything old has for an American.

Although Australians drew their past from British history, they nevertheless felt that their historical journey was more akin to America.

Tripp was not alone in her empathetic connection with America. In tracing the cultural basis of Dr. John Dunmore Lang’s declaration in 1840 that Australia was ‘the future America’, Noel McLachlan found that the influence of American values and ideas was widespread since the early nineteenth century. Britain’s approach to colonising Australia stemmed, in part, from its loss of its thirteen American colonies in the War of Independence from 1775 to 1783.

As such, comparison between the two was made even before the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. For Britain, the American experience dictated the manner in which Australia was settled and governed. For those advocating self-government in New South Wales, such as W. C. Wentworth, America served as a model for political

independence. For the remaining colonial populace, the stance by the American colonies to sever its British bonds and attain economic and political credibility in its own right was inspirational. In 1837, *The Colonist* published:

It is natural that Australia should look upon the United States with more than ordinary interest. Throughout the whole of their history, there are certain broad features bearing no imaginary resemblance to our own. America was once a British dependency; Australia is so now. America was once the receptacle of those whom Britain banished from her bosom; Eastern Australia is that receptacle now. America received her manners, her literature and the germ of her laws and political institutions from the British Isles; so also has Australia. America at length outgrew the trammels of national juvenility, and asserted the prerogatives of matured manhood, which she in the end compelled her reluctant parent to acknowledge: it is perfectly consistent with loyalty and with common sense to predict, that at some future period, far distant no doubt it is – Australia will pursue a similar course, and with similar success.100

When drafting his Constitution Bill for self-government in New South Wales, W. C. Wentworth used America as a precedent. When defending the Bill in the N.S.W. Legislative Council in 1853, Wentworth devoted most of his speech to discussing American state and federal constitutions, and cited pages from Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*.101

The presence of American culture was not restricted to ideological and political concepts. McLachlan placed such influences as part of a general interest and admiration in things American – from inventions and technological developments, to literature, organisations and popular entertainment.102 This continued into the twentieth century, with the *Age* declaring that ‘We in Australia have more constantly turned our eyes to America for light and guidance than we have to the mother country’.103

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100 Quoted in McLachlan, "The Future America": 373.
SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The context from which the heritage movement developed in Australia was entirely different to that of America. There was no War of Independence providing ready-made heroes or founding fathers. Nor did Australia experience a civil war like America, which was a catalyst for the enshrining in American consciousness historical figures like Washington and his revolutionary contemporaries. Australia wanted to be seen as a self-determining country while maintaining its links with the Mother Country.

As such, the history and heroes created in Australia drew from both the old and new worlds. Heroes like the ANZACs and William Charles Wentworth were characterised by a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency that distinguished them from their British counterparts while still upholding a proud English ancestry. The spirit of independence, however, was framed by American rhetoric of freedom and democracy. Australia’s past was defined by the Mother Country, but its future was destined as the ‘new America’.

In shaping this image, Australia adopted the approaches and ideals of the American heritage movement in its process of hero-making. The heritage movement that Australia observed in America, however, was in a state of flux, with the waning of female ancestry societies and the rise of male professionals as epitomised by museum curators and organisations like SPNEA. The melding of six decades of American practices at Vaucluse House produced a jumbled mix of conservation practices and philosophies that characterised the early stages of Australia’s heritage and house museum movements.
Figure 2.1
Vaucluse House, 1910 (Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection, HHT).
TURNING HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS INTO BRICKS AND MORTAR:
Vaucluse House – The First House Museum in Australia

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Vaucluse House into a house museum brought together the disparate strands of the American heritage movement and the budding historical consciousness in Australia. This chapter examines the embryonic house museum and heritage movements in Australia through the opening of Vaucluse House, and the patriotic ideals underlying its interpretation.

The opening of Vaucluse House was a small but important part of a wider cultural shift that saw, in the wake of World War I, inherited histories replaced by a national one. Its expression through the collection of historical material culture and the conservation of historic sites marked a new phase in the development of an Australian historical consciousness. It also showed how the heritage movement was in a period of transition. The historical interpretation of Wentworth and the house was undertaken by amateurs (such as the Australian Historical Society and later female volunteers) and firmly based on nineteenth century notions of romantic patriotism and traditions, but the restoration of the building was guided by the Institute of Architects, reflecting the twentieth century preference for male professional input.

Such seemingly contradictory practices mirrored similar occurrences in the American heritage movement. At this time, the predominantly female ancestry and genealogy organisations that characterised the movement during the nineteenth century were sidelined by a new generation of male heritage professionals. This change was an effect of modernist and in particular progressivist politics in the
areas of urban planning, health, education, industrial relations, and natural and historic conservation. Similar developments in Australia indicated the influence of American ideas and practices in the late nineteenth century.

Following the example of Mount Vernon, Vaucluse House was elevated to the status of a national shrine. The Australian Historical Society was instrumental in setting the interpretative direction of Vaucluse House, including the creation of the ‘Constitution Room’ which became the mythical birthplace of Australia’s Constitution and democracy. Its former owner, William Charles Wentworth was presented as Australia’s George Washington and the nation’s ‘founding father’. Despite adopting the basic ideas of civil religion, the founders also felt that Vaucluse House should become a history museum that collected objects relating to Australia’s past. The absence of prescribed methods of collecting and presentation resulted in an unsophisticated and at times jumbled interpretation. It attracted much criticism from heritage professionals in the 1970s, including Clive Lucas and the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales.

Nevertheless, these early efforts were instrumental in establishing the Australian house museum and heritage movements. The interpretation of Vaucluse House by the Australian Historical Society as the ‘Mecca of Australian hero-worshippers’ in 1915 was a pivotal factor in cementing Australia’s historical consciousness.1 As such, it played an important role in raising the public profile of Australian history and the aims of the heritage movement. Its symbolic representation of cultural values and founding purpose as a place of civic reverence continues to shape its current role as a house museum.

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1 The phrase ‘Mecca of Australian hero-worshippers’ was written by K. R. Cramp, William Charles Wentworth of Vaucluse House (Sydney: 1918), 21.
CREATING THE HOME OF AUSTRALIA'S FOUNDING FATHER

William Charles Wentworth: The Makings of ‘The Hero of Australia’

Figure 2.2

William Charles Wentworth is remembered as an explorer, author, barrister, politician, and one of the ‘founding fathers’ of self-government in New South Wales.² In addition to the enshrinement of his home, Wentworth, like Washington, has been memorialised through paintings, plaques, statues and place names (Figure 2.2). As Michael Bogle wrote in the current guidebook for Vaucluse House:

> During his career he was fondly known in some quarters as ‘The Great Son of the Soil’, ‘The Hero of Australia’ and ‘The Means of the Australian People’. When he practised law, he was seen as ‘a Champion of the Oppressed’.³

Recent re-interpretations noted his desultory youth that was marked by regular visits to the Hyde Park Races, his convict mother, his father’s own dubious past, and his own marriage to a currency lass with convict parents of her own – aspects

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of Wentworth’s life that were omitted in his earlier biographies. As such, Wentworth was an interesting choice as Australia’s ‘founding father’.

His parents, D’Arcy Wentworth, an assistant surgeon on the Second Fleet, and Catherine Crowley, a convict had a liaison during the voyage. It resulted in their first son, William Charles, who was born on Norfolk Island in 1790. D’Arcy Wentworth’s reason for accepting a posting in New South Wales was itself a little ambiguous. He came from a respectable family and was trained as a medical practitioner in Ireland. Nevertheless, after four charges of highway robbery, all of which were dismissed, his family convinced him to leave for New South Wales.

By 1805, D’Arcy Wentworth was Principal Surgeon, Superintendent of Police and Treasurer of the Police Fund, and in 1806, he relocated his family to Sydney. He played a modest role in the Colony, but his government postings and shrewd business sense ensured that he became one of the richest men in the colony. This enabled him to assist in the social elevation of his family. In 1813, he funded the legendary crossing of the Blue Mountains that immortalised his eldest son, along with Blaxland and Lawson. Shortly afterwards, he sent William Charles to England for eight years so that he could be educated in law.

Returning to Sydney in 1824, William Charles was admitted to the bar in the New South Wales Supreme Court. In that same year, he also established the Australian with Dr Robert Wardell. As the co-editor and publisher, Wentworth used the paper to voice his views on representative government and the right of trial by jury in New South Wales. These two causes secured his status as a champion for the disenfranchised.

It was a busy period for Wentworth. Amidst his legal and publishing endeavours, he also began a relationship with Sarah Cox. A ‘currency lass’, both of her parents were former convicts who were transported to New South Wales for theft. Wentworth and Sarah established their residence in Petersham from 1825 to 1827. The death of Wentworth’s father in 1827 provided the means to purchase Vaucluse,

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a harbour front estate owned by Captain John Piper, for £1,500. Prior to moving to Vaucluse, the couple married in 1829. By this stage, they had two children and another eight were born at Vaucluse.

**Building the Gothic Revival Dream**

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 2.3* Vaucluse, 1851, painted by G. E. Peacock (ML 236).

For Wentworth, Vaucluse was a means of overcoming the convict stain that kept his family socially ostracised in Sydney. As such, Wentworth sought to make Vaucluse into the grandest residence in Sydney, beginning with the expansion of the estate to 515 acres through an additional grant of 370 acres. Even with its surviving twenty-five acres, Vaucluse remains the largest harbourside estate in Sydney of its period.

Wentworth invested much of his wealth in creating the Gothic Revival mansion known as Vaucluse House (Figure 2.3). The house was originally a stone cottage, which was built by its first owner, Sir Henry Browne Hayes. Hayes had a colourful past of his own. He was a knight from Ireland who abducted Mary Pike, a daughter
of a Cork banker, and forced her to marry him. Mary was rescued, the marriage was deemed invalid and Hayes was transported to New South Wales in 1801.

As a convict with substantial means, Hayes was able to purchase a property upon receiving his pardon in 1803. He called it 'Vaucluse', after a town in southern France now known as Fountain-de-Vaucluse. By the time Hayes decided to return to Ireland in 1812, the harbourside land had been cleared and included several structures and a paddock adjacent to the main house. After passing through several owners, Captain John Piper purchased the property, before selling it to Wentworth in 1827.

Improvements made within the first few years included a turreted sandstone stable, a large kitchen wing and a convict barracks on the eastern banks above the house. During the following decade, Wentworth enlarged the main house by lifting the roofline and demolishing most of the internal walls of Hayes' original cottage. Reflecting his social aspirations, the much-expanded house included five reception rooms, a three-storey bedroom wing, upper and lower halls and a crenellated tower (Figure 2.4).

*Figure 2.4*
Wentworth appeared to be riding high on his success. In the 1830s, he formed the Australian Patriotic Association and, as vice-president, drafted two bills for colonial representative government. One of these drafts was adopted by London as the basis of colonial government in 1842. In the following year, Wentworth was elected to the Legislative Council. A decade later, the Colonial Office agreed to grant New South Wales full representative government. As the chair for the Select Committee that drafted the constitutional document in 1854, Wentworth played a central role in the process.

While his public standing appeared strong, Wentworth was struggling financially with the effects of the 1840s economic depression and Vaucluse House remained unfinished. When Wentworth agreed to lead a group of selected Australian representatives to England to facilitate the passing of the constitutional document through the British Parliament, he also took the opportunity to auction his household contents and relocate his family to England. In March 1853, the *Sydney Morning Herald* advertised the on-site auction of "The Whole of that Gentleman's superior household furniture and other effects". Apart from a few items, most of the contents were sold. Sarah and their seven younger children left for England that same year. Wentworth followed a year later (Figure 2.5).

![Mr Wentworth departing from Sydney by Walter G. Mason (Sydney : J.R. Clarke, 1857) (nla.pic-an8017163).](image)

*Figure 2.5 Mr Wentworth departing from Sydney by Walter G. Mason (Sydney : J.R. Clarke, 1857) (nla.pic-an8017163).*

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5 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March 1853.
Another reason for moving the family to England was the continual social snubbing of Sarah and the potential negative impact on their children's acceptance into society. The Wentworths did not associate with their wealthy compatriots like the Macleays and Macarthurss. Lady Franklin, the wife of the Governor of Van Dieman's Land noted that Mrs Wentworth was 'not visited'. In 1847, Sarah was forced to decline her invitation to the Queen's Birthday Ball held by the newly appointed Governor, Sir Charles Fitzroy and his wife Lady Mary. Sarah's inclusion on the guest list drew protests from the Chief Justice and other legal associates and, while not publicly named, was reported in the press.

After eight years abroad, the Wentworths returned to Sydney to a very different social environment in 1861. Armed with sophisticated European tastes and new social connections, the Wentworths were invited to Government House. The following year, William and Sarah hosted a ball, which was attended by the Governor and his wife, as well as members of the Legislative Council and Sydney's social elite.

Despite achieving social acceptance, the family returned to England and Europe shortly afterwards. In 1872, William Charles died at the family's rented estate in Dorset. When news of Wentworth's death arrived to Sydney, the Parliament resolved to honour him with a public funeral. Sarah accompanied Wentworth's remains to Australia, and the service was held at St Andrew's Cathedral on 6 May 1873. A large procession followed the hearse to Vaucluse House, including a contingent of 300-400 'Native Australians' and a small group of Aborigines (Figure 2.6). Wentworth was interred in the newly constructed family vault on the Vaucluse estate (Figure 2.7). Sarah returned to England in 1875, where she remained, apart from a short visit to Sydney in 1877-78, until her death in 1880. She was buried in Sussex, England.

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6 Quoted in Michael Bogle, *Vaucluse House* (Glebe, Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1993), 16.
7 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May 1873, 4.
Figure 2.6
W.C. Wentworth’s funeral: view taken in College St. 6 May 1873 (ML GPO 1 – 18473).

Figure 2.7
‘Mausoleum. 1880’. (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 5: William Charles
Wentworth, 1856-1898 (Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT)).
Sarah Wentworth retained a life interest in Vaucluse after her husband's death. When she died, the property passed onto their unmarried daughter, Eliza Sophia. Eliza spent most of her life in England, and upon her death in 1898, the house and grounds were transferred to the trustees of W. C. Wentworth's estate. The contents of the house were left to Wentworth's youngest son, D'Arcy Bland Wentworth. Family and friends continued to occupy the house until 1900, when D'Arcy instructed Lawson's to auction the remaining contents of the house. Henry Palmer was appointed caretaker of the estate in 1903.

It is at this point that the story of Vaucluse House as a house museum inadvertently begins. In 1910, the State government resumed twenty-five acres of the former Vaucluse Estate for the establishment of public parkland along the harbour foreshore. The resumed area fortuitously included Vaucluse House. Although the resumption was not directly motivated by the heritage values of the estate and its association with William Charles Wentworth, the social basis of creating a public parkland reflected the growing influence of American progressivism in Australia in the areas of urban planning, health, education and conservation.

American Progressivism, Environmental Politics and the Resumption of Vaucluse Estate

Progressivism followed from the social and health reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. In Australia, arguments of environmental determinism and calls for government and 'expert' intervention were promoted in newspaper commentaries, medical societies and reform groups that linked social well-being with the physical conditions of towns and cities. Much of these discussions related to calls for better sanitation, proper drainage and sewerage.

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John Sulman, a leading figure in town planning, likened the urban landscape to a social organism and believed that social progress was only possible through the improvement of living conditions. Sulman was a major contributor to the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburbs following the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in January 1900. Many of his ideas were incorporated into the urban improvement schemes that followed, which proposed widespread demolition of inner-city working-class areas.

Similar ideas were also apparent in health reforms of this period. In an 1865 paper to the Philosophical Institute of Royal Society of Victoria about the importance of sanitary works, T.E. Rawlinson asserted, 'show me a dirty undrained locality in your town, and I will show you the seat of perpetual debility, fever and death'. He concluded with the need for 'progress, efficiency and cleanliness' as the solution for social problems. The professional and expert were central in developing such solutions. The Australian Health Society in Melbourne was established in the 1870s with the objective of providing public health education, and advocated the introduction of legislation to improve sanitary conditions. The Society's journal included moralistic fictional stories of 'decent people' who succumbed to alcoholism, unemployment, domestic violence and social degradation owing to poor living conditions (Figure 2.8).

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11 Rawlinson, "The Importance of Sanitary Work for Towns Having Special Reference to Collingwood; with Suggested Remedial Works for That District", 3.

A BAD SMELL.

"What a bad smell!" said Carey to his fellow-workman, as they came up the right-of-way on their road home after the day's work was done.

"Pooh!" said the other, holding his nose with his finger and

Figure 2.8
"A Bad Smell", Australian Health Society (August 1880). (ML SLNSW) – The Australian Health Society published stories for public education which often linked social well-being and morality to environmental factors like clean living conditions and proper drainage.
The belief in environmental determinism and social well-being was also the premise underlying the natural conservation movement. Created in 1879, the Royal National Park in New South Wales became the world's second national park - after Yellowstone in America. Such principles were later broadened to the conservation of the historic environment in the twentieth century. In 1899, the New South Wales government resumed 100 hectares of Kurnell Peninsula. It was gazetted as a Public Recreation Reserve for the purpose of commemorating Captain Cook's landing on 29 April 1770.

In his brief history of the heritage movement, Graeme Davison noted the correlation between the ideals of the environmental conservation and those dealing with historic sites:

The preservation of old buildings was often allied to the conservation of the natural environment and appealed to much the same vein of ... nationalistic sentiment that inspired the landscapes of Hans Heysen, Lionel Lindsay and Septimus Power.\(^\text{13}\)

The initial protection of Vaucluse House by the State government was coincidental rather than intentional, but the opening of the house signified an extension of similar environmental principles that led to the resumption of Vaucluse Estate as a public park. In response to public demands and as part of a broader government program to provide community access to the harbour foreshore, the New South Wales government resumed approximately ten hectares of the Vaucluse Estate to establish a 'public recreation ground' in July 1910.\(^\text{14}\)

In the previous decade, the issue of public access to Sydney's foreshore had been the focus of debate. Vaucluse had been under private ownership since 1803 and in the Wentworth family since 1827. Leading up to the resumption, most of the estate was being subdivided and sold. Concern that the on-going privatisation of such areas would turn the harbour into 'a Pond in a Private Paddock' led to the formation of community groups such as the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee.\(^\text{15}\)

Charged 'with the special objective of securing areas at Parsley and Vaucluse Bays',

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\(^{15}\) "The Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee", *Sydney Evening News*, 19 October 1907.
the Committee campaigned through public meetings, placing advertisements in the press and printing handbills.\(^{16}\)

The Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee was successful in lobbying the government and Vaucluse Park was gazetted on 21 August 1911.\(^{17}\) The extensive, waterfront parkland provided direct public access to the Sydney Harbour. By chance, it also included the neglected main house of the former Vaucluse Estate, as well as its stables and workers’ cottages (Figures 2.9, 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12). Vaucluse House was a secondary concern, but this public campaign to ensure the public ownership of recreational areas indicated the burgeoning influence of progressive ideals in Australia at this time.

**The Legend of the ‘Constitution Room’**

The cultural significance of a place or object is a relational concept, rather than an intrinsic quality. Nevertheless, the early phase of Vaucluse House as a house museum has been subjected to much criticism by recent curatorial professionals for its apparent lack of historical authenticity and scholarship. Ann Toy, a former curator at Vaucluse House, noted how ‘it took several years for the Trustees to realise the potential of the house and its significant historical associations with W.C. Wentworth.\(^{18}\) Similarly, Jo-Ann Pomfrett also surmised that ‘despite its historical importance Vaucluse House was initially of secondary concern to the Trust’.\(^{19}\) The focus by the early Trustees on the recreational, rather than historic aspects of the Vaucluse Estate is not surprising when it is considered within the context of the cultural attitudes towards the historic environment and Australian history at the time. Such critiques also overlooked the importance of Vaucluse House in the early formation of Australia’s heritage and house museum movements.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Nielsen Park was also gazetted as a public park that year and named in honour of Niels Nielsen. Originally part of the Vaucluse Estate, Wentworth gave the harbour front land to his daughter as a wedding present. It includes Greycliffe House and is currently managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation as a National Park.


Figure 2.9
'Vaucluse House, 1910'. The house was fortuitously included in the government resumption of Vaucluse Estate in 1910. By this stage, the house was in poor condition. (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 2: Vaucluse House [Exterior Views].ca.1870-1926 (Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT).

Figure 2.10
The stables, Vaucluse House, 1910. The resumption of the estate in 1910 also included the service buildings like the stables and workers' cottage (ML/GPO 1-11713).
Figure 2.11
‘Vaucluse House, ruins of storage attached to quarters, 1909’. This building is believed to be the workers’ (or convicts’) cottage. It was shortly after demolished by the Vaucluse Park Trust. (ML GPO 1-11715)

Figure 2.12
Entrance to the convict barracks, 1910 (Vaucluse House Collection, HHT).
In 1911, Australia did not have any house museums, history museums or historical collections. The heritage movement in Australia was still embryonic, and the idea of conserving historic buildings remained just a notion. The Royal Australian Historical Society was the main heritage organization at the time, and was only formed in 1901. As noted earlier, its president Frank Walker, wrote one of the first papers calling for the preservation of historic landmarks in 1907. In the same year, Mary Salmon wrote one of the first historical accounts of Vaucluse House, and the association with Hayes and Wentworth.

Following the resumption of the ten hectares of Vaucluse Estate, the New South Wales government appointed an honorary Board of Trustees to manage the public park. The Board was constituted by prominent citizens, such as Niels Nielson, Colonel J. W. Macarthur-Onslow and W. A. Notting, who was previously the Honorary Secretary and Spokesperson for the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee. The Trustees were not antiquarians, historians or museum curators. Nevertheless, they realised that Vaucluse House was a place of historical interest and opened the house to the public within their first year of appointment.

On 3 March 1912, less than five months after its first meeting, the Board agreed to:

Allow the Public access to the ground floor of the Old House only. The Caretaker was instructed to put a barricade up to prevent people going upstairs – and put a notice up to that effect.

In the following year, the Trustees wrote to the Mitchell Library requesting:

... as far as possible authentic information with regard to the age of the old House and its associations as regards the occupation by the late William Charles Wentworth [and] any particulars which they be able to supply.

21 Salmon, "Some Historic Houses in N.S.W.: Old Vaucluse".
22 Nielsen Park was named in honour of Niels Nielson. The park was established at the same time as Vaucluse Park in 1911 due to the efforts of the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee.
23 Vaucluse Park Trust, Minute Book 1912-1925 (Vaucluse House Archives, Historic Houses Trust of NSW), 4th Meeting, 3 March 1912.
Despite obtaining historical material from the Mitchell Library, the public interpretation of Vaucluse House was minimal during the initial two years of its opening. Appointed with the primary task of establishing a public park, the Trustees directed most of their attention to issues such as park signage, public access and facilities. The interpretation of the house was limited to merely opening it to visitors.

The public viewed what was basically an empty dilapidated house (Figure 2.13). In 1853, W.C. Wentworth had sold most of the furnishings by auction, with the remainder auctioned by his son through Lawson's in 1900. A caretaker was appointed in 1903, but little work was undertaken to prevent the vacant house from ruin. Bemoaning the condition of Vaucluse House, Mary Salmon wrote in 1907:

There is something pathetic about an old house in its decay, when its days of glory are gone, and when only haunting memories of times that are no more give interest.  

Figure 2.13
(Left) Dining room looking into little tearoom, c.1914. (Right) Chimney Piece in ballroom, c.1914. (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs. Volume 4: The furnishings of Vaucluse, 1920-1925 (Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT)).

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25 Vaucluse Park Trust, Minute Book 1912-1925, 20 February 1913.
Perhaps it can be assumed that such ‘haunting memories’ of the past were sufficient in generating public interest and visitations, because regular ‘inspection’ hours were approved in July 1914.\textsuperscript{27} The house was opened between the hours of 10.00am to noon and 3.00pm and 5.00pm on weekdays, and in October, these afternoon hours were extended to Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

It was during the newly extended opening times that the Australian Historical Society visited Vaucluse House in 1915. This resulted in a long and constructive partnership that truly established the property as a house museum, as opposed to a historic house that was merely opened to the public. The desire to create a distinctive Australian history was apparent in the recommendations provided by the AHS for the interpretation of Vaucluse House.

Guided mainly by Captain James Henry Watson, the Australian Historical Society made recommendations that had a lasting influence on how the house was interpreted and presented. In 1915, Watson was the Honorary Research Secretary of the Australian Historical Society. A retired businessman, Watson was also an enthusiastic amateur historian with a particular interest in the history of Vaucluse House. While noting Sir Henry Browne Hayes’ associations with the house, Watson focused on Wentworth’s political career and his role in establishing self-government in New South Wales.

It was this aspect of Wentworth’s life that influenced the Australian Historical Society’s understanding of Vaucluse House, and its recommendations to the Trustees. Watson suggested that the library should be named the ‘Constitution Room’ to celebrate Wentworth’s political achievement and also to ‘keep the house in good order as a tribute to the memory of William Charles Wentworth’. Secondly, it was also recommended ‘to use the house as a Museum for historical works related to the District’.\textsuperscript{28} Accepted by the Trustees, these recommendations guided the museum collection and interpretation at Vaucluse House for the following seventy years. A subcommittee was formed ‘to deal with all historical documents & relics received by the Trustees & also to take steps to form a museum for Australian

\textsuperscript{27} Vaucluse Park Trust, \textit{Minute Book 1912-1925}, July 1914, 32.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 25 June 1915.
historical records & objects at Vaucluse House’. Australia’s first history and house museum was born.

In furnishing the ‘Constitution Room, the Trustees recognised the preference for acquiring objects that were directly associated with Wentworth. In addition to accepting the AHS recommendations, the Trustees also resolved to write to Fitzwilliam Wentworth (William Charles and Sarah’s son) to ascertain if he held any artworks, furniture or souvenirs belonging to his father, and whether he was willing to donate these items to the Trust. They also wrote to the auctioneering firm, Lawson’s, with the hope of locating the household objects sold at auction in 1900, but without success. The Caretaker had acquired four tables, two dressers, one large safe, one old clock, one pair of steps and an old mangle and ironing table at the auction, and the Trustees purchased them in 1916 for £5. Faced with the difficulty of acquiring the necessary furniture and objects to furnish the museum, the Trustees agreed to accept donations of ‘Historical Records or Relics, [and] if acceptable the name of the donor be shown on the article accepted’.

In addition to acquiring objects to furnish the house, the Trustees also interpreted the history of the house through guided tours. Vaucluse House became the cradle of Australian democracy, with the Trustees creating the mythical ‘Constitution Room’ to explain that (Figure 2.14 and 2.15):

Wentworth fought and obtained for New South Wales the rights and liberties which we to-day enjoy and in the Constitution Room, which I will show you later, the constitution was drafted...

CONSTITUTION ROOM
This was Wentworth’s Library, it was here the old time patriots and statesmen forgathered to petition the English Government to grant them redress of their grievances and responsible Government. In this room the Constitution Act which gives New South Wales responsible Government was drafted and the Trustees therefore decided to re-name it, and it is now known as “The Constitution Room”. Besides fighting for and obtaining Responsible Government Wentworth was also mainly instrumental in obtaining “Trial by Jury”, “The Liberty of the Press”, “Adult

29 Ibid., 56.
30 Ibid., 42nd Meeting, 29 September 1916, 82.
31 Ibid., 82.

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Suffrage”. He was the founder of the Sydney University where his statue may be seen. He was also Australia’s first Immigration Agent, the first man to foreshadow a “Federated Australia” and, as you know, in addition to the above he was an explorer, barrister and poet. No name figures greater in Australian history than that of Wentworth. There is no house in Australia with such historic associations as Vaucluse House and the Constitution Room we are now in is the most historic of all rooms therein.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Figure 2.14}

‘Constitution Room’,\textit{ Vaucluse House, c.1920} (Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 4: The furnishings of Vaucluse, 1920-1925 (Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT)).

\textbf{Figure 2.15}


\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. also quoted in Charlotte Smith, \textit{The House Enshrined: Great Man and Social History House Museums in the United States and Australia} (PhD Dissertation, University of Canberra, 2002), 69.
This imagery of Wentworth was blatantly patriotic and heroic, and possibly inspired by John Trumbull's famous painting 'The Declaration of Independence' (Figure 2.16).

*Figure 2.16*
*John Trumbull’s Declaration of Independence, 1776, is often mistaken as depicting the actual signing of the Declaration. It was intended to memorialise the authors of the Declaration by amalgamating several events into the one painting* (Library of Congress Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C.).

The Trustees and the Royal Australian Historical Society were open about their aims to create a national shrine. In a 1918 AHS pamphlet commissioned by the Vaucluse Park Trust, Karl Reginald Cramp wrote:

> The historic home is destined to become the Mecca of Australian hero-worshippers…
> As one wanders in the picturesque grounds, or lingers in the spacious rooms redolent with sacred memories, or contemplates the tiles once trod by feet of ancient Pompeians, an overpowering recollection of bygone splendour and modern triumphs hallows the ground whereon one treads.\(^{33}\)

Concurring with other studies of Vaucluse House, this interpretation of Wentworth was undeniably ‘romantic’ and shaped by a conventional ‘great man’ approach to history.\textsuperscript{34} To dismiss this initial museum interpretation of Wentworth and Vaucluse House as purely an exercise in myth making and lacking in historical integrity, however, is to overlook its contribution in the overall development of Australian historiography and heritage conservation.

At the International Exhibitions hosted by Australia in the previous decades, the historical displays were largely limited to the ‘discovery’ and exploration of Australia by Europeans (and more specifically Captain Cook). The display of the ‘Digger’s hut’ referred to the development of distinctive ‘Australian legend’, but it was generic and non-descript. William Charles Wentworth was the first Australian-born individual considered sufficiently worthy to be commemorated through the conservation of his home as a museum.

It was fitting that the Vaucluse Park Trust and the AHS adopted the American inspired house museum to commemorate a man who had looked to the American system of government for New South Wales. In modelling Vaucluse House on Mount Vernon, the Trustees adopted the same process of mythologising Wentworth as the Americans did with Washington. But the social context in which Australia observed Mount Vernon in 1911 was no longer the same as in the nineteenth century. At the start of the twentieth century, the heritage movement in America had entered a new chapter, characterised by male professional experts, a greater emphasis on architectural aesthetics and scientific approaches to conservation. Such changes were also apparent in Australia. The participation of the Institute of Architects in the heritage movement and with Vaucluse House from the 1920s also signified a new phase for the museum.

MUSEUM PRACTICES AND THE GREAT GENDER DIVIDE

A New Alliance

The partnership between the Institute of Architects and the Royal Australian Historical Society resulted as a response to the proposed demolition of Burdekin House in 1922, and continued through subsequent campaigns to save the Commissariat Store and Hyde Park Barracks in the 1930s. Primarily from academia, the two key members from the Institute included Bertrand James Waterhouse, who served as vice-president and later president of the New South Wales branch, and Leslie Wilkinson, who was instrumental in establishing the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney. Waterhouse was the driving force behind these campaigns, which unlike earlier efforts, attracted media attention and generated public debate. By bringing the issue of heritage conservation to the forefront of community interests, the movement broadened its support beyond the realms of antiquarian groups (like the RAHS) and academics.

Burdekin House was built during the 1840s on Macquarie Street for the commercially and politically prominent Burdekin family (Figure 2.17). The demolition of the house was first proposed in the early 1920s to allow the construction of a new hotel as part of the Waldorf-Astoria chain. This marked the beginning of a decade-long campaign. In 1922, preservationists lobbied the State government to acquire the property. When the hotel proposal lapsed, the site was purchased by the investor, T. E. Roë, a former president of the Town Planning Association. Roë intended to redevelop the site for flats and professional chambers, but instead sold the property to the Trustees of St. Stephen’s Church in 1933.

Figure 2.17
Sketch of The Burdekin House, Macquarie St., Sydney by Hardy Wilson, 1914
(NLA.pic-an2720709)
St. Stephen’s Church, with many other buildings, was earmarked for demolition under the proposed plan to extend Martin Place to Macquarie Street. As the replacement site for the church, the demolition of Burdekin House seemed more certain. Public interest in the building had grown by this point, and newspapers were noting public opinions ranging from suggestions to convert it into the Premier’s residence, similar to Britain’s No. 10 Downing Street, to the more popular idea of using it as a house museum.\(^{35}\)

Despite the campaigns, Burdekin House was demolished. Reporting on its demise, the *Sydney Morning Herald* captured the public feeling of uncertainty with the question, ‘are we to have only modern things and buildings in Sydney’.\(^{36}\) Even the architectural journal, *Building*, recognised for its modernist designs, acknowledged that ‘Sydney is undoubtedly the poorer for the loss’ of Burdekin House.\(^{37}\) According to Robert Freestone, the demolition of Burdekin House, despite the decade long effort to save it, was ‘something of a watershed in Sydney’s conservation history.’\(^{38}\) Subsequent campaigns attracted greater levels of community attention and support.

Similar campaigns to save the Commissariat Stores and the Hyde Park Barracks, however, highlighted another tension. While there was the desire to preserve historic buildings, there was also a sense of embarrassment about the convict past. Despite focusing on the aesthetic qualities of early colonial buildings, the undeniable fact was that most of these buildings were constructed using convict labour.

The Commissariat Stores on the western side of Circular Quay were built by convicts between 1809 and 1812 (Figure 2.18). By the 1920s, this sandstone structure was the oldest public building in Sydney still in use. Sir Archibald Hower, a former Lord Mayor and building developer, mirrored the general public view when he declared that there was ‘nothing artistic about them, and the fact that each stone used in their construction bears the initials of a convict is a damn good reason

\(^{35}\) *Sun Herald*, 12 February 1933.

\(^{36}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Feb 1933, 13.


why we should forget about them'. For Frank Walker, the Stores were important because they provided a 'strange contrast to our modern ideas of buildings construction'.

Following Burdekin House, the preservation movement was beginning to attract a broader support base. A special committee was formed to save the Commissariat Stores, and included representatives from the Town Planning Association. The committee lobbied for the buildings' adaptive reuse as community meeting rooms and as a historical museum. Such efforts were, however, unsuccessful. In 1936, the State government's Circular Quay Replanning Committee, chaired by Sir John Butters, and including Waterhouse, recommended that the Commissariat Stores be demolished to permit construction of the new offices for the Maritime Services Board (currently occupied by the Museum of Contemporary Art). The buildings were duly demolished in July 1939, and the stone sold.

*Figure 2.18*

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39 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 February 1939, 17.
41 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1935, 13.
The Hyde Park Barracks, another building steeped in convict history, was also under threat at this time (Figure 2.19). Under Governor Macquarie, it was built by convicts for their accommodation. From the 1840s, it was used as a depot for single immigrant women from Ireland, and later became law courts and government offices in the 1880s. By the twentieth century, the Barracks had become a dilapidated complex with ad hoc additions crammed into the courtyard.

Recommendations to demolish the Barracks were first made in The Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and Its Suburbs in 1909. Similar plans re-emerged during the 1930s. This time, however, such suggestions precipitated a surprising public reaction. A citizens’ committee was formed and, with the assistance of the Institute of Architects, a protest petition with 8,000 names was organised. The key ‘professional’ figures of this campaign included Sydney Ure Smith, Keith Harris and Leslie Wilkinson, who claimed that the Barracks was ‘of more than local interest, and should be looked upon as an Australian historical monument’.42

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42 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 February 1937, 10.
Applying a similar planning approach as in the case of Circular Quay, the State government established the Macquarie Street Replanning Committee - also chaired by Sir John Butters, with Waterhouse as deputy. The Committee released an interim report in September 1935, recommending that the decision of Hyde Park Barracks be deferred 'until the adjacent buildings are demolished, and the condition of the building becomes more clearly ascertainable'. With the neighbouring Mint buildings and Parliament House earmarked for demolition, it was not surprising that the Final Report in July 1936 made the almost inevitable and predetermined recommendation to demolish the Hyde Park Barracks as well.

As Deputy of the Committee, Waterhouse fully endorsed the proposal to demolish the Hyde Park Barracks, conceeding that 'its condition is such that . . . it cannot be preserved'. Such a statement was a direct contrast to Waterhouse's pro-preservationist stance a decade earlier, and exposed the underlying weakness of the preservation movement during this period – the absence of a strong united and organised front. Makeshift alliances between professional and community groups were formed in response to proposals affecting particular buildings, and support for special cases was at times compromised by professional demands to tow the official government line.

In 1926, Waterhouse opposed the scheme to remodel Macquarie Street and its impact on Hyde Park Barracks, and personally brought this issue to the attention of the Institute of Architects. In urging the Institute to support his views, he argued that 'we have so little interest in and recognition of tradition that I think any small building which can be isolated from its present chaotic state would be something which the future generations of Australia would value'. In 1936, however, as deputy of a state government committee, he was required to set aside his personal views and support the government's position.

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44 Ibid.
Architecture and Male Expertise

The conservation of Vaucluse House against the backdrop of a struggling heritage movement makes it even more remarkable. In its first decade, the Trustees at Vaucluse House undertook limited building works. In 1912 repairs were made to replace damaged roof slates, window glass and guttering following a storm. Apart from urgent works, the government did not provide ongoing funds, with the Director of Public Works ‘stating that Department does not propose making provision for the maintenance & upkeep of Vaucluse House and grounds in the future’. 47

With the introduction of regular opening hours and the creation of the Constitution Room, funds were directed for building alterations in 1917. This included the demolition of the timber skillion (used as a bedroom during Wentworth’s occupancy), and the construction of a turret to the eastern façade. Wentworth’s grand Gothic Revival ambitions for his home were halted by the 1840s Depression, and plans from this period did not survive. The Trustees also converted part of the stable into a workman’s dwelling, repaired the roof of the covered way in the courtyard, constructed additional public toilets, and tar painted paths. 48

A greater focus on architectural matters was introduced in new management policies on 26 August 1921. At a special meeting, the Trustees put forward an ambitious plan to raise £25,000 for:

1. Restoration & putting of Vaucluse House in good order
2. Refurnishing Vaucluse House with original furniture (if possible, if not with furniture of the Wentworth period)
3. The establishment of a Historical Museum (Wentworth period)
4. Construction of an amphitheatre in the back portion of the Park (on the lines of the Grecian Theatres) 49
5. Improving the grounds with relics & monuments connecting Australian History and Ideals. 50

48 Ibid., 53rd meeting, 27 July 1917.
49 A Greek inspired amphitheatre was never constructed, but the suggested architectural form reflects the influence of the Colonial Revival by the 1920s. This point is discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.
The policies indicated the continuing influence of the RAHS, but they also revealed a new architectural focus that was generated by the Institute of Architects and reflected American heritage practices. With the collaboration between the RAHS and the Institute of Architects in campaigning to save historic landmarks in Sydney, it is not surprising that the Institute became involved with the restoration of Vaucluse House at this time.

In 1922, the State government granted £8000 to restore Vaucluse House. The Trustees sought advice from the Institute, with ‘Sir Charles Rosenthal (President) [of the] Institute of Architects forwarding plans, specifications & estimate (£5000) for the restoration of Vaucluse House’.\(^{51}\) The advice was provided gratis, with the Trustees agreeing that the Institute would be consulted ‘before any vital alterations, or material additions’ were undertaken.\(^{52}\)

Professional input ensured continuing government funding. Upon hearing of the Institute’s involvement, the Minister of Lands provided additional financial support for the restoration of the house and the house closed temporarily in January 1925 for eighteen months. During this time, the restoration works included the construction of a spiral staircase in the eastern section of the hallway to provide access to the new turret. Most of the ground floor rooms were re-painted, and brass picture rails were mounted.\(^{53}\) Re-opening in August 1926, the museum was

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\(^{50}\) Vaucluse Park Trust, *Minute Book 1912-1925*, 103rd meeting, 26 August 1921.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 338.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 358.

\(^{53}\) ‘Inspection of the House’, Ibid.
received with resounding public support (Figure 2.20). Enthused by such a response, the Trustees proceeded to the restoration of the upper level, which was opened in 1928.

**Interior Decoration and the Female Realm**

The architectural restoration program in the 1920s meant that the newly opened rooms required furnishing. While (male) professional architects addressed architectural matters, women were charged with the responsibility of furnishing and interpreting the room settings. The ongoing public appeal for donations of furniture since 1915 resulted in a substantive historical collection. The Trustees aimed to acquire objects that were associated with Wentworth, or contemporary to that period. In practice however, the house was furnished with many items that did not satisfy either criteria.

When the restoration of the upstairs level was completed in 1928, the Trustees enlisted the help of the ‘ladies’ with ‘experience and taste in matters of this kind’, to undertake the task.54 Photographs of the rooms taken in 1933 show how the interiors were furnished according to twentieth century assumptions of mid-nineteenth century tastes (Figures 2.21-23). Attempts were made to display furniture in their correct rooms, but many of the pieces did not belong stylistically to the Wentworth period and were arranged incorrectly.55 The Dining Room, for example, included three sideboards (Figure 2.21).

An inventory of the museum collection in 1932 listed pieces of furniture and objects originally owned by the Wentworth family that were acquired by the Trustees, but it also revealed how the collection included numerous objects that were unrelated to the history of Vaucluse House. Many of these objects were provided by the Mitchell Library, and ranged from bricks from the First Government House in Sydney to a piece of worm-eaten timber that was supposedly from the Old Cumberland Street Bridge.56 Many of these items were displayed in the house. Several showcases were placed in the Drawing Room and filled with a range of disparate objects, such as glass, documents, bottles and china (Figure 2.22).

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54 Ibid., Note dated October 1928.
56 Ibid. 2.
Figure 2.21
Dining Room at Vaucluse House. 1933.
(Photographed by Thomas Joseph Lawlor, Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 12: Vaucluse House & Grounds, Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT).

Figure 2.22
Drawing Room at Vaucluse House. 1933.
(Photographed by Thomas Joseph Lawlor, Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 12: Vaucluse House & Grounds, Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT).

Figure 2.23
Bedroom at Vaucluse House. 1933.
(Photographed by Thomas Joseph Lawlor, Nielsen-Vaucluse Park Trust photographs, Volume 12: Vaucluse House & Grounds, Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, HHT).
The women responsible for these room displays and exhibits were not paid staff but the wives of the Trustees and museum staff.\textsuperscript{57} As volunteers, they assumed the primary responsibility for all aspects of interpreting and presenting the interiors, from furniture, soft furnishings, to wallpaper designs and paint schemes. In 1968, the Trustees noted that Mrs Taylor, the caretaker's wife, was making the curtains and bed drapes for the First Bedroom and Miss Wentworth's Bedroom, as well as restoring and arranging the furniture.\textsuperscript{58} This role continued until 1980, when the property was transferred to the Historic Houses Trust.

The rooms may have been inaccurately interpreted, and displays of generic historical objects inappropriate, but the duties assumed by women at Vaucluse House were an important aspect of the house museum and its history. The development of the house museum genre in America during the nineteenth century was intrinsically tied to the social assumption that the private domestic sphere was the female realm, and provided the moral basis for society. In the professional environment of the twentieth century, women were consigned to volunteer museum roles, mainly in the areas of fund raising. The perceived role for women in house museums was reflected in a letter from a Trustee, Mr Duncan:

> Once the building and its surroundings have been thoroughly renovated the public will readily respond to our appeal to refurnish and maintain the old Home, the Cradle of Australian National Life, as did the ladies of America with regard to Washington's old home. Indeed, the Women's Reform League . . . has already begun work of raising funds for this purpose.\textsuperscript{59}

The role of female volunteers at Vaucluse House reflected this changing status of women in the heritage movement. Their work was viewed as non-professional (and non-architectural), while retaining the nineteenth century connection between women and the home.

\textsuperscript{57} Smith, \textit{The House Enshrined}, 81.

\textsuperscript{58} Vaucluse Park Trust, \textit{Minute Book 1941-1950} (Vaucluse House Archives (Historic Houses Trust of NSW)), Trustees note dated October 1968.

\textsuperscript{59} Vaucluse Park Trust, \textit{Minute Book 1912-1925}, 'Letter from Duncan to Bruntnell, 14 June 1922'.
A PLACE FOR INACCURACY IN AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY

The decades from the 1920s to World War II solidified the role of Vaucluse House as a museum. The contributions by the Institute of Architects resulted in a greater architectural focus, but the initial interpretation by the RAHS of Vaucluse House as a place of civic reverence and patriotism continued. Lobbying for government funding, the President of the Vaucluse Park Trust wrote to Sir Joseph Carruthers, MLC:

The Trustees by every means in their power have educated the people of this country, especially the rising generation, to a knowledge of who Wentworth was, and the great work he did in laying the foundation of the national life of this country... Wentworth and his Co-Federates who in starting a Nation Building in Australia laid the foundation of all our greatness... such men as Wentworth paved the way for the future prosperity of the statesmen of Australia... and people should know these things. It establishes a love of country and love of country is of utmost value to the Welfare of any nation, however small... Vaucluse House... SHOULD BE – A MONUMENT OF PRIDE TO ALL AUSTRALIANS. [We must] not allow the property of such historic value to pass into ruin... [but] provide a means to further educating the people, particularly the rising generation, to a knowledge of the history, political and social, of their native land.60

The position of Vaucluse House in Australia's history was confirmed during the sesqui-centenary celebrations of 1938 (Figure 2.24). The pageantry celebrating European settlement was documented in the film, March to Nationhood. Reference was made to Vaucluse House as the home of one of Australia's founding fathers:

Vaucluse House, Sydney, formerly the home of Australia's great statesman William Charles Wentworth, is the lovely setting for an historical pageant depicting colonial society in Wentworth's day, enacted now by descendants of those early pioneers. The actual coaches of a century ago are used in a scene depicting the reception of guests by Mr and Mrs Wentworth. Many of the costumes are heirlooms of the period. Fashion plays its part in the history of nations, and this display of gallant men and women, who amid the hardships of a young colony, preserved the manners and customs and the civilised society of the motherland. Yet under the trappings of an old world they were

60 Ibid., Note dated 8 June 1922.
already citizens of a new world … So Australia in 1938 looks back to the colourful
days of the early colony, back to the splendid backdrop of a pioneering past.  

This early interpretation of Vaucluse House was unabashedly glorified. In
hindsight, the early conservation and interpretation of Vaucluse House by the
Vaucluse Park Trust now seems uninformed, lacking in historical scholarship and
an understanding of museum practices. When viewed in relation to its historical
context however, the past nine decades as a house museum reveals the evolution of
public attitudes towards heritage and conservation. Nevertheless, under the Historic
Houses Trust, the inaccurate room settings created by the Trustees were revised
following historical research. Despite the current emphasis upon historical
accuracy and authenticity, the initial cultural importance attributed to Vaucluse
House has prevailed. As discussed in Chapter 5, its status as a national shrine and
the creationist legend of Wentworth as the nation’s founding father remains the
centre-piece of the museum.

Figure 2.24
The sesquicentenary procession through Sydney included floats with strong reference to Britannia,
as well as to the pioneering settlers that forged the nation (Hood Collection- Vol.36:
Sesquicentenary celebrations, 1938, SL.NSW).

61 Quoted in J. Thomas, Heroic History and Public Spectacle Sydney 1938 (Unpublished PhD
thesis, Australian National University, 1991), 137-138. and Smith, The House Enshrined,
38.

62 Pomfrett, "New Reflections on an Old House: Vaucluse House and Its History as a
Museum", (; Toy, "Collecting Policies - the Vaucluse House Experience".

109
SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The process of turning Vaucluse House into a museum reflected how American conservation philosophies and practices were transferred to Australia. The beginning of the twentieth century was a transitional period for the conservation and museum movement in America. Progressivism had a profound impact on twentieth century environmental and heritage politics. The female-based ancestral and patriotic societies of the nineteenth century, gave way to male-dominated heritage and museum experts and professional organizations at this time.

At Vaucluse House, the museum founders unconsciously adopted attributes from both nineteenth century and early twentieth century phases of the American conservation and house museum movement. As a museum, the house focused on William Charles Wentworth, and its presentation of Wentworth as a ‘founding father’ was unmistakably modelled on Mount Vernon and its interpretation of George Washington. But the management of Vaucluse House by male Trustees, and the input of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects also reflected the transitional nature of the American heritage movement at this time towards professional methods and heritage expertise. The role of historical sites as material culture and the development of systematic methods for documentation, research and conservation were still in its preliminary stages. Consequently, and in spite of professional input, the conservation and interpretation of Vaucluse House was guided by early twentieth century assumptions about nineteenth century styles and aesthetics.

The opening of Vaucluse House also coincided with the beginning of the heritage movement in Australia, and this period of the museum’s history provided an insight into the main organisations and individuals involved, and their cultural perceptions towards the built environment and its conservation. The pioneering efforts of the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Australian Institute of Architects were hindered by disjointed and unsuccessful campaigns, and by a regretful acceptance that the demolition of historic landmarks was inevitable for the sake of progress and urban growth. Both Burdekin House and the Commissariat Stores were demolished, and the Hyde Park Barracks only saved by the outbreak of the Second World War. This unpromising beginning was marked by more failure than successes. Nevertheless, it was a vital phase in the maturing of heritage ideas and in generating
public interest in heritage issues, which eventually led to the formation of the National Trust of Australia in 1945.

Vaucluse House was one of the few success stories of the heritage movement up until the 1940s. Considering the prevailing views of the time, it is not surprising that Vaucluse House was the only historic building conserved as a house museum during this period. Australia was not quite ready to fully embrace the ideals of heritage conservation, but the seeds had been planted. As discussed in the next chapter, the principles of progressivism and the Colonial Revival that influenced the conservation of Vaucluse House became more defined at Experiment Farm Cottage and with the work of the National Trust of Australia.
Figure 3.1
Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (Photograph by the Fraser Family, National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
AN AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE RENAISSANCE:
Experiment Farm Cottage and the National Trust

INTRODUCTION

In 1963, the National Trust opened Experiment Farm Cottage in Parramatta. It was a quantum leap in the progression of the house museum movement. Nearly thirty years had passed since Australia’s second house museum, Cooks’ Cottage, was relocated from England to Melbourne, and more than fifty years since Vaucluse House was resumed in 1911. There was no comparison with America, where nearly one hundred house museums opened within fifty years of Mount Vernon.¹

This unremarkable start reflected the overall state of the heritage movement in Australia. There was a discernible level of public interest in the colonial past and its cultural heritage by the 1880s, but this was largely confined to antiquarian societies, architects and artists. Unable to generate widespread public or government support, campaigns to save colonial buildings in Sydney prior to the 1940s were generally unsuccessful.

In complete contrast, the post-war period witnessed the exponential rise of the heritage movement due to the formation of the National Trust. Founded in 1945, it was the first organisation in Australia with the specific purpose of heritage conservation. Its work not only generated widespread public and government support in heritage conservation, but it also established a benchmark in heritage practices. This was achieved through the acquisition and restoration of historic

buildings as museums. In doing so, the National Trust ensured the longevity of the house museum form in Australia.

This chapter examines the history of the house museum from 1945 to 1977 - the year when the New South Wales State government created, by enactment, the Elizabeth Bay House Trust. This milestone marked the demise of a community-driven movement, and the beginning of the current bureaucratic heritage system in Australia. The National Trust defined the house museum genre during these post-war decades, especially through the opening of its first house museum Experiment Farm Cottage. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the ideas and cultural values that shaped how Experiment Farm Cottage was conserved and interpreted, and assess how this process reflected the overall direction of the National Trust and its influence on the heritage movement.

Under the aegis of the National Trust, the various ideas espoused by the previous generation of historic conservationists were amalgamated. Reflecting the progressivist inspired methods from SPNEA, this period was characterised by a systematic approach to heritage conservation using empirical means of analysis, and the ongoing domination of professional architects. Juxtaposing such quasi-scientific methods was the championing of the Colonial Revival by artists and architects at the start of the twentieth century. It reflected the ongoing influence of American ideas in Australia.

In Australia, the Colonial Revival movement was transplanted onto the 'pioneer legend' that arose in Australian literary and artistic culture from the 1880s. It reshaped the cultural perceptions of Australia's past by according it a mythical Georgian agrarian social order. It also shifted the focus of the heritage movement, giving preference to buildings and architectural styles from the Georgian period. These ideas were present in Australia in the first half of the century, but the National Trust articulated these principles into an identifiable system. The conservation and conversion of Experiment Farm Cottage into a house museum provided the first opportunity to practically apply these ideas.
RELIGHTING THE HERITAGE FIRE

Experiment Farm Cottage holds a special place in my memory, being the first house museum that I visited as a child. Returning nearly twenty years later, little had changed. The rooms were still filled with dusty old furniture. I was delighted to find that the dripstone was still under the rear verandah, and that the plum tree was holding precariously to life. Middle-aged ladies still staffed the front desk, although visitors seemed few and far between. All in all, Experiment Farm Cottage was the same stereotypical house museum – silent, stagnant and a little stale.

Yet this was not always the case. The museum was triumphantly opened by the Governor of New South Wales in 1963, and was a stop on Princess Anne’s tour of Australia in 1970. Four decades later, however, Experiment Farm Cottage was outdated and tired. Instead of being remembered as the former shining star in the house museum movement, it was noted more for the ongoing debate about its construction date – was it built in 1798 or 1834? The preoccupation with this issue has overshadowed and, to a certain extent, trivialised the significance of Experiment Farm Cottage as the historic site chosen by the National Trust as its first house museum.

In conserving Experiment Farm Cottage, the National Trust demonstrated the increasing attention to architectural aesthetics and the confirmed status of the professional architect in heritage practices. Its restoration as an example of a Georgian styled rural homestead reflected the continuing influence of the Colonial Revival. This was further reinforced by the museum’s focus on the convict farmer, James Ruse, rather than the actual owner of the house, Surgeon John Harris. The attributes of an emergent modernist movement in the opening decades of the twentieth century were discernible in the conservation of Vaucluse House, but the absence of a centralised heritage organisation and the onset of the Second World

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War resulted in an unremarkable and slow start to the house museum genre in Australia. It was not until the opening of Experiment Farm that the ideals of the Colonial Revival and modernism came into fruition in the heritage movement.

Figure 3.2
Originally located in Yorkshire, England, Cook’s Cottage was built by Captain James Cook’s parents in 1755. It was purchased by Russell Grimwade in 1933 for £800 as a gift to Melbourne city. The house was dismantled, transported and reassembled in Fitzroy Gardens. It was misleadingly named Captain Cook’s Cottage for many years. By 1755, James Cook was 27 and in the navy. He never lived in the cottage. In recent years, the house has been renamed ‘Cooks’ Cottage’ and furnished as a period house museum to reflect late 18th century rural England. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003)

Nearly three decades passed since the opening of Vaucluse House and Cook’s Cottage before another house museum was established in Australia (Figure 3.2). In her study of house museum typologies, Charlotte Smith attributed this period of seeming non-activity to the absence of ‘identifiable heroes and sacred sites’ upon which civil religion and the nineteenth century American house museum were based and how:

Civil religion . . . is distinctly American in origin and practice. Patriotism, a cornerstone of American style civil religion, did have the same resonance in other nations, including the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia. The dominant historical paradigm at the turn of the twentieth century, monumental history.
advocated many of the principles of civil religion, relying on the identification of founding figures who undertook heroic events.\(^3\)

For civil religion to thrive however, there had to be individual, identifiable heroes and sacred sites where significant national events took place: the reasons Australians did not adopt civil religion was the absence of such heroes and sites.\(^4\)

Furthermore, she reasoned that the creation of an Australian national hero was based on characteristics symbolised through an anonymous figure created through events that occurred overseas during World War I:

Herein lies the problem for civil religion and indirectly Great Man house museums in the first half of the twentieth century. The new nation of Australia was beginning to make a history of its own and in the process sought new heroes and sacred sites. But at this stage the nation-building heroes were anonymous and the defining moments happened overseas. With no identifiable hero and no sacred site in Australia, civil religion could not take root. It has only been since the post-1970’s reappraisal of Australian history that Australians have begun to identify individuals of the twentieth century for the role they played in shaping the nation. Sporting heroes and early Australian prime ministers are now venerated at house museums.

After the opening of Vaucluse House and Cooks’ Cottage, the house museum movement in Australia fizzled. Not until the creation of the very elite membership-based National Trust... were more houses converted to museum status. The motive behind such rescues was no longer premised on the civic or historical virtue of the sites’ former residents however; architectural value became the principal selection criteria.\(^5\)

However, Smith’s reasoning overlooked several important developments in Australia that impacted on the house museum movement. First and foremost, the cultural environment in Australia before World War II was not, in general, supportive of heritage conservation. Despite efforts to save numerous historic buildings like Burdekin House and the Commissariat Store, the heritage movement was marked by more failures than successes in its campaigns. Although the combined efforts of the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Institute of

\(^3\) Charlotte Smith, *The House Enshrined: Great Man and Social History House Museums in the United States and Australia* (PhD Dissertation, University of Canberra, 2002), 43.

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid., 45.
Architects raised public awareness of heritage issues, the movement was restricted to a small and specialised group with little public or government support.

Secondly, the American form of civil religion that venerated politicians and the government was not applicable to the Australian cultural environment. As discussed in Chapter 1, the initial Australian ‘heroes’ were the faceless ‘digger’ and ‘Anzacs’ that represented the grassroots populace. William Charles Wentworth was a politician, but he was also considered a voice and advocate of the downtrodden. Similarly, John Macarthur was also respected because of his stance against colonial authority.

For thirty years, the house museum movement entered an apparent hiatus but the ideologies and historical perspectives that would shape the National Trust and its house museums were developing in other areas. In the first half of the twentieth century, this was notably through artists and architects following the Colonial Revival movement. Contrary to Smith’s claims that the limited opening of house museums during this period was due to an absence of identifiable ‘heroes and sites’, the opening of Experiment Farm Cottage indicated that they were clearly present – they were merely waiting in the wings for the right opportunity to shine.

The Colonial Revival in Australia

The Colonial Revival that reshaped the heritage field in America at the start of the twentieth century was quickly embraced in Australia. Many artists and architects of this period, such as Harold Desbrowe-Annears and William Hardy Wilson, went on ‘grand tours’ as part of their architectural and artistic training. By the twentieth century, the tour included not only the traditional destinations of Europe and England, but also America.

Desbrowe-Annears was the leading proponent and practitioner of the Arts and Crafts and Colonial Revivalist movements in Melbourne. His architectural perceptions were strongly influenced by John Ruskin and the American architect H. H. Richardson, and openly articulated through papers published in the *Australian*
Builder and Contractors' News. While teaching at the Working Men's College, he established the T-Square Club for artists, architects and craftsmen to promote the Arts and Craft ethos of 'art as architecture'. In his opening address, Desbrowe-Annears stated:

Now the fellowship of this trinity is considered valuable, in order that the artist might be more architectural, that the architect might be more artistic, and that both might be better craftsman.  

Such ideals were translated into his private architectural commissions, which made reference to the Tudor revival, British Arts and Craft and Spanish colonial architecture. All these styles featured in the Colonial Revival but for his work on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, however, he incorporated American colonial architecture.

One of his commissions was for his friends Daryl and Joan Lindsay, who purchased a property, Mulberry Hill, on the Mornington Peninsula following their marriage in 1925 (Figure 3.3). That same year, they commissioned Desbrowe-Annears to convert and extend the four-room timber cottage. The American influence on Desbrowe-Annears' design was strong, with the house being an adaptation of the American clapboard house including three dormer windows and a semi-circular porch. The rooms were designed as a Regency interior, to comply with Daryl's English Georgian tastes and the couples' eclectic range of Australian Georgian pieces acquired through second-hand stores.

The story of Mulberry Hill indicated the close-knit circle of this pre-war group of artists and architects, their adherence to the Colonial Revival and how this permeated into the Australian heritage movement. Daryl Lindsay was brother to Lionel and the infamous Norman Lindsay. Joan, best remembered as the author of Picnic at Hanging Rock, studied at the National Gallery School with Frederick McCubbin. Mulberry Hill was purchased from McCubbin's cousins. Through


Lionel and Norman, the couple became friends with Melbourne’s artistic, literary and academic world that included Nellie Melba, Arthur Streeton, Baldwin Spencer, George Bell, Harold Herbert, John Longstaff and Theodore Fink. The walls of Mulberry Hill resembled an Australian art gallery. Daryl Lindsay also became one of the founding members of the National Trust in Victoria, and Joan bequeathed the house and its contents to the Trust upon her death to be conserved as a house museum.

Figure 3.3
Mulberry Hill located on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria. Designed by Harold Desbrowe-Annear. It was the home of Daryl and Joan Lindsay. It is currently a house museum managed by the National Trust. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003)

Unlike the Melbourne set, which referred to the colonial period through urban forms of Georgian and Regency architecture, the Colonial Revival in New South Wales referred mainly to English rural colonial traditions. Exemplified by the work of William Hardy Wilson, this particular reading of the Colonial Revival was related to a Georgian pastoral Arcadia in New South Wales and Tasmania during

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9 Ibid., 169.
the Macquarie period. Wilson’s 1920s publications, *The Cow Pasture Road* and *Old Colonial Architecture in New South Wales and Tasmania*, defined this agrarian-based movement in New South Wales, and popularised the conservation of Georgian architectural styles until the 1970s.

Hardy Wilson’s romantic depictions of Australia’s heritage excluded the greater part of the built environment. For him, civilisation was steeped in a mythical past, and this was transplanted onto the pre-industrial Georgian settlement of Australia in his 1920 publication, *The Old Cow Pasture Road*. According to Wilson, the naming of Cow Pasture Road was based on a story of a brindled cow and bull that were brought to Australia with the First Fleet. The two animals escaped from the Sydney settlement in the first few months of arrival, and were later discovered south of Sydney settled in pasturage where they became forebears of a large herd of cattle. Historically, more than two animals escaped, but Hardy metaphorically transformed the story into a creationist legend of where Australian civilisation began. Interestingly, Hardy’s choice of the Macquarie town of Campbelltown as the cradle of civilisation was also the place of his birth and childhood (Figure 3.4).

Following the Colonial Revival concept of civilisation as art and architecture, Hardy Wilson portrayed the colonial homesteads along Cow Pasture Road as divine creations. Describing the house ‘Greystanes’, he exalted (Figure 3.5):

> The Great Architect of the Universe perceiving an irreproachable site, took care to dower it with fertility . . . this humble servant Nelson Lawson, following in their immortal footsteps, planted Greystanes on Prospect Hill, selecting the art of Classic Greece to give his Georgian home a savour of gods.\(^10\)

These classical Georgian houses belonged to an idealised past, based on a blessed and bountiful agrarian community. The use of religious analogies also suggested a natural social hierarchy of master and servant. Continuing his tale, Hardy Wilson explained how:

> In pioneering days these homesteads resembled small villages. Each provided its own necessary commodities. The grape furnished wine and the wheat bread; and the pasturage grazed sheep and cattle . . . In the kitchen gardens flourished artichokes and

\(^{10}\) William Hardy Wilson, *The Cow Pasture Road* (Sydney: Art in Australia, 1920), 9.
luscious melons and bountiful crops of commoner nourishment. Blacksmiths, carpenters, shepherds and vigneron, congregeted in outbuildings, were employed welding iron and turning wood, tending flocks and vineyards.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Figure 3.4}
Parchment map of the Cow Pastures Road from William Hardy Wilson's Cow Pasture Road, 1920. The map showed what Wilson considered, the cradle of civilisation in Australia. It included the grand colonial homesteads, like Greystanes, Horsley, Gledswood and Harrington Park.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
The tradition of mythologising Australia’s colonial settlement through an idealised bucolic past was well-established by the 1920s, both in Australia and England. The cultural attributes espoused by the Colonial Revival were not dissimilar to those promoted by the ‘pioneer legend’, which was created at a time of growing Australian nationalism in the 1880s and 1890s. This in turn, followed earlier depictions of Australia as Arcadia in mid-nineteenth century English literature.

In his discussion on the origins of the pioneer legend, J. B. Hirst described it as the celebration of ‘courage, enterprise, hard work and perseverance and that it usually applied to the people who first settled [and worked] the land, whether as pastoralists or farmers’. For Hirst, the conversion of these early settlers into ‘pioneers’ and national heroes was attributed to the poets and writers of the late nineteenth century, especially the work of Henry Lawson and A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, and later by


14 Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend", 316.
artists like Frederick McCubbin. Paterson's poem 'Pioneers' epitomised such dedications:

They came of bold and roving stock that would not fixed abide;  
They were the sons of field and flock since e'er they learnt to ride,  
We may not hope to see such men in these degenerate years  
As those explorers of the bush—the brave old pioneers.

O ye that sleep in lonely graves by distant ridge and plain,  
We drink to you in silence now as Christmas comes again,  
To you who fought the wilderness through rough unsettled years—  
The founders of our nation's life, the brave old pioneers.

In her study of how Australia was represented in nineteenth century literature, Coral Lansbury identified a longer tradition of romanticising the 'bush' that began through English literature in the 1850s. For example, Samuel Sidney, a recognised English expert on Australia at the time, wrote in 1852:

Australia – New South Wales – Botany Bay...— to be the wealthiest offset of the British Crown – a land of promise for the adventurous – a home of peace and independence for the industrious – an El Dorado and an Arcadia combined, where the hardest and the easiest, best-paid employments are to be found, where every striving man who rears a race of Industrious children, may sit under the shadow of his own vine and his own fig-tree – not without work, but with little care – living on his own land, looking down to the valleys to his herds – towards the hills to his flock, amid the humming of the bees, which know no winters.

Australian writers, like Lawson and Barbara Baynton, noted the farcical nature of such depictions that bore little resemblance to the stark reality of Australian rural life. For Lawson, whose parents were driven off their land by drought:

15 Ibid. 318-330.
The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple trees, no undergrowth. Nineteen miles to the nearest civilisation - a shanty on the main road ... There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees.¹⁸

Such imagery contrasted sharply to more popular Arcadian impressions as presented by writers like ‘Banjo’ Paterson, whose ‘Singer of the Bush’ depicted a plentiful environment:

There is waving of grass in the breeze
   And a song in the air,
And a murmur of myriad bees
   That toil everywhere.
There is scent in the blossom and bough,
   And the breath of the Spring
Is as soft as a kiss on a brow—
   And Spring-time I sing.¹⁹

Regardless of whether the bush was represented in grim or golden terms, the pioneer legend positioned the farmer or bushman (and not the statesman) as the central historical figure. In doing so, it transformed the ‘ordinary man’ to that of national hero. The work of individual settlers was recognised as contributing towards the overall achievement of nation building, based on ‘the requisite qualities of diligence, courage and perseverance’.²⁰ Such acknowledgement also broadened the writing of Australian history beyond administrative and government concerns. As Hirst noted, the pioneer legend provided the opportunity to write a social history of ‘the people’.²¹

The pioneer legend enabled the ordinary worker to be included in the history of nation building, and this was extended in the twentieth century to also include the contributions of the ‘reformed’ convict. As noted in Chapter 1, Mary Gilmore included in her poem ‘Old Botany Bay’ in 1918:

²¹ Ibid. 331.
I was the conscript
Sent to hell
To make in the desert
The living well;

I split the rock;
I felled the tree:
The nation was —
Because of me. 22

The inclusion of the convict into the pioneer legend in the early twentieth century was an important step. Combined with the Colonial Revival, it transformed the convict James Ruse from a petty thief to a national hero when Experiment Farm Cottage was converted into a house museum in the 1960s.

The house museum movement was not visibly active for several decades, but neither did it ‘fizzle’ out. The groundwork for the future direction of heritage and house museum practices was established during this period. Under the National Trust and the separate initiatives by the Royal Australian Historical Society, the Royal Institute of Architects, and the colonial Georgian-inspired artists and architects were brought together in a standardised system. In a sense, heritage was merely re-branded, but the people and ideas were the same. The effect of acquiring a new public image on the heritage movement and house museums however, was phenomenal.

THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA: THE NEW NAME OF HERITAGE

The National Trust of Australia was the leading force in the heritage movement up until the 1970s. For the first time, the heritage movement presented a united front. The first branch was opened in New South Wales in 1945, followed by South Australia in 1955, Victoria in 1956, Western Australia in 1959, Tasmania in 1960.

22 Mary Cameron Gilmore, The Passionate Heart (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1918). Also quoted in Hirst, "The Pioneer Legend", 332.
and Queensland in 1963. The Australian council of the National Trust was established in 1965.

While having no statutory powers, the Trust wielded substantial influence over government and developers in its aim to protect heritage sites. Its most active and effective phase spanned from the 1950s to the 1970s, when it had a strong government and community following. During this period, it developed a system of classifying buildings and listing heritage places on a register. It became the central tool in heritage management and Federal and State governments adopted this model when they created a legislative framework in the 1970s. It continues to form the basis of current heritage practices.

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) was modelled on the English National Trust. Its founder, Annie Wyatt, raised the idea of establishing a similar organisation in Australia. Demonstrating the close link between natural and heritage conservationists, Wyatt was already involved in nature conservation campaigns, having founded the Ku-ring-gai Tree Lovers' Civic League in 1927. This group was instrumental in conserving important coastal views from Palm Beach, and persuaded the State government to establish a reserve to safeguard the panoramic vistas. The park was named the A. F. Wyatt Reserve in honour of her work.

In addition to nature conservation, Wyatt was also involved in heritage conservation. Her acquaintances included both Captain H. Watson and Charles H. Bertie from the Royal Australian Historical Society and she assisted in the campaigns to save Burdekin House and the Commissariat Stores in the 1930s. As Ken Bernard Smith, a founding member of the National Trust, recalled:

*the loss of Burdekin House was a great blow, although it was one of the strong sparks that spurred her on towards her goal. Perhaps, I should add another though quite different type of building, about which she was most concerned was the Commissariat Stores at West Circular Quay.*

In 1935, Wyatt wrote to the English National Trust, requesting copies of its Act and seeking advice. Her plan to establish the Australian branch with her Tree League

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Experiment Farm Cottage

colleagues was postponed because of the war however, but she resumed her idea
nine years later in November 1944. Speaking at the ‘Save the Trees – Conserve our
Forests Conference’, Wyatt publicly launched her campaign, asking:

the government to give us something approximating the National Trust of England,
which functions not only for the trees, forests and parklands but also historic buildings
or anything which adds to the beauty and interest of the countryside, . . . or anything
deemed worthy of preservation for the enjoyment of the people, even a little cottage or
an old farmhouse – all those things which are typical England and worthy of
preservation.24

The New South Wales National Trust was established on 6 April 1945. Under its
Constitution, the objectives were:

(a) The promotion, acquisition and maintenance for permanent preservation for the
benefit of the public of;
   (1) lands and buildings of beauty, architectural, historical and antiquarian
       interest, and
   (2) as regards lands, the preservation of natural feature and fauna and flora.

(b) The protection and acquisition of the amenities of such lands and buildings as
foresaid, the preservation of furniture, pictures and chattels of any description
having a national or historical or artistic interest and the encouragement of the
enjoyment thereof by the public.25

According to Wyatt, the ‘immediate endeavours’ were to concentrate on the
presentation of those buildings that stand in immediate danger of being lost to the
community.

The English National Trust was founded in 1895, and its success gave the newly
founded Australian branch immediate recognition and acceptance. It provided a
new public profile for the heritage movement, but it did not signify a complete
break with pre-war ideas and values. Wyatt’s association with members of the
Royal Australian Historical Society and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects
revealed the ongoing collaboration of the first generation of heritage advocates with

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24 Ibid., 14.
25 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), Constitution of the National Trust of Australia (New
South Wales) (Sydney: 1945).
the National Trust. Early twentieth century Colonial Revival artists and architects also entered the fold. In a similar vein to William Hardy Wilson, the first set of publications by the National Trust promoted colonial Georgian architecture. *Georgian Architecture in Australia* was published in 1963, and featured the photography of Max Dupain. Early colonial houses of New South Wales was released in 1974. Both books were published in association with Ure Smith, who had published Hardy Wilson’s work.

The Constitution stressed the intention of the National Trust to represent public and community concerns, but its work was heavily influenced by the interests of its founding members. The modernist and Colonial Revival ideas that were surfacing since the beginning of the twentieth century were finally married under a uniform heritage system by the National Trust. True to the modernist spirit of corporatism, the National Trust organised its functions into the three areas of heritage classification and listing, advocacy, and building conservation and interpretation.

The National Trust introduced the first register of heritage places in Australia, and this currently includes buildings, historic sites, streetscapes, precincts and landscapes. Adopting a scientific approach, historic buildings and sites were classified and listed on the register according to their perceived importance. It provided a systematic method for identification and assessment, and shaped subsequent practices in Australia. While having no statutory standing, the seemingly scientific credence of the register made it a very influential instrument in drawing public attention to particular heritage sites, especially when threatened by demolition or unsympathetic redevelopment. The idea of the heritage register was adopted by both Federal and the New South Wales State government as the main administrative tool when heritage legislation was introduced in the 1970s.

Despite the systemised approach, building classification remained a subjective process. Based on criteria that emphasised aesthetic and stylistic merits, the initial

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27 Rachel Roxburgh, Douglass Baglin, and National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), *Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales* (Sydney: Ure Smith in association with The National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), 1974).

28 In the 1990s, a standard system of heritage assessment was adopted by all Australian states to ensure a uniform management of heritage items.
classification system created by the National Trust graded historic buildings
according to a hierarchy from 'A' to 'D'. The register reinforced a bias towards
early colonial buildings and demonstrated the ongoing influence of the Colonial
Revival from earlier that century. Georgian and Regency styles inevitably received
the higher classifications of 'A' and 'B', whilst Victorian and Edwardian buildings
were given lower rankings. Under the system, it was difficult to justify the
conservation of historic sites with 'C' or 'D' grading. This included vernacular
styled buildings (such as early slab huts), or places that were not associated with an
important historical event or individual (such as working-class cottages).

Such a narrow definition of heritage was also reflected in the National Trust's
advocacy work. The first campaign initiated by the National Trust was in response
to proposal to redevelop the inner-city areas of Sydney. At the conclusion of World
War II, the Sydney City Council and the New South Wales government resumed its
plans to redevelop the inner-city areas of The Rocks, Woolloomooloo, Macquarie
Street and Circular Quay, which involved the demolition of large areas of working-
class houses. The reaction by the National Trust was not dissimilar to its pre-war
predecessors, whose concern was limited to public buildings such as the Hyde Park
Barracks and The Mint on Macquarie Street. The supposition that progress was
dependant upon new urban development also continued from the pre-war period.
Observing the building boom in the 1950s and '60s, the National Trust accepted
that:

The old buildings of Sydney are continuing to topple to make way for the tall new
office blocks which are so radically changing the city's sky-line. The progress of the
city of course must go on and indeed many of the buildings which have been replaced
are of no loss.29

The underlying principle of the Colonial Revival and progressivism was to maintain
middle-class values and dominance, and both the National Trust membership and
the main political parties that supported it, were from this socio-economic
background.

29 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), "The Changing Face of Sydney", National Trust
Despite promoting itself as being community-based, the constituency of its membership and the limited range of buildings considered worthy of protection reflected its predominantly Anglo-Australian middle-class interests. The first issue of the National Trust Bulletin highlighted its supposed non-political and non-sectarian approach towards historic and natural places in both urban and rural areas. In practice, membership was initially by invitation only, and the Trust was only compelled to open its membership to the general public when it needed to increase its numbers to enable the organisation to be incorporated. When the National Trust Bill was introduced in 1960, both Houses of Parliament praised its work and the Bill was passed unopposed, suggesting that the State government and National Trust shared similar values towards the historic environment.

In general, the work and attitudes espoused by the National Trust complemented the urban planning programs initiated by the State government, with the Trust serving as an advisory body on issues relating to heritage planning. Under the Local Government Act (NSW), the County of Cumberland Planning Scheme of 1951 authorised local councils to declare ‘any land, building or work to be a place of scientific or historic interest’.\(^\text{30}\) Despite limited application by the Cumberland County Council, it was the first heritage planning instrument and was devised with direct reference to the National Trust and its heritage register.

According to the Cumberland County Council, the National Trust was responsible for the ‘real revival of architectural good taste and good sense and an awakening appreciation of the earlier records of Australia’s past’.\(^\text{31}\) Georgian and Regency architecture represented a period of ‘decency’. By contrast, the century after 1851 was considered inferior because the discovery of gold “ended an era and ushered in a new, faster, more hopeful, but infinitely uglier world”.\(^\text{32}\) Such reasoning for conserving particular architectural styles and buildings over others reflected the ongoing belief that heritage places were a source of civic reform – a factor that has continued into current heritage practices.


\(^\text{32}\) Ibid.
The advocacy and classification work by the National Trust were based on a systematic approach to heritage management. The purpose of these tasks was to raise public and government awareness of heritage issues and particularly the range of historic buildings that were considered worthy of protection. Its most effective sphere of influence however, was through its acquisition of historic buildings and their conversion into house museums. Leading by example, Experiment Farm Cottage finally provided the opportunity to fully convey its heritage principles in the conservation and interpretation of an actual rural Georgian building.

EXPERIMENT FARM COTTAGE: THE FRUITION OF MODERNIST AND COLONIAL REVIVAL IDEALS

In the Tradition of the ‘Pioneer Legend’: The ‘First Land Grant’, the ‘First Settler’ and the ‘First Private Farm’

*Figure 3.6*
Experiment Farm Cottage, Parramatta (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2000)

Experiment Farm was one of the first historic sites to be recognised as having heritage value. James Ruse was described as the ‘first settler’ in the 1911 *Jubilee History of Parramatta*, and the property was included in James Jervis’ 1933 paper, “The Beginnings of Settlement in the Parish of St. John, New South Wales”, for the Royal Australian Historical Society Journal. Jervis was also responsible for the placement of the commemorative RAHS plaque that is currently located in the allotment to the rear of the Cottage. Experiment Farm Cottage was one of the six

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buildings placed on the Cumberland County Council's List of Historic Buildings in 1961 – the first government heritage register in Australia.

Experiment Farm Cottage is a fine example of colonial Georgian architecture and belongs to the highly valued class of the Australian verandahed bungalow that included Elizabeth Farm, Hambledon Cottage and Horsley Park. What sets it apart from the other examples within this group was its siting on Experiment Farm. This was the first land grant and private farm in Australia. While important, the story of the Cottage and its owner, Surgeon John Harris has always featured second to the legend of the first settler and farm.

The survival of the 1788 penal colony depended on creating a self-sufficient colony, and on 17 June 1790, Governor Arthur Phillip wrote to Lord Sydney:

In order to know in what time a man might be able to cultivate a sufficient quantity of ground to support himself, I last November ordered a hut to be built in a good situation, an acre of ground to be cleared and once it was turned up it was put into the possession of a very industrious convict, who was told if he behaved himself well he should have thirty acres.\textsuperscript{34}

With his agricultural experience, James Ruse was chosen for the task.

James Ruse was transported as a convict to Sydney with the First Fleet in 1788. Originally from Cornwall, he was sentenced to seven years transportation for theft in 1782. When his sentence expired in July 1789, Phillip took the opportunity to employ Ruse to determine the period of time required to establish a self-sufficient farm.

In addition to the area of cleared land and hut, Ruse was also given convict assistance to clear heavy timber from a further five acres. Clothing and rations were supplied from the public store for fifteen months, as well as seeds, tools, two

\textsuperscript{34} David Collins, \textit{An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, with Remarks on the Disposition, Customs, Manners, Etc. Of the Native Inhabitants of That Country}, ed. Brian H. Fletcher (Sydney: Reed in association with the Royal Historical Society, 1975), 97-98; Watkin Tench, \textit{Sydney's First Four Years: Being a Reprint of a Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and a Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson} (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1961), 197-198.
sow pigs and six hens. With a successful harvest, he was granted his promised thirty acres of land in November 1789. Governor Phillip reported on 5 November 1791 that:

The first settler was a convict James Ruse whose time had expired; a hut was built and 1 1/2 acres of ground broke up and assisted in clearing the heavy timber off 5 acres at Parramatta, given grain for sowing his ground the first year, with the necessary implements for husbandry. Two sow pigs and six hens given to him. He entered on his farm on 30 acres on the 21st November, 1789, and was supported from the public store until 25th February, 1791, when he declined receiving any further support, being able to maintain himself. He has since remarried, and has a child, both of whom he wishes to take off the public store next Christmas.

The thirty-acre grant was officially documented as being in the possession of Ruse in 1790 (Figure 3.7). The Deed of Grant defined:

Thirty Acres of Land, in One Lot, to be known by the name of Experiment Farm, laying on the south of the Barrack Ponds at Parramatta.

Ruse only remained on Experiment Farm for four years. Much of this period was spent trialling different crops, and adapting to new climatic conditions. He also had to contend with limited and often unreliable convict assistance. Despite such challenges, Ruse had a successful harvest in August 1793, selling 600 bushels of corn to the commissary for £150. The following year was a failure however, caused by the combination of the exhausted soil and a prolonged drought. In October 1793, Ruse sold Experiment Farm to Surgeon John Harris for £40, and secured another grant in the Hawkesbury area. He remained in this area until his death in 1837.

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35 ‘Details for Ruse, Robert Webb’, Public Records Office Reel 3 CO201/6, Enclosure 1791, 94 (ML SLNSW).
36 Governor Phillip, 5 November 1781, Historical Records of Australia, 33 vols. (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914), Vol. 1. Watkin Tench, a captain of the marines with the First Fleet, also provided a similar account of James Ruse and his agricultural pursuits. See Watkin Tench, 1788: Comprising a Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and a Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, ed. Tim F. Flannery (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1996), 157-158, 222, 223.
37 Deed of Ruse Grant, 1790 (ML D 225).
38 D. G. Bowd, Macquarie Country: A History of the Hawkesbury (Melbourne, Canberra [etc.]: Cheshire, 1969), 5; Grant No. 201. James Ruse, between 3 Oct. And 3 Nov. 1794. Granted by Goree, 1794 (LTO, 1794, Book 1A)).
John Harris also arrived in New South Wales with the First Fleet (Figure 3.8). As surgeon's mate with the 102nd Foot Regiment of the New South Wales Corps, he was in a favourable position to establish himself as a leading landowner in the colony. In addition to holding a range of military and civil posts, including those of Military Surgeon, Navel Officer, Police Magistrate, Superintendent of Public Works and Deputy Judge Advocate, Harris acquired extensive landholdings in Parramatta, Ultimo, South Creek, Five Dock, Bathurst and Callengen.  

Figure 3.7
'Early plan of Rose Hill c.1790' / Bonwick Transcripts Box 36 (ML, SL, NSW). The location of Experiment Farm was labelled 'The First Settler'. The small portion to the west (left) may be the initial 1½ acres provided to Ruse by Governor Phillip.

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Sheedy, Draft Conservation Analysis of Experiment Farm Cottage 9 Ruse Street, Parramatta, section 2.5.2.
Harris’ primary residence was at Ultimo Estate, near Sydney, and later at Shane’s Park at South Creek. His Parramatta property was used mainly for his pastoral pursuits, in particular animal husbandry. In addition to Ruse’s 30-acre property, Harris was also granted a further 100 acres that adjoined Experiment Farm in 1793. He further increased the estate with the purchase of an adjoining 30-acre property from Thomas Clark in 1805. The Parramatta holdings became known as ‘Harris’s Farm’.

In addition to his pastoral interests, Harris regularly came to Parramatta in his official capacity as a military surgeon, and later to sit on the Bench of Magistrates. In 1834, Harris commenced the construction of the present Experiment Farm Cottage on the original Experiment Farm grant. It replaced an earlier cottage and was completed in 1835 (Figure 3.9). Harris never resided here. Elizabeth Macarthur, who lived on the adjacent estate, Elizabeth Farm, wrote to her son in 1839 that Experiment Farm Cottage had been leased to the Police Magistrate,
Pierter Laurentz (Peter Laurence) Campbell and his wife, Barbara, for the past three years. Harris, suffering from acute arthritis, passed away at Shane's Park in 1838.

Without any direct heirs, Harris divided his estate amongst his relatives in Ireland. A condition of every inheritance was that each estate was to pass onto the eldest son, all of whom were to be named John Harris. Harris's Farm was left to his nephew, Thomas Harris. Despite financial problems and the need to mortgage part of the estate, the property remained in the family. It passed to Thomas Harris' son, John Harris in 1870, who began to subdivide the estate. A portion of the 100-acre grant was subdivided and sold in 1876. A further 30-acres was sold in 1884. The remainder of the Harris's Farm, excluding the original Experiment Farm grant, was placed onto the market just before John Harris' death in April 1884 (Figure 3.10).

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 3.9**
'Residence of J. Macarthur Esq., near Parramatta NSW' by Joseph Lyce (Views in Sydney, 1825).
This view of Elizabeth Farm shows the boundary to Experiment Farm on the right. The small cottage to the right of the fenceline was probably Harris' first house that was later replaced by the present Experiment Farm Cottage.

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Figure 3.10
*Experiment Farm Cottage, 1891* (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives). The hard surface in the foreground was a tennis court.

Figure 3.11
There are very few historical images of Experiment Farm Cottage. The following four photographs were taken in c. 1910, when the Fraser family leased the house

(Above) Mrs Fraser sitting at the front of Experiment Farm Cottage, c. 1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
Figure 3.12
The south-west rear corner of Experiment Farm Cottage, with four of the Fraser children, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).

Figure 3.13
The western side of the front verandah, Experiment Farm Cottage, c.1910 (National Trust of Australia (NSW)).
The house remained in the Harris family but tenanted until 1921. The Fraser family leased the house from 1910 to 1921, and they provided the very few early photographs of Experiment Farm Cottage and its gardens (Figure 3.1, 3.11 to 3.14). In 1921, it was sold to L. Simpson, who was the Mayor of Parramatta at the time. The remainder of Experiment Farm was subdivided and sold. Reporting the sale, the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote:

> with the recent sale of Experiment Cottage, [it] is considered likely that the whole property will soon be divided and again, change hands, which will probably mean the passing out of the home to give place to a more modern structure. An effort was recently made, but without success to resume that area as a park for that now thickly populated portion of the town. In view of the important part that Parramatta played in the early history of Australia, there are many who advocate the acquisition of this house and its conversion into a museum for the safe custody of relics of bygone days which are still in the possession of some of the oldest inhabitant of the district.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{41}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1921, 12.
The house was saved from demolition but was instead divided into flats. On 11 April 1960, a small classified advertisement appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* listing ‘James Ruse Historical Cottage, 9 Ruse St, Harris Park, 11 rooms, two furnished Flats’ for sale for £4,500.\(^2\)

Upon seeing the notice, the National Trust considered it a ‘national responsibility’ to ‘preserve a significant link with Australia’s early history’.\(^3\) After a series of Council meetings, the National Trust resolved to acquire the property due to the ‘historical significance’ of the site. Assisted by the Bank of New South Wales, the Trust purchased the property in 1961 for the reduced price of £4,250.\(^4\)

**Turning the First Land Grant into a House Museum**

House museums usually tell a tale of their main owner or occupant. As the most prominent owner of Experiment Farm Cottage, and as an individual who conformed to the historical mould of the leading male public figure, John Harris was the obvious choice. Having arrived with the First Fleet as a member of the New South Wales corps, Harris belonged to the first generation of settlers and became one of its largest landowners. In his official capacity, he served in a variety of roles that ranged from Military Surgeon to Police Magistrate and Superintendent of Public Works. He was also a founding director of the Bank of New South Wales, the first bank in the colony. Loyal civil servant, pastoralist and enterprising entrepreneur, Experiment Farm Cottage was evidence of Harris’ legacy as an early settler who contributed to the opening of Australia as a European colony.

This was not the story that the National Trust adopted. While the biography of Harris was included in the museum’s interpretation, he was not the central figure in this tale. Instead, the starring roles were awarded to the site of Experiment Farm and James Ruse as the ‘first settler’. On the eve of the museum’s opening in 1963, A.G. Hudson, the Chairman of the Restoration Committee, told *The Telegraph*:
We regard this project as very important for two reasons.

First of all we want to show the public what a colonial Georgian farmhouse of this type would have looked like.

Second, because this is a most historic spot for Australia – the start of agriculture in this country. 45

The current Georgian verandahed bungalow was built on the site of Experiment Farm, but no physical evidence associated to James Ruse has survived. By the time the National Trust purchased the property in 1960, the 30-acre grant had been subdivided by Harris’ descendants to form part of the current suburb of Harris Park. The northern section of the original 1 1/2 acre allotment where the agricultural ‘experiment’ was undertaken became part of the current Robin Thomas Reserve and separated from the house by Hassall Street. Clay Cliff Creek, which bounded the northern perimeter of Ruse’s grant and provided water to the farm, has since been converted into a concrete-lined stormwater line. Ruse’s initial timber hut, and later brick cottage are also documentary figments of the past.

A lack of physical evidence did not hinder the National Trust in commemorating James Ruse as the ‘pioneer’ farmer through a house that he had no historical connections with. According to the National Trust:

The cottage can be regarded as a direct link with the birthplace of private agriculture in Australia. On this site was planted and flourished the nation’s first commercial wheat crop.

The Trust believes that while in Experiment Farm Cottage it is preserving a good example of an early farm cottage in the Colonial Georgian style the building and site should also serve as a perpetual reminder of the pioneering work of James Ruse – Australia’s first farmer. 46

An ‘agricultural museum’ was established in the basement, which included a replica of Ruse’s plough. 47 While it is a very rare example of a plough from the early

46 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), Experiment Farm Cottage, 4.
47 Made from wood and iron, the original plough (dated to 1811) is held by the Powerhouse Museum (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences). See Australian Museums & Galleries
nineteenth century, the initial claim by the National Trust that ‘it can be fairly
claimed to be the first plough made in Australia’ was probably an over-extension of
the ‘first’ settler legend.48 The museum also included a range of photographs,
documents and models of early farming equipment, as well as pieces of ‘vintage’
farm machinery and implements.49 The purpose of this display was to trace the
history of Australian agriculture and farming back to Experiment Farm.

Through its museum interpretation, the National Trust elevated Experiment Farm to
the birthplace of Australian agriculture and industry. It traced the history of all
Australian primary industries to the very moment when Ruse turned the first sod:

   The aim has been to provide some practical link between the great Australian primary
   industries and the site of the first private farm . . . And what more suitable place for
   this than on the very spot where he turned the first sod, with a hoe his only implement,
   and where the first commercial wheat crop was sown and flourished?50

John Macarthur was viewed as the founder of the wool industry, but Ruse was the
forefather of Australian farmers:

   Although for some years the colony was to depend on imported rations, James Ruse,
   by proving that a man could support himself entirely from the land, is the first in the
   line of Australian farmers, the forerunner of those whose modern machinery reaps a
   hundred acres where Ruse reaped one – on the land now covered with suburban
   houses.51

Ruse’s potential as a national hero was already recognised in 1911. In The Jubilee
History of Parramatta, a book celebrating fifty years of municipal government in
Parramatta, J. C. Wharton wrote about the agricultural developments in the colony.
Apart from recognising Ruse as ‘the first settler’, he also declared that:

   Indeed, Ruse would seem to have been a most patriotic farmer, not like some of whom
we have heard in later days; for he actually declined assistance from the public stores

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48 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), Experiment Farm Cottage, 21.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 6.
early in 1791 on the absurd ground that he did not stand in need of it and could live on the produce of his holding! It was fitting that so honest a man should have been issued the first grant of land made in Australia.\footnote{Wharton, (ed.), The Jubilee History of Parramatta, 114.}

Here was an individual, who despite being from the underclass of society, rose above his failings and through honest hard work, achieved success. So much so, that his ‘honesty’ was not only rewarded with being issued with the first land grant, but also being bestowed with the status of a national hero. Ruse may have been a convicted thief who was transported to Australia, but rather than being a flaw in the patriotic legend of ‘the pioneer farmer’, the ‘convict stain’ served to enhance the story.

Wharton’s portrayal of Ruse’s actions in such patriotic terms conformed to the aspects of the pioneer legend which celebrated ‘individual rather than collective or state enterprise’, but where such efforts contributed to the success of future generations.\footnote{Hirst, “The Pioneer Legend”, 316-317.} Yet Ruse was not the first farmer in Australia. Government farms were established at Sydney Cove within days of the landing of the First Fleet, and further government farms were established in Parramatta within the first year of European settlement.

The mythologising of Ruse as the first settler also matched progressivist ideals, which ‘pictured a past where hard work, personal virtue, and obedience to law had guaranteed a man’s success’.\footnote{James M. Lindgren, Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism and the Remaking of Memory (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 171.} Ruse epitomised such attributes – first private settler, landowner and reformed convict – he was the ideal historical candidate to represent the Colonial Revivalism and progressivist movements in Australia while retaining the attributes of the pioneer legend. It was a fitting epitaph on Ruse’s tombstone that commemorated his agricultural contributions:

\begin{center}
I.H.S.  
Gloria in Arcelsis  
Sacred  
To the Memory  
Of James Ruse who  
Departed this life  
Sept. 5th in the year of
\end{center}
Houre Lord, 1837 Natef of Cornwall and arrived in this Coloney by the Forst Fleet Aged 77
My Mother rered me tenderley with me she took much paines and when I arrived in this Coloney I sowed the forst Grain And Now With My Hevenly Father I Hope For Ever To Remain.  

A ‘splendid example of early Georgian architecture’  

While bearing little relevance to Ruse, the subsequent construction of a Georgian home by Harris on Experiment Farm served to further reinforced the moral superiority of this period. Experiment Farm Cottage was not restored to reflect Harris’ period of occupancy, but rather to a ‘colonial Georgian farmhouse’ form in accordance with twentieth century tastes. In 1960, Experiment Farm Cottage consisted of three flats. The National Trust spent the following two years restoring the house under the guidance of its Honorary Architect, Leslie J. Buckland, and Professor Eben Gowrie Waterhouse.  

Waterhouse’s adherence to the Colonial Revival was well-established, having commissioned Hardy Wilson to design his house ‘Eryldene’ in Gordon (Figure 3.15)  

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56 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), Experiment Farm Cottage, 3.  
57 Wyatt, Ours in Trust: A Personal History of the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), 58.
3.15). Despite being an associate professor of German and comparative literature, Waterhouse’s successful garden design at Eryldene established him as a leading landscape designer of his period.\(^8\) Through Eryldene, he popularised the cultivation of camellias and azaleas, and took charge of the landscaping around the main quadrangle at the University of Sydney, including the current Vice-Chancellor’s courtyard.

A member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Buckland prepared the plans and drawings for the restoration of the main house, as well as the conversion of the existing rear out-building into accommodation for a caretaker.\(^9\) Contrary to current building conservation methods, Buckland did not refer to historical plans or pictures to ascertain the original architectural form and details. Nor did he make reference to any historical documentation. Instead, his approach was more attuned to the methods espoused by Appleton and SPNEA, that of building archaeology. Buckland analysed the building fabric to understand the materials, techniques and sequence of physical development of the house, and supplemented his observations with his own assumptions of what Georgian architecture entailed.

This included an investigation of the foundations, roof structure, ceiling joists and cedar joinery. His analysis provided not only an insight into colonial materials and techniques, but also the apparent social merits of its builders and artisans. He noted the ‘delightfully light’ constructed French doors, but bestowed high praise on the main entry door, describing it as:

the original craftsman hand-made and it is a fine example of early pioneering joinery work. The strength of the door is well shown by the solidarity at the present time.\(^{10}\)

Such comments reflected the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement that promoted the timeless ethics of the traditional artisan – qualities that were supposedly transferred to the workmanship of a building for eternity.


\(^{60}\) National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), Experiment Farm Cottage, 15.
‘Simplicity’, above all, was ‘the keynote’. The philosophy to ‘faithfully portray the charm and simplicity of this early period of our history’ that was adopted for the restoration of the house was also applied to the furnishing of its interiors and garden design. As the National Trust explained:

Architecture and furnishings are simple and Georgian in feeling, with surroundings dignified, unassertive and quietly meaningful. That early Colonial period had a certain sense of style, a feeling for form, texture and quality. The garden at the Cottage will be in keeping with this.

Describing his objectives for the garden, Professor E. G. Waterhouse wrote that he wanted to create a “lived-in” appearance, while ‘affording a gracious welcome to the visitor, attuning his mind to the contemplation of the Colonial exhibits to be viewed within’. A photograph of the Cottage after it was restored revealed a sterile and pristine white-washed building, with highly manicured lawns (Figure 3.16 and 3.17). Even the ‘century-old wisteria which once romped unchecked over the roof’ was ‘trained’ to conform to the apparent orderly attributes of the Georgian period. By 1963, it had been duly pruned to a neat and orderly small shrub.

In furnishing Experiment Farm Cottage, the National Trust sought to acquire items that were Australian in origin and made prior to 1840. It followed the early twentieth century tradition of the museum period room, rather than displaying room arrangements that were historically specific to the actual house or its occupants (Figure 3.18 and 3.19). As noted in the museum guidebook:

A visitor to Experiment Farm Cottage today sees a typical Colonial gentleman’s country cottage, furnished with original antique pieces, as it well may have appeared, with few exceptions, to a visitor in about the year 1840.

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61 Ibid., 17.
62 Ibid., 3.
63 Ibid., 20.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 19.
Figure 3.16
Experiment Farm Cottage prior to restoration (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).

Figure 3.17
Experiment Farm in 1963, after its restoration (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).

Figure 3.18

Figure 3.19
When compared to its contemporary cousin, Elizabeth Farm, the interpretation and presentation of Experiment Farm Cottage was dated and inaccurate. Elizabeth Farm was opened as a house museum by the Historic Houses Trust in 1984, and was guided by the new scholarship of social history. As such, Elizabeth Farm was furnished with replica items that were based on the Macarthur family papers and known to have existed in the house. Nevertheless, in furnishing Experiment Farm Cottage, the National Trust brought together one of the first collections of early colonial furniture in Australia. The breadth of the collection is only matched by the pieces held at Old Government House at Parramatta.

In recent years, the National Trust has reorganised the room settings at Experiment Farm Cottage in an attempt to provide a more historically based interpretation of the house. Unlike Elizabeth Farm, Harris did not leave any detailed description or inventory for his Parramatta property. The National Trust has relied on the inventory from Harris’ other estate, Shane’s Park, to provide a basis for a furnishing plan. Even so, it is not the ‘faithful’ history of Harris, but remains as a snapshot into an imagined Georgian past.

**Establishing a museum genre**

The Governor of New South Wales, Sir Eric Woodward, officially opened Experiment Farm Cottage on 20 July 1963 (Figure 3.20 and 3.21). The public was both enthusiastic and supportive. Over 5,000 visitors came to the Cottage in the first three months, with attendances reaching 16,000 by the end of its first year.

The restoration of Experiment Farm and its conversion into a house museum cemented the National Trust as the leader in heritage conservation. It was the main advisory heritage body in the state. In 1964, the Parramatta Park Trust requested

66 National Trust of Australia (NSW), “Honorary Secretary’s Report for period 2 July to 19 August 1963”, *Minutes of the Council Meeting of the National Trust, 1960-1964*, (National Trust Archives); National Trust of Australia (NSW), “Some Notes Prepared for the Official Opening of Experiment Farm Cottage, Harris Park on 20th July, 1963” *Experiment Farm Cottage Opening, July 1963 (File)*, (National Trust Archives).

advice regarding the future of Old Government House. The Historical and Architectural Survey Committee of the National Trust recommended:

The best use of the building would be a museum of the early Governors (up to 1850) which should be designed by an expert and the Trust could offer advice on historical aspects.68

The State government considered the National Trust to be most suitable manager, and through a special Act of Parliament, established the Trust as the trustee ‘responsible for its care, control and management’.69

Figure 3.20
Opening of Experiment Farm Cottage in 1963 (The Advertiser, 24 July 1963).

Figure 3.21
The NSW Governor, Sir Eric Woodward, opened the museum. He is pictured inspecting the replica plough that was believed to belong to Ruse. (The Advertiser, 24 July 1963).

68 National Trust of Australia (NSW), “Minutes of Executive Meeting, 22 October 1964”, Minutes of the Council Meeting of the National Trust, 1960-1964 (National Trust Archives).
69 Wyatt, Ours in Trust: A Personal History of the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), 77.7
With the possibility of the Australian-American Association purchasing Elizabeth Bay House, similar concerns to Old Government House were raised about its future use and conservation. Discussions regarding the most appropriate use for the building included suggestions that it should vest in the National Trust. This indicated how the Trust had become the first port of call for all heritage matters. This also prompted the National Trust to address a broader issue of what its objectives entailed. At a National Trust Council Meeting, it was noted that as a general policy:

when preservation was assumed by the Government, the Trust should not seek to obtain ownership to enhance its prestige. Its objective was achieved with proclamation and it should direct its attention to other buildings not gazetted. 70

These were prophetic words. The National Trust had defined its role in advocating greater government protection of heritage sites. The introduction of heritage legislation from the mid-1970s effectively diminished the relevance of the organisation. This was further reinforced when the Cumberland County Council acquired Elizabeth Bay House. Rather than transferring the house to the National Trust, the State government maintained control of the property and opened it as a house museum under the Elizabeth Bay House Act (NSW) of 1976. This was the precursor to the Historic Houses Act (NSW) of 1980 and the formation of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. The heritage baton was passing from the National Trust, and with it, the centre of the house museum movement would shift to the newly formed State agency in 1980.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

As a house museum, Experiment farm Cottage conveyed several messages, which at first glance, seem contradictory. When interpreting the history of the house, the National Trust sidelined its original owner John Harris for James Ruse, a convict who was neither involved with the construction or occupancy of the house. The museum guidebooks acknowledged the important contributions made by John

70 National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.), 'National Trust Minutes of Council Meetings, 5 December 1960' Minutes of the Council Meeting of the National Trust, 1960-1964 (National Trust Archives).
Harris to the colonial settlement of New South Wales, but the room settings were not specific to Harris’ occupancy, nor did they offer an insight into his life. Instead, the furnishing arrangements, along with the restoration of the house were intended to recapture the ‘spirit and atmosphere’ of the colonial Georgian age.

The various messages presented at Experiment Farm Cottage demonstrated how a range of principles and ideas simultaneously influence the conservation and interpretation of a historic building, and the complexity of this process in attempting to achieve a myriad of different ideological objectives.

Following the tradition of the nineteenth century house museum, Experiment Farm was not conserved with the aim of providing an accurate insight into Harris’ life, or even of mid-nineteenth century life in colonial New South Wales. The use of the Cottage to honour the life of Ruse within the context of nation building was a conscious process of myth-making, and followed the tradition of Mount Vernon and Vaucluse House. It did not matter that Ruse neither constructed nor lived in the house. The purpose of conserving Experiment Farm Cottage was to create some level of physical connection between the past and an abridged version of Australia’s European beginnings, however tenuous the historical association.

The pioneer legend explained how Australia was built through the collective efforts of hardworking individuals on the land; the Colonial Revival placed this story within a specific period and social hierarchy; and Ruse provided an identifiable face to this nationalist tale. Ruse was perfect. A fallen man, whose redemption through the goodness of the earth matched the Colonial Revival ideal of a morality and order based on a pre-industrial agrarian social hierarchy, and the progressivist notion of success through virtue and honest efficient work. Ruse was an individual, who through the single act of turning the sod at Experiment Farm ensured the future success of a nation – he personified the pioneer legend.

The room presentations did not, however, relate to either Harris or Ruse. They were furnished in the tradition of the period room. While the National Trust was mindful of acquiring pieces that were original to the period, the basis of its collection policy was not for the purpose of re-creating an accurate setting of Harris’ house. Rather, Experiment Farm Cottage was furnished as a period house museum to educate the public on the tastes and values of the Georgian period in
accordance with the principles of the Colonial Revival. The purpose of the restoration and furnishing of the Cottage was to display the exemplar aesthetic and architectural qualities of Georgian architecture and decorative arts as a material expression of the superior values of this era.

As the first house museum in the National Trust’s portfolio, Experiment Farm Cottage signified an important point in the heritage and house museum movements in Australia. In New South Wales, the National Trust was the primary organisation that established and managed house museums in the post-war period up until 1980, when the Historic Houses Trust of NSW was created. During these preceding decades, it created an identifiable house museum genre in Australia. It opened another twelve house museums in the two decades after Experiment Farm Cottage, and currently owns twenty-two museum properties. Its work through this particular museum form provided the first model for building conservation and interpretation, which were followed by government agencies and other heritage groups.

More recent developments in house museum practices have departed from the period room approach to more historically based interpretation, making house museums like Experiment Farm Cottage outdated and seemingly inaccurate. Nevertheless, this museum represented the house museum philosophies and methods of its time. As such, the contributions by the National Trust to the heritage and house museum movement cannot be undervalued with the benefit of hindsight.
Figure 4.1 Staircase. Elizabeth Bay House / Photograph by Harald Cazneaux. 1930 (PIC LOC C17-6, National Library of Australia)
FROM GREEN BAN INSURGENCY TO HERITAGE REGULATION: 
*The Elizabeth Bay House Trust*

INTRODUCTION

For most of the twentieth century, the Australian heritage movement developed slowly with relatively little government or public support. House museums were almost non-existent, and it was only with the formation of the National Trust in 1945 that both the heritage and house museum movements were revived from its interwar lull. The following twenty years saw a steady rise in both its public profile and support and by the 1970s, public interest had broadened beyond the traditional middle-class circle to the working-class and trade unions.

In contrast to its understated beginnings, the heritage movement in the 1970s was characterised by massive public protests to save historic buildings and precincts. This resulted in direct conflict with the government, and led to the green ban movement from 1971 to 1974 and a dramatic transitional period in the heritage movement. Heritage issues were at the forefront of Australian politics and were a central feature of the Federal election in 1972 and helped usher the Labor party and leader, Gough Whitlam, into power.

Such forceful public demonstrations pressured the government to acknowledge the value of heritage beyond its monetary worth and to recognise its cultural and social attributes. The government also bowed to public demands to provide effective legislative protection, beginning with the *Australian Heritage Commission Act* (Cwth) in 1976 and followed by the *Heritage Act* in New South Wales a year later. In addition to ameliorating public dissent, it was also an effective means of disempowering the radical elements of the heritage movement and expanding government control.
Against the backdrop of the green bans, this chapter examines how changing cultural, political and professional attitudes towards heritage shaped the restoration of Elizabeth Bay House and its conversion into a house museum. It was through its use of this property and the creation of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust, that the New South Wales government cemented its role as the leader of the heritage movement. Within a decade, heritage practices in Australia were transformed from a community-based stronghold, to one that was government regulated and dominated by professionals.

The New South Wales government purchased the Elizabeth Bay House in 1964, and it was restored in 1973-76 as a reception venue and residence for official guests of the City of Sydney Council. Its subsequent conversion into a house museum in 1977 by the newly elected Labor State government marked a new phase in the heritage and house museum movements. From the mid-1970s, both Federal and State governments assumed a more active role in managing heritage places. Precipitated by the Green Bans, which paralysed the construction industry and planning system in New South Wales, a range of heritage legislation was introduced. The *Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act* (NSW) was one of several initiatives by the New South Wales government to ensure its influence and control over heritage matters.

The public opening of Elizabeth Bay House also signified a new cultural role for house museums. The essentially private use of a publicly owned historic building as a VIP residence was no longer acceptable to the community, and the purpose of such heritage places was redefined within the parameters of 'public access' and 'education'. Ironically, despite identifying new uses for heritage sites in relation to public use, the level of community control decreased with the introduction of heritage legislation. The resulting standardisation of heritage practices and its requirements for professional input meant that the community groups formerly responsible for conserving heritage places were sidelined from the process.

Changes to heritage practices were also initiated from within the movement. The introduction of empirically-based conservation techniques at Elizabeth Bay House heralded the emergence of a recognisable heritage profession in Australia. Led by Clive Lucas, building conservation ceased to be undertaken by voluntary architects with amateur heritage interests. From the 1970s, it became the domain of
professional experts, who differentiated themselves from earlier amateurs by emphasising the need for formal training in the fields of architecture, history and archaeology.

The conservation and conversion of Elizabeth Bay House was shaped by the redefined role of heritage, increasing government control and the rising status of the heritage professional. These attributes of the new heritage system were then formalised through the enactment of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust (which later became the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales).

ELIZABETH BAY HOUSE: THE BEGINNINGS OF A ‘GREAT HOUSE’

![Image of Alexander Macleay and Elizabeth Macleay](image)

*Figure 4.2*
(Left) Alexander Macleay, 1838, attributed to Margaret Carpenter after the original by Sir Thomas Lawrence (Camden Park Preservation Committee / reproduced by HHT, Elizabeth Bay House: A History and Guide, 2001).
(Right) Elizabeth Macleay, c.1800, attributed to John Hoppner (ML)

Historically and architecturally, Elizabeth Bay House conformed to the ‘great man, great house’ category of Australia’s colonial heritage. It was built from 1835 to 1839 for Alexander Macleay, who came to Sydney with his family in October 1826 as the Colonial Secretary to the newly appointed Governor Ralph Darling (Figure 4.2). Macleay was also a gentleman scientist, with keen interests in natural history, horticulture, architecture and landscape design. He became an elected fellow of the Linnean Society in 1794 and the renowned botanist, Robert Brown, named a variety
of *Bocconia, MacLeaya cordata*, in his honour.¹ His extensive natural history collections, together with those of his son William Sharp Macleay and nephew, Sir William John Macleay, formed the basis of the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney. Reflecting over a hundred years of collecting, these collections are a significant part of Australia’s movable heritage because of their ‘ability to interpret the history of the sciences of biology and ethnography in Australia, and, more broadly, attitudes to Australia held by a British and international scientific community’.²

As a public servant, Macleay was entitled to land grants, a privilege he readily accepted. This included fifty-four acres at Elizabeth Bay and 2,560 acres at Byalla. He also purchased 2,560 acres at Ulladulla in 1840, and 1,663 acres of the old government cattle station in 1841, both of which were reserved for him by Darling. Macleay also bought 2,000 acres at Brownlow Hill in 1829 and held rights to several runs on the Murrumbidgee and Richmond Rivers.³

The location of his Elizabeth Bay grant reflected Macleay’s high administrative ranking. It was situated adjacent to Woolloomooloo Hill, an area subdivided by Governor Darling into allotments for large residences and extensive gardens (Figure 4.3). These allotments were granted to selected citizens, mostly high-ranked civil servants, to ensure that the Colony’s growing middle-class resided close to town. Seventeen villas were built at Woolloomooloo Hill, most of which were designed in the Greek Revival style by the fashionable architect of the time, John Verge. Only three of these villas remain today, including ‘Barham’, ‘Rockwall’, designed for John Busby, and ‘Tusculum’ for the merchant Alexander Brodie Spark (Figure 4.4 and 4.5).

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³ "McLeay, Alexander (1767 - 1848)," 178.
Figure 4.3
Made in 1839, this engraving shows the villas on Woolloomooloo Hill. 'Woolloomooloo [sic.] from Domain Road'. (From J. Maclehose, Maclehose's picture of Sydney and strangers' guide in New South Wales for 1839: embellished with forty four engravings of the public buildings and picturesque land and water views in and near Sydney (Sydney: J. Maclehose, 1839)).

Figure 4.4
Following the trend, Macleay also commissioned Verge to design his residence at Elizabeth Bay. Architecturally, Elizabeth Bay House was intended to be 'the finest house in the colony'.\footnote{James Broadbent and Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales., \textit{The Australian Colonial House : Architecture and Society in New South Wales, 1788-1842}} It was sited to optimise the vistas across Sydney Harbour and designed in a similar Grecian Revival villa style as the nearby residences. Its most notable architectural feature was the symmetrical domed oval saloon and the sweeping staircase that encircled the atrium and led to the first floor (Figure 4.1).

The house also boasted one of the best gardens in Sydney. Based on his horticultural interests, Macleay created a botanical garden around the house. Its sophisticated landscape design was influenced by the English eighteenth century landscape picturesque movement. The natural rocky topography and bushland were retained and incorporated with introduced specimens (Figure 4.6). The layout of the drives and terraces were designed to maximise the views of Sydney Harbour.

\footnote{James Broadbent and Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales., \textit{The Australian Colonial House : Architecture and Society in New South Wales, 1788-1842}}
In his 1836 *Lectures on Landscape Gardening in Australia*, Thomas Shepherd praised the landscape design and the range of plants at Elizabeth Bay House and surmised that ‘when completed the place will probably not be surpassed by any garden in New South Wales’. In 1852, Lt.-Colonel Godfrey Charles Mundy described the estate as ‘beyond compare’, and:

> the finest house and gardens that I am acquainted with in Australia. The extensive gardens, replete with plants, flowers, and fruits from various climes, culled and reared with infinite care, labour, and expense, the large and valuable library, and the priceless cabinet of natural history, are not thrown away upon the accomplished and scientific owner.\(^5\)

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5. Thomas Shepherd, *Lectures on Landscape Gardening in Australia* (Sydney: William McGravie, 1836), 88. Thomas Shepherd was a nurseryman who immigrated from England in 1826. His father was the head gardener to Lord Crawford in Scotland, and also to a Mr White, who was a pupil of ‘Capability’ Brown. It was through these associations that Shepherd learnt the principles of late eighteenth century landscape design.

The house was completed in 1838, but the Macleays only occupied the house for six months. Governor Darling had departed Sydney in 1831 and was replaced by Sir Richard Bourke. Philosophical differences between Governor Bourke and Macleay over such issues as Bourke's sympathetic attitudes towards emancipists and the National Schools Bill resulted in a tense working relationship. Upon hearing of his impending replacement, Macleay resigned under protest in 1837 and with it, his generous £2000 a year salary. Coupled with the onset of the 1840s depression in the Colony, Macleay was forced to declare insolvency. His eldest son, William Sharp settled his father's debts and assumed possession of the house, remaining there until his death in 1865.

Without a direct heir, the estate passed from William Sharp to his brother George Macleay, who began subdividing the estate. By 1882, only three acres of the garden surrounding the house remained. George was predeceased by his son, and Elizabeth Bay House passed to George's grandson, James William Macarthur, in 1891. From 1865, Alexander Macleay's nephew, Sir William John Maclaey, and his wife, Lady Macleay, leased the house. William died in 1891, but Lady Macleay remained there until her death in 1903. It marked the end of the family's occupation of Elizabeth Bay House (Figure 4.7).

The Michaelis family leased the house in 1903 before eventually purchasing the property in 1911. They sold it to Sir Sydney Snow in 1926 for £40,000, who immediately sold it to the Elizabeth Bay Estates Limited (a development company that included as a director, Leslie Buckland, the honorary architect for Experiment Farm Cottage). The company subdivided the remaining 3-acres into sixteen allotments and demolished the kitchen wing to provide road access. Only five allotments were sold through auction in 1927, and further attempts to auction the remaining blocks in 1934 were also unsuccessful (Figure 4.8).

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7 "Mcleay, Alexander (1767 - 1848)," 178.
Figure 4.7
Elizabeth Bay House, c.1895. Platinotype by Freeman & Co. (HHT). Sir William John and Susan Macleay tenanted the house for nearly forty years, from 1865 to 1903. They were the last Macleays to reside at Elizabeth Bay House.

Figure 4.8
Elizabeth Bay House prior to its sale, September 1927. Silver gelatin print by Broughton Ward & Chaseline (HHT).
Elizabeth Bay House also failed to sell in 1927 and a caretaker was appointed. At this time, the house became an artists’ squat, with ‘the alcoholic caretaker turning a blind eye’ (Figure 4.9). This bohemian rent-free period lasted until 1935, when Elizabeth Bay House Limited leased the property to Mr and Mrs A. Hall, and Mrs L. Minnett. The house was restored and used as a reception venue for society weddings, balls and functions for the next five years.

In 1940, the house was last privately sold to Mrs Evangeline Olga Murray, who was a wife of a real estate agent. She engaged the architect Charles C. Phillips to convert the house into fifteen flats. All the rooms were divided, with the exception of the entrance hall, saloon, breakfast room and morning room. Kitchens and bathrooms were placed in former dressing rooms. The heyday of Elizabeth Bay House seemed all but over.

THE ROCKY PATH FROM PRIVATE HOUSE TO PUBLIC BUILDING

Although Vaucluse House was fortuitously protected when the Vaucluse Estate was resumed by the government in 1910 for the creation of a foreshore public park, the protection of Elizabeth Bay House against redevelopment during the twentieth century was less assured. Transforming Elizabeth Bay House from a private residence, to a government heritage asset and finally a house museum was due mainly to public lobbying. Its uncertain fate during the twentieth century illustrated how the heritage and house museum movements evolved from a primarily community to a government-directed concern.

Despite the fragmentation of the estate in the 1880s, the sale of the house, and its conversion into flats in 1940, Elizabeth Bay House continued to be recognised as an important historic house. Writing for the *Sunday Times* in 1908, Mary Salmon included Elizabeth Bay House in her ‘Historic Homes of N.S. Wales’ series. She considered that:

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Figure 4.9
Elizabeth Bay House was used as an artists’ squat in the early 1930s (Sydney Morning Herald, 18 July 1935).
no house around Sydney that is such a fine example of the type of mansion that belonged to the New South Wales of the early 19th century... this splendid old mansion still occupies pride of place and rears itself conspicuously among many fine gentlemen's residences, built according to more modern ideas of architecture.⁹

Even Florence M. Taylor, who wrote for the modernist architectural journal Building, praised the architectural merits of Elizabeth Bay House.¹⁰ In 1921, she described the house as 'a monument to the men who selected the material, designed the work and constructed it'. As one of the first advocates calling for its conservation, she:

hoped many of these old homes, so rich in historic association will become the property of the people. A fine example was that of Wentworth House at Vaucluse, now vested in Trustees for the public for all time, and it would be a fitting and proper thing for the Government or for public-spirited individuals to purchase Elizabeth Bay House and grounds, and establish them as a public garden and museum, so that the associations of the founder of this home and of Sydney's Museum, Scientific Societies, and interesting collections may be maintained in their original environment.¹¹

'Public-spirited individuals' did campaign to preserve the house for 'the nation'. In 1937, Mrs Rodney Dangar formed a fund-raising committee that included Sir Sydney Snow (who had purchased and sold the house in 1926), Professor E. G. Waterhouse and Ure Smith, with the intention of purchasing Elizabeth Bay House and the grounds immediately to the front of it.¹² The proposal was supported by the Horticultural Association of N.S.W. and the Royal Australian Historical Society.¹³

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¹¹ Ibid. 65.
¹² anon, "Save Elizabeth Bay House", The Home (2 August 1937): 45.
Mrs Rodney Dangar came from a prominent pastoralist family. Her husband was the founder of Cranbrook School and had a keen interest in horse racing. This was shared with Sir Sydney Snow, who was a successful retailer. The two men were members of the Australian Jockey Club. Other committee members included Mr. Charles Lloyd Jones, Lady Wren, Mrs. Victor White, Mr. J. L. Stephen Mansfield (Hon. Secretary) and Mr. George Hughes (Hon. Treasurer).
The Committee wanted to furnish the house in ‘the period’ and to retain the site ‘as a memorial to our pioneers, to celebrate Sydney’s 150th anniversary’. Like Vaucluse House, the linking of the conservation campaign to Australia’s sesqui-centenary highlighted the emerging nationalist sentiments that sought local historical landmarks to create an Australian identity. The architectural journal Building supported Dangar’s cause with the statement:

A young nation like Australia must build up its tradition, and tradition is most certainly wrapped up with such old buildings as Elizabeth Bay House. 

In 1938, Dangar’s Committee in partnership with the Tree Lovers’ Civic League of Ku-ring-gai gathered a petition from local residents to the City of Sydney Council for it to acquire Elizabeth Bay House with the three allotments immediately to the front of the house. Informed that the State government was preparing to purchase Elizabeth Bay House, the Council agreed ‘in principle to support a public movement to raise funds to acquire such property’ but did not make further commitments. The campaign encountered another setback when the Royal Australian Historical Society advised the City of Sydney Council in May 1944 that it no longer supported the acquisition of the house, arguing that the location and the restoration costs made the idea of creating a museum untenable.

Undeterred, a public meeting was held at the Sydney Town Hall in 1948 to urge the Sydney City Council to acquire Elizabeth Bay House and the three allotments. This time, the Council responded more positively and on 9 August 1948, it resolved to purchase the three allotments from The Elizabeth Bay Estates Pty Ltd for £16,720

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14 anon., "Save Elizabeth Bay House", 45.
16 Note the involvement of the Tree Lovers’ Civic League, Ku-ring-gai, which was headed by Annie Wyatt and who later founded the National Trust.
to create a public park.\textsuperscript{19} It was subsequently named McElhone Reserve. Despite establishing a curtilage to the front of the house, and the initial interest by the State government to purchase the property in 1938, Elizabeth Bay House remained in private hands until 1964 (Figure 4.10).

The year 1960 marked a change (albeit a small one) in the government’s attitude towards the protection of heritage buildings. Elizabeth Bay House was included on the first government list of ‘places of historic interest’ under the County of Cumberland Planning Ordinance.\textsuperscript{20} The list also included Roseneath Cottage at Parramatta, Fernihill at Mulgoa, Kelvin at Bringelly, and Elizabeth Farm House at Parramatta.\textsuperscript{21} Apart from drawing attention to these buildings, the ordinance did not allow for their immediate protection. Instead, it permitted their owners to request the government to purchase the properties.

In 1962, the Cumberland County Council began negotiations to purchase the property, which was finalised the following year.\textsuperscript{22} The Cumberland County Council was abolished in 1964 and the house was transferred to the newly formed State Planning Authority (which was renamed the Planning and Environment Commission in 1972). The New South Wales government had little experience in managing historic buildings, and the discussions concerning the restoration and future use of Elizabeth Bay House during the 1960s and ‘70s demonstrated the overall transition in the heritage movement from a community movement to one dominated by professionals and administered by government bureaucrats.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Government Gazette} No. 90 of 5 August, 1960, 9629.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Government Gazette} No. 90 of 5 August, 1960, 9629.
Figure 4.10
Elizabeth Bay House (The Home, 1 October 1936). By the 1930s, the original curtilage to Elizabeth Bay House was subdivided and the house surrounded by apartment buildings and houses. The three allotments to the of front the house were eventually purchased by the Sydney City Council in 1948, and turned into public parkland.
THE GOVERNMENT ENTERS THE HERITAGE FOLD: A PRIVATE USE OF A PUBLIC ASSET

Despite officially identifying Elizabeth Bay House as a heritage site and subsequently purchasing it, the New South Wales government was unsure as to what to do with the property. For most of the twentieth century, it had little interest in conserving historic buildings or supporting heritage causes. The State government owned Vaucluse House but it delegated the management and conservation of the property to honorary trustees and voluntary committees. Even when the National Parks and Wildlife Service assumed management of the Vaucluse House and its grounds in 1967, its primary concern was on naturalising park areas and the Vaucluse Park Trust continued to separately manage the house museum.

The idea of converting Elizabeth Bay House into a house museum was not supported in discussions surrounding its future use during the 1960s. The Cumberland County Council envisaged that the Sydney City Council would manage the property and four City Council representatives were appointed in 1962 to help identify possible uses. Both parties agreed to work together in restoring the house, and this arrangement continued after the Cumberland County Council was dissolved and the house was transferred to the newly formed State Planning Authority in 1964.

However, the National Trust was still committed to the earlier idea of creating a period house museum and sent a report to the Cumberland County Council in August 1961 outlining its ‘recommendations for the public use of Elizabeth Bay House’.23 Prepared by Daniel Thomas, a curator from the Art Gallery of New South Wales:

It was felt that this house would be best used as a period museum in which the domestic aspects of Australian social history of one particular period can be brought to life and studied. As such it would of great educational value.24


24 Ibid., 1. Daniel Thomas was one of the most respected fine arts curators in Australia. Beginning as an assistant at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1958, he retired as the Director of Art Gallery of South Australia in 1990.
For Elizabeth Bay House, this particular period was the Regency Period and corresponded with its architectural style. Thomas was very definite about the style and period of the furniture and decorative arts. He recommended that collection and exhibition principles be adopted to limit furnishings to the period between 1800 and 1840 and be Australian in origin.\textsuperscript{25} He also noted how Vaucluse House was ‘an example of what not to do’ having ‘been used as a dumping ground for large objects usually late Victorian, some even 20th century’.\textsuperscript{26} Similar to American museum practices at the beginning of the twentieth century, professional museum curators in Australia were directing their attention to the house museum.

As with Experiment Farm Cottage, the National Trust envisaged a house museum that reflected a particular period rather than specifically that of its occupants. Thomas did, however, envisage a room ‘intended as a memorial to Alexander Macleay ... and other members of the family who lived there’.\textsuperscript{27} This room was to focus on Macleay as the ‘celebrated botanist’ and his role in establishing a branch of the Linnaean Society in Sydney, his involvement in the Royal Botanic Gardens and his own botanical work on the grounds of Elizabeth Bay House.

The suggestion by the National Trust for a period house museum was one of several ideas touted during the 1960s, which included a library, an official residence for the Sydney Lord Mayor, a fine arts museums, and a ceremonial venue.\textsuperscript{28} The Cumberland County Council did not accept Daniel Thomas’ recommendations, although the National Trust would later be involved in furnishing Elizabeth Bay House in the 1970s.

Up until 1964, the City of Sydney Council and the Cumberland County Council had backed the idea of turning Elizabeth Bay House into a fine arts museum.\textsuperscript{29} When the house was transferred to the State Planning Authority, its Chairman, Mr. N. W.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 3.
Ashton ‘did not favor turning the building into a museum, but he did not wish to see it continue being used as flats’.\textsuperscript{30} Once again, the future use of Elizabeth Bay House was unclear and the State Planning Authority formed a sub-committee to address this issue.\textsuperscript{31} In the interim, repairs to the roof, dome and portico were undertaken in 1965 under the supervision of the Government Architect, E.H. Farmer, and in association with John Fisher, a consultant architect (Figure 4.11).\textsuperscript{32}

Fisher’s involvement signified an important development in the history of the house and in heritage practices generally. Conservation was previously undertaken by architects within an honorary capacity and Fisher’s work at Elizabeth Bay House was one of the first instances where an architect was engaged professionally for such purposes. A decade later, Fisher included Clive Lucas on the restoration project at Elizabeth Bay House, and that decision changed the direction of conservation techniques in Australia.

Ashton favoured the idea of maintaining the upper floors as flats and using the ground floor for State receptions.\textsuperscript{33} On 20 August 1968, the State Planning Authority requested E. H. Farmer to consider:

\begin{quote}
a proposal for the restoration of the building on the basis of providing three flats on the first floor with the ultimate objective of their forming a residence for an important personage, whilst the ground floor would be reconstructed so that it could be used by organisations of standing in the community for receptions, dinners, meetings and such like function, whilst also being available for public inspection from time to time.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} The committee included the Lord Mayor, Alderman H. F. Jensen, the Associate Professor of Town and Country Planning at the University of New South Wales, Professor J. H. Shaw, the secretary of the Water Board, Mr E. L. Beers, and Mr N. W. Ashton.
\textsuperscript{32} anon., "Historic Home Is Getting £8000 Facelift", \textit{Wentworth Courier}, 16 June 1965; Carlin, \textit{Elizabeth Bay House Conservation Plan (Vol. 2 History and Appendices)}, 52.
Figure 4.11
Under the Government Architect, the Public Works Department repaired the dome at Elizabeth Bay House in 1963 (HHT).
In response, Farmer expressed concern about:

the difficulty here is to suggest who would be allowed to live in it. I do not feel that circumstances in the time we live in would make this possible. If one senior civil servant, for example, were permitted to do so all would look for equivalent status.

Also if it were used for residential purposes it would be difficult or impossible for the general public to inspect the interior of the house which some would hold is its best feature.

As to the State hospitality in the building, I cannot see this happening when the Government has the large and costly 31st floor of this building, complete with kitchens and staff, at its disposal.35

Farmer could not justify the cost in converting the house to what was essentially for private use with limited access to the public.

Informed that the State Planning Authority did not favour the idea of a museum, the National Trust approached Ashton in July 1968 with the suggestion of locating the National Trust headquarters at Elizabeth Bay House.36 This was to include offices and committee rooms on the first floor, and using the two main rooms on the ground floor for meetings of the Council and Executive.37 The National Trust also planned to restore the ground floor rooms 'in accordance with their original character' and open these areas for public inspection.38

The Government Architect supported this idea, but Ashton did not.39 Remaining firm to the idea of a combined residence and reception, he informed the National Trust that:

38 'Letter from J.C. Moore, President, National Trust of Australia (NSW) to The Chairman, State Planning Authority of NSW, dated 16 September 1968', Elizabeth Bay House File, Vol. 1, 1937-1969 (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
Whilst ... Elizabeth Bay House would be an appropriate venue for meetings of the Council of the Trust, I do not feel that the building could be used for office purposes, as would be the case if the headquarters of the Trust were to be located in it.\textsuperscript{40}

Furthermore, due to a lack of funding, the State Planning Authority suspended its plans to restore the house.\textsuperscript{41}

After a delay of several years, restoration works commenced in 1973 to convert Elizabeth Bay House into a Mayoral residence and reception venue, but it was never used for such purposes. Upon completion in 1976, the newly elected Labor State government decided to open Elizabeth Bay House as a house museum. This decision stemmed from several developments in the heritage and environmental movements during the early 1970s.

CHANGING ATTITUDES: ELEVATING ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING ABOVE PROFIT

From the late 1960s, Australians were expecting public uses for public assets, as well as a greater level of input into planning decisions over residential, historic and natural areas. In New South Wales, the inability of the Liberal-Country government to gauge public opinion and respond constructively by changing its planning policies, led to the green bans movement from 1971 to 1974. The green bans highlighted environmental and heritage conservation as key community concerns, and contributed to the political demise of the Liberal-Country government in the 1976 elections.

The green bans were not isolated events. Nor were they solely related to the protection of heritage places. They were symptomatic of widespread unease towards unregulated urban and regional development, the perceived apathy of the government towards the environment, and its disregard for the social and cultural


wellbeing of the community. Public dissatisfaction had been snowballing in the
two decades leading up to the 1970s, precipitated by the unrestrained growth and ad
hoc planning regulations in the post-World War II period.

From the 1950s, the building boom in Australia resulted in unprecedented levels of
urban development and suburban expansion. Fuelled by foreign investments and
economic growth, Sydney became the centre of commercial activity. In the period
from 1964 to 1965 alone, the level of American ownership of manufacturing in
Australia jumped from twenty to twenty-seven per cent. The Sydney skyline was
dominated by cranes as both private and government sectors vied to construct the
tallest high-rise building to accommodate increasing commercial and retail activity.
Built in 1957, the 150-foot high Qantas House at the corner of Hunter and Bligh
Streets was soon surpassed by the 26-storey AMP Building in 1961 (Figure 4.12).
This record was quickly broken when the State government completed the 38-storey
State Office Block in 1967. Skyscrapers were a symbol of modernity and progress,
and the State government openly encouraged and participated in such developments.

Accompanying this spurt of high-rise construction was an increasing pressure to
demolish historic buildings to provide more development space. The National Trust
expressed concern in September 1970 with the question:

What future for historic city buildings? The small number of buildings of historic and
architectural distinction remaining in the central areas of Sydney is being torn down at
such a rate that in a few years we shall have none left... whatever the reasons for this
wholesale destruction, Sydney will be the poorer when the last old stone is bulldozed
away by the piecemeal assaults of private developers whose activities are not
enhancing the city.\(^\text{41}\)

The National Trust was not alone in its disapproval. On 3 November 1970, the
editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* warned that:

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Sydney is in grave danger of becoming a city without character – a city of stereotyped, rectangular, concrete and glass buildings... buildings which have given its charm and personality for the last century are being reduced to rubble by the demolishers at a wholesale rate as if newness, more space and economies were the only considerations and no one at all was concerned about the past and the environments that make a city.44

The unchecked development of Sydney even attracted international notice. Visiting Australian in 1972, the UNESCO representative Ian Grant highlighted the cultural value of historic buildings in providing a sense of cultural identity and social well-being, and the need for their legislative protection. He noted how:

Every civilised community requires tangible reminders of the past to give its members a sense of continuity required for the development of a healthy and well-balanced culture... Everyone is very disturbed about what is happening to the environment except, it would seem, the Government. They do seem to be way behind.45

In 1970, the National Trust had blamed private developers for the wanton demolition of historic buildings. By 1972, the blame was directed towards the government and its inadequate planning policies and legislation for protecting both the natural and cultural environment. The National Trust declared in 1972 that:

This is no way for a State to go about conserving its heritage. There is an urgent need for legislation . . . Ample precedents exist in the statute books of other countries which have accepted their obligations to ensure the conservation of things of enduring value.46

It was a sign that even the government's traditional middle-class supporters were losing faith.

Planning regulations did exist. Under the Local Government Act 1919 (NSW), the Cumberland County Council was created from elected representatives of local governments to manage the development of Greater Sydney in 1947. The Cumberland County Council Planning Scheme was ratified in 1951. A bold initiative, the Planning Scheme sought to undertake urban planning in a collective and integrated approach and entailed progressive ideas like encircling the Sydney metropolitan area with a green-belt. Due to the State government's pro-development sentiments however, this planning body proved ineffective. New suburbs were built without proper planning and services, such as sealed roads, public transport or sewerage connections, were often omitted. Many residents were forced to wait several years for these services, and often paid for at their own expense.47

The Cumberland County Planning Ordinance also enabled the State government to identify historic buildings on a heritage register. It took nearly thirteen years, however, for the government to announce its first group of 'places of historic interest'. Gazetted in August 1960, the list included the five properties of Elizabeth Bay House, Roseneath Cottage, Fernhill, Kelvin and Elizabeth Farm House.48

46 National Trust of Australia (NSW), National Trust Annual Report 1971-72, quoted in Ibid., 105.
48 Government Gazette, 5 August 1960, 9626.
The Australian economy was buoyant in the post-war period and consumer confidence was high. Despite such high levels of affluence, questions were being raised about the quality of new developments, their social impact on the community and the environment, and inadequate planning provisions to address such issues. Just as the town planning movement in the nineteenth century had framed their reforms by reference to environmental determinism and social wellbeing, the environmental and heritage groups in the 1970s were also advocating similar ideas.

The Green Bans Movement: Broadening the Meaning of Heritage

Despite vocal expressions of public concern, it required the politically radical green bans movement to push the issue of conservation and planning to the forefront of government notice. The heritage movement gained unprecedented levels of public support and political strength during the 1970s. This was generated by the unusual alliance between the conservative National Trust, Resident Action Groups, and the radical trade union, the Builders’ Labourers’ Federation (BLF).

This partnership was born from the campaign to save Kelly’s Bush, a 5-acre tract of remnant bushland in the Sydney suburb of Hunters’ Hill. In 1967, the development company, A.V. Jennings, submitted a development application for high-density housing on the site. It meant clearing the vegetation and local residents were appalled at the possibility of losing this natural area. Forming the ‘Battlers for Kelly’s Bush’, residents joined together to oppose the development. When their appeals to the State government went unheeded, the group turned to the Builders’ Labourers’ Federation for support. The BLF Secretary, Jack Mundey, agreed to back the campaign and banned construction work on the site. It resulted in the first green ban in 1971. The move was a success and Kelly’s Bush was saved.

The alliance between the ‘upper-middle class Morning Tea Matrons’ and the radical BLF proved to be both powerful and effective.\(^{49}\) It served as a template for future environmental protests, with forty-two green bans occurring in New South Wales between 1971 and 1974. These were not restricted to protecting natural bushland or

open spaces and extended to historic buildings and precincts, reflecting the close affinity between nature and heritage conservationists that had existed since the beginning of the twentieth century.

![Figure 4.13](image)

*Figure 4.13*  
*Arrests at the Playfair Building (left) and protest against demolitions at The Rocks (right) in 1973 (News Limited).*

The first green ban in an urban area was at The Rocks in Sydney (Figure 4.13). Beginning in 1971, this was probably the most controversial and publicised heritage-based protest because of its location in the oldest area of European settlement. It also involved working-class residents, a group that were not previously associated (or considered) part of the conservationist cause. Combining forces with the BLF, these residents came into direct conflict with the State government and paralysed the building industry and the planning system.

Notably, this green ban followed seven decades of State government control of The Rocks, following resumption after the bubonic plague in 1900. Throughout the twentieth century, local residents remained as mere onlookers to the early twentieth century slum clearance and city improvement schemes that included the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Cahill Expressway. Those projects resulted in the widespread demolition of nineteenth century residential, commercial and industrial buildings, and the physical dislocation of many residents.
Large-scale proposals to demolish and redevelop The Rocks were touted since 1900, but the most serious threat to the area came in the 1970s (Figure 4.14). The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) was created in 1970, replacing the Maritime Services Board as the public authority for the area. It consisted of representatives from Sydney’s political, business and civic sectors who were charged with preparing a plan for a new commercial and retail precinct. It did not include any representatives from the local residents, nor did its one-year timeframe allow for community consultation.50

The $500 million plan released in February 1971 reflected the commercial interests of the SCRA. It entailed clearing two-thirds of the area that would be rebuilt as high-density commercial space, consisting of almost five million square feet of

office and retail space, being more than double what was initially suggested by the government.\(^{51}\)

The SCRA’s lack of provision for its existing tenants was obvious. The scheme did not provide for the future accommodation or relocation of residents affected by the proposed development. Nor were residents allowed any opportunity to formally comment on the plan. As Meredith and Verity Bergmann noted in their history of environmental activism:

> Private rights in working-class areas like The Rocks were presumed by the state and capital to be negotiable, even dispensable, and the rights of The Rocks' residents were compromised further by their status as public housing tenants. Their houses were unquestionably available for redevelopment, in what was dubbed the "public interest."\(^{52}\)

The response from the residents was immediate. Led by Nita McCrae, a fourth generation resident of The Rocks, a Resident Action Group (RAG) was formed. Direct appeals to the State Government were ignored. Even the National Trust endorsed the SCRA proposal, reflecting its continuing architectural preference for colonial Georgian structures based on the ideals of the Colonial Revival. For the residents however, the cultural value of The Rocks stemmed from its social fabric, and ‘the uniqueness of The Rocks area is the people who live in the historic buildings with all their past generations of ancestors who lived and died here’.\(^{53}\) It was an acknowledgment that the meaning of heritage was broadening to include community and social values.

Faced with the start of demolition in January 1972, the RAG turned to the BLF for help in November 1972. Unlike Kelly’s Bush, BLF members were more attuned to the working-class community in The Rocks. Attending a public meeting with over 1,000 residents, the BLF offered its support. The RAG remarked that:

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\(^{53}\) Nita McRae quoted in Ibid., 197.
once again, in the face of the usual apathy, inaction and favouritism of the Askin Government, it has been left to the Unionists to show leadership in protecting our citizens and their history buildings.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite a ruling by the State Industrial Commission that the green ban on The Rocks was illegal, the BLF maintained its support and only permitted restoration work on historic buildings.

The green ban continued into 1973, and was costing the government $2 million dollars a year in interest payments. With little prospect of breaking the strike, the SCRA was forced to abandon the scheme in March 1974. It revised its proposal in light of residents' demands, which were outlined in the 'People's Plan' in 1973.\textsuperscript{55} High-rise buildings were deleted, residential areas maintained, and the SCRA decided to generate commercial activity through the heritage of the area. Satisfied with these changes, the BLF lifted its ban in 1975. By this stage, seventy historic buildings had been restored and the SCRA was promoting The Rocks as the place where 'history was alive and kicking'.

Strolling pass the romantically restored shopfronts along George Street that are presently occupied by boutique clothing chains and restaurants, it is apparent that The Rocks is no longer occupied by local residents or shopowners. Nevertheless, the green ban did prevent the mass demolition of the historic precinct and gave credit to community values and their opinions in the management of their neighbourhoods. Following The Rocks, green bans were placed on other inner-city suburbs including Woolloomooloo in February 1973, Victoria Street in Potts Point in April 1973, and Surry Hills in August 1973.

The issues and event that led to the green bans had been brewing over several decades. The alliance of the BLF with various community groups ensured the survival of many nineteenth-century urban areas and compelled subsequent governments to provide more socially inclusive policies on urban planning, cultural

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 198.; "Court Order on Rocks' Black Ban: Eviction Trouble", \textit{Daily Mirror}, 17 March 1972; Pete Thomas and Australian Building Construction Employees' and Builders' Labourers' Federation (New South Wales Branch), \textit{Taming the Concrete Jungle: The Builders Laborers' Story} (Sydney: New South Wales Branch of the Australian Building Construction Employees & Builders Laborers' Federation, 1973), 46.

\textsuperscript{55} Burgmann and Burgmann, \textit{Green Bans. Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation}, 199.
development and heritage conservation. Australians no longer accepted that profit was the sole object of development and ‘progress’.

The Impact of the Green Bans on Australian Politics and Heritage Conservation

The issues that sparked the green bans played centre stage in the Federal elections in 1972 and contributed to the demise of the Conservative Party’s twenty-three year term in office. When the Labor leader Gough Whitlam was elected as Prime Minister on 2 December 1972, there was neither a national cultural or arts policy. Most of the cultural institutions and arts organisations (such as the State libraries, art galleries and museums) operated at a State level and had developed in relative isolation from each other.

The new government elevated the importance of the arts and heritage by creating national bodies to oversee the development of performing and visual arts, and cultural institutions. Its commitment was matched by substantial increases in Federal funding. Commenting on his government’s arts policies, Whitlam noted how they related to broader policies for education and social reform because:

They were part of the same processes; the embodied the same values... In any civilised community the arts and association amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be seen as something remote from everyday life. Of all the objective of my Government none had a higher priority than the encouragement of the arts, the preservation and enrichment of our cultural and intellectual heritage. Indeed I would argue that all the other objectives of a Labor Government – social reform, justice and equity in the provision of welfare services and educational opportunities – have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts and the appreciation of spiritual and intellectual values can flourish. Our other objectives are all means to an end; the enjoyment of the arts is an end in itself.56

The use of museum and cultural institutions as instruments of civic reform and social cohesion was not new. Both Mount Vernon and Vaucluse House were conceived as house museums on similar premises, but it was under Whitlam that such ideas were incorporated into cultural and social policies.

At the heart of Labor's cultural aims was Whitlam's belief that the arts were an integral part of society and, that all government policies should be guided by a uniform social vision and ideal. Artistic and intellectual endeavours became markers of a civilised and progressive society. The Whitlam government also accepted that the encouragement and financial support of such pursuits were government responsibilities and situated their development within a global context by Australia becoming a signatory to international cultural and heritage conventions. All these aspects have continued into the present arts and heritage systems.

The foundations of the current heritage and museum systems were created through the Federal inquiries into the 'National Estate' and 'Museums and National Collections' with the inquiry on the National Estate having a greater impact on the management of historic sites and house museums. Whitlam envisaged a central national body to manage both natural and cultural 'assets', and this was to form part of a broader strategy in urban and regional planning.

The term, 'national estate' was first used by President J.F. Kennedy and adopted by Whitlam in his electoral policy speech in November 1972, when he promised to 'preserve and enhance the quality of the National Estate'. This idea formed part of Whitlam's electoral platform. Speaking in August 1970, Whitlam called for the creation of a Department of Urban Affairs to:

> act as an initiator and co-ordinator of efforts to conserve Australia's national estate...
>
> The Australian Government should see itself as the curator and not the liquidator of the national estate.  

The Federal government appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate on 17 May 1973. Chaired by Justice R. M. Hope, the Committee was charged with defining the 'National Estate' and the types of natural and cultural places that it

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included. The Inquiry also included a review of existing government policies and the future role for government.

The *Report of the National Estate* was released in 1974. The National Estate was defined as components of the cultural and natural environment that were considered to be of 'outstanding world [or] national significance' based on their 'aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, cultural, ecological or other special value', and thus requiring 'conservation, management and preservation for the benefit of the community'. It was the first national study by the government on the cultural role of the natural and built environment. The town planning movement earlier in the twentieth century had promoted the use of urban planning as a vehicle for social progression, but the centralisation of heritage and museum management for such purposes did not occur in Australia until the Whitlam government.

The environmental deterministic stance of early town planners like Sulman was apparent in the *Report of the National Estate*, with the Committee stating that:

> the rapidly accelerating rate of change in our society and surrounding is disorienting and bewildering many people, and that a growing rootlessness and ugliness in their surroundings may be mirrored in aimlessness and violence. Many in our 'exploding metropolises' now live virtually cut off from man's natural biological background among increasing noise and visual and other types of pollution.  

Just as the *Report of the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its Suburb* in 1909, had called for the beautification of Sydney to ensure the social and moral well-being of its inhabitants, the Hope Inquiry also found that:

> The recreational and cultural needs of these great city populations have largely not been planned for. The increasing loss of urban and near-urban recreation areas ... and of parkland and historic or beautiful buildings and townscapes, is thus deeply felt as a deprivation.

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61 Ibid., 21.
62 Ibid.
The Hope Inquiry made three main recommendations that provided the basis of the current heritage system. It proposed that the Commonwealth should have direct control over the protection and conservation of the National Estate, and suggested that all other levels of government do likewise for areas under their responsibility. Secondly, it recommended that a ‘National Estate Commission’ be established to create a national inventory of significant sites and to coordinate the conservation of the National Estate with State and local governments, and voluntary groups. Finally, it recommended that the new National Estate Commission assume an advisory role to Parliament on the management of listed sites, and to develop a legislative heritage framework.

Following from these recommendations, the Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, introduced the *Australian Heritage Commission Bill* (Cwth) in May 1975, but the Whitlam Government was dismissed before the Bill was passed. The new Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, introduced an amended Bill in June 1976, which was enacted in December that year. With the amendments, the size of the Commission was reduced and its statutory role over the allocation of grants and expenditure for conserving the National Estate was removed. Instead, the Australian Heritage Commission was given the primary responsibility of compiling the Register of the National Estate through a nation-wide survey of natural and cultural places. This was published as *The Heritage of Australia – the Illustrated Register of the National Estate* in 1981.

Despite the brevity of the Whitlam administration, the impact of its heritage and cultural policies was enduring. Although the adoption of Whitlam’s initiatives was not immediate, every State subsequently passed heritage legislation. Victoria was the first state to pass a heritage bill in 1973, followed by New South Wales in 1977, South Australia in 1978, Queensland and Western Australia in 1990 and the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory in 1991. The final state to enact such provisions was Tasmania in 1995.

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63 *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975* (Cwth).
A VEHICLE FOR PROFESSIONAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE: FROM MAYORAL RESIDENCE TO A HOUSE MUSEUM

Following the green ban on The Rocks, the Liberal-Country State government was financially and politically compelled to curtail its development ambitions but this did not mean it comprehended the changing community priorities. It played little heed to the underlying causes of the green bans, or the factors leading to the defeat of the Federal Conservative government by Whitlam in 1972. It would require the election of the Labor party in 1976 before State government environmental and heritage policies were more attuned with public opinions.

Insensitive to the political and cultural context of its administration, the New South Wales government recommenced its program to restore Elizabeth Bay House to an official residence and reception in 1973 after a lull of five years. Its eviction of tenants from the house confirmed the government’s continuing disregard for working-class communities and its continuing support for laissez-faire private enterprise. Tenants were given three months to vacate the house. Some of the tenants had resided at Elizabeth Bay House for more than twenty years and the government did not offer any assistance to relocate.\(^\text{65}\)

Fifteen tenants refused to move until they received ‘alternative accommodation and an assurance that the building will be open to the public’.\(^\text{66}\) They also believed that the house was being restored as a ‘club for the boys’ rather than for the public as claimed by the government.\(^\text{67}\) The State Planning Authority commenced legal action to evict the ‘stayput’ residents. The matter was heard in court in October 1973, and resolved when the residents were provided with alternative accommodation.

In light of the green bans at The Rocks and similar protests in the adjacent areas of Potts Point and Woollahra, it was apparent that both State and local governments remained inconsiderate to community concerns of social displacement.

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Reporting on the 'Furore over Elizabeth Bay House', the *Paddington Paper* noted how:

> Sometimes, preoccupation with the building obscures the predicament of people who live in it and the use to which it may be put.\(^{68}\)

After a year spent evicting its tenants, the State Planning Authority began restoring Elizabeth Bay House in March 1974.\(^{69}\)

Despite a lack of government support, the heritage movement was changing on two levels. First, within the architectural profession, the introduction of quasi-scientific empirical conservation techniques at Elizabeth Bay House totally transformed heritage practices in Australia and signified the emergence of a heritage profession. Secondly, the Wran government acknowledged calls for a broader understanding and representation of heritage, which included community values. The conversion of Elizabeth Bay House into a house museum heralded a new role for heritage places that was based upon notions of equitable community access, public ownership and education.

**Empiricism, Professionalism and Heritage: Restoring Elizabeth Bay House in 1973-76**

John Fisher, the architect involved with earlier repairs to the house in 1965, was commissioned to complete the restoration works and to furnish the house. As part of the firm Fisher Jackson Hudson Architects, Fisher introduced a young architect, Clive Lucas, to direct the project. In hindsight, this was a pivotal point in heritage practices in Australia. Lucas introduced empirical methods of research and analysis that changed how buildings were conserved. This also elevated the status of heritage professionals because formal training was deemed necessary to competently 'read' the physical fabric.

Clive Lucas was the first architect in Australia to work exclusively on building conservation. Up to this point, such work had relied on honorary advice, as was the

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\(^{69}\) Civic Reporter, "$275,000 Program - Restoration Starts after Year's Delay", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 March 1974, 12.
case with Vaucluse House and Experiment Farm Cottage. Lucas acquired an early interest in historic architecture from visiting his grandparents in Parramatta as a child and gained his architectural qualifications at the University of Sydney. After working at an architectural firm, ‘doing modern work’, he embarked on a holiday to the United Kingdom.

It was during a visit to a church in Ireland that Lucas observed different techniques in building analysis and conservation from what was practiced in Australia. He observed how paint scrapes were undertaken to determine the sequence of painted layers and how this evidence was used to inform the conservation process. Lucas’ overseas experience was a major influence on his methodology in restoring Elizabeth Bay House and consequently heritage practices in Australia.

Prior to his departure, Lucas was an active member of the National Trust. It was through this organisation that Lucas met John Fisher. When the Cumberland County Council resumed Glenhaven, Fisher Jackson Hudson Architects were also engaged to restore the property. Fisher decided that Lucas would be more appropriate for the task, and he persuaded him to return to Australia by offering him a position with the firm, which Lucas accepted.

The brief to restore Elizabeth Bay House followed from Glenhaven. Lucas’ approach was very different from that used by Leslie Buckland at Experiment Farm Cottage a decade earlier. Buckland had restored the verandahed bungalow with the aim of recapturing the ‘spirit and atmosphere’ of the Georgian period according to the Colonial Revival. As a house museum, Experiment Farm Cottage was not intended to provide an accurate snapshot of John Harris’ residence, and as such, its restoration was based on limited primary and physical research.

While not intended to be a museum, Lucas applied the conservation methods he observed during his travels to Elizabeth Bay House. He studied the building as a form of empirical evidence to determine the sequence of physical change. The process was closely aligned to the scientific methods introduced by Appleton and the Society of Preservation of New England Antiquities in America, earlier in the twentieth century. Lucas emphasised how:

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70 Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
A great deal of research and enquiry took place in order that the house should be restored as accurately as possible.\textsuperscript{71}

The brief was to restore the ground floor 'to its former layout . . . and the main rooms furnished to the 1830-50 period and shown to the public as intact interiors of the period'.\textsuperscript{72} As such, all additions made after the mid-nineteenth century were removed, and changes reversed. Although the house was converted into flats in 1941, most of the internal architectural features had remained relatively intact. The three-year program was spent recreating missing, broken or altered elements. Australian cedar and blackbutt were used to match the timber of the joinery and flooring. Moldings and cornices were reproduced to match the original plasterwork, as were the collapsed ceilings. The colour schemes were determined by scraping back the surfaces of the walls, cornices, architraves and ceilings.

In summing up his conservation approach, Lucas explained that:

\begin{quote}
The archaeology of a building must be read in conjunction with a deep understanding of tastes of the period, otherwise authentic details can easily be dismissed due to lack of appreciation. It is essential for the architect to have a sense of what he expects to find.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

This statement emphasised the importance of using physical evidence as the basis for building restoration, but it also highlighted the apparent need for expert architectural knowledge to fully understand and appreciate such evidence.

In addition to the architectural works, Fisher Jackson Hudson Architects were also responsible for furnishing the house. To assist in locating and suitable items, the State Planning Authority invited the National Trust to set up an informal committee to offer assistance in locating and suggesting suitable items in April 1974.\textsuperscript{74} This Portable Antiquities Advisory Panel included Mrs. G. Blaxland, K.R. Bernard Smith, Kevin Fahy and Daniel Thomas.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. 118.
\textsuperscript{74} 'Acting Director's Report, Minutes of Executive Meeting, National Trust of Australia (NSW)', \textit{File - Elizabeth Bay House, Vol. 2, 1970-1979} (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
As with the architectural works, a similar empirical approach was also adopted for furnishing the house. Unlike Experiment Farm Cottage, where an inventory was never made of the furnishings, two key inventories from Elizabeth Bay House survived. Affected by the economic downturn in the 1840s and the loss of his official posting as Colonial Secretary, Alexander Macleay was compelled to sell the contents of the drawing room to the colonial government to furnish the newly completed Government House in 1845.

Documenting the items to be purchased, the Colonial Architect, Mortimer Lewis, prepared a detailed inventory for the dining room. It revealed that, except for the shade curtains, everything else had been purchased in London. Macleay only received £196.8.1, which was less than ten per cent of what he had paid originally. At the same time, less detailed inventories were prepared for the other rooms in the house and this portion of the furniture was deeded to Macleay’s eldest son, William Sharp Macleay. These two inventories were the main sources in gathering a neoclassical collection for the house. Inventories from other houses sold during the 1840s were also consulted, including The Vines in 1848 and Ultimo House in 1842, together with a the list of furniture imported from London for Lyndhurst in 1835.

When insufficient details were available in the inventories, mid-nineteenth century pattern and design books, including J.C. Loudon’s 1833 *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, were also consulted. For example, detailed descriptions of the upholstery were provided for the drawing room but not for the other rooms. Horsehair cloth was selected for the chairs in library and dining rooms because the design books from this period considered these to be ‘masculine’ rooms and recommended such materials. The soft furnishings for the house were also based on similar design and pattern book recommendations. The result was a historic building that was furnished partly as a recreation of the Macleay interiors, and partly as an interpretation of mid-nineteenth century middle-class tastes in the vein of the period room genre.

76 Ibid.
Similar to Appleton, Lucas used empirical methods of research and physical investigation to emphasise particular physical and historical aspects of the building and support particular interpretations of the building's history. Despite the use of seemingly objective techniques, the restoration of Elizabeth Bay House to a particular period remained a subjective decision. Restoration during the 1970s continued to focus on architectural attributes, and all the physical and historical research was directed towards restoring Elizabeth Bay House back to its 1830s form.

The use of quasi-scientific techniques was well suited to the pre-occupation with structural morphology at this time. Even an article in *Architecture in Australia* on the 'External Restoration at Elizabeth Bay House' was written in the style of a laboratory report. The details of the project were organised under the headings of 'Background', 'Aim', 'Investigation and examination', and 'Procedure and technique', and provided such statistical information as the weight of lead used and the percentage of copper in its composition.\(^{78}\)

Nevertheless, Elizabeth Bay House marked an important step in the heritage movement because it was the first time such empirical techniques were applied in Australia. The innovative approach to building conservation was recognized with the project being awarded a New South Wales Merit Award in 1977 in the 'Restoration of historic buildings' category. The Jury commented that:

> With so much money, time and expertise lavished on one of the colony's finest houses, what other result would be expected? Superb.\(^{79}\)

It set a new benchmark in building conservation, and reinforced the standing and perceived necessity for professional involvement. It also became a primary reason for establishing the Elizabeth Bay House Trust, and subsequently, the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales.

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Opened to the Public: The Formation of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust

Elizabeth Bay House was never used as the official residence and reception venue by the Sydney City Council. By the time the restoration program was completed in June 1976, the Wran government was in office. After eleven years of a Liberal-Country government, Neville Wran led the Labor Party to victory on 1 May 1976. It heralded a new era of environmental and heritage politics in New South Wales and a different use for Elizabeth Bay House.

Wran openly acknowledged he did not have a personal interest in either heritage or natural conservation in the 1970s. Unlike his predecessor however, he was able to gauge the public’s mood and was open to professional heritage advice. Wran also attributed his environmental and heritage policies to his wife, Jill Wran, whose ‘influence was not only persuasive for me but also sometimes decisive’:

She has been a conservationist in the wider sense of that term all her life and [I’m] not suggesting she ran the government but she certainly had a big influence on my thinking and I swung a long way towards protection and conservation of the environment, both natural and built.

Above all, Wran’s strong record in supporting the arts and environmental conservation was perhaps a legacy of the Whitlam government, which transformed the cultural and heritage sectors in Australia in the early 1970s. Wran noted that:

Until the Whitlam government, there’d not been a great deal of concern shown by government of either persuasion, on any level, at any time. . . There was just not thought or consciousness about our heritage, man-made or natural, and Whitlam did elevate the profile of the heritage of the country. And when Whitlam lost in 1975, it was only soon after that my government was elected and I was very conscious of keeping the momentum going in what Whitlam started.

Elizabeth Bay House was fortuitous perhaps but it was one of the elements by which we did keep that momentum going and I think it’s fair to say that more happened in

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80 Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
81 Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
the '70s and the '80s to set some benchmarks to cater for the national heritage than in
the near two-hundred years that had gone before.\textsuperscript{82}

The Wran government introduced a range of bills to protect the natural and cultural
environment, and to ensure that adequate planning provisions were provided. These
included the\textit{Heritage Act (NSW)} in 1977, the\textit{Environmental and Local Planning
Act (NSW)} in 1979 and the listing of Lord Howe Island and Willandra Lakes on the
World Heritage List – the latter two considered by Wran as political career
highlights.\textsuperscript{83}

The\textit{Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act (NSW)} belonged to this generation of
legislation. By opening Elizabeth Bay House as a house museum, the Wran
government appeared to appreciate historic buildings as a public asset and for their
educative value. Although the reasons for establishing the Elizabeth Bay House
Trust were framed in terms of community access and education, the passing of the
\textit{Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act (NSW)} guaranteed the government control over how
heritage should be defined, conserved and interpreted to the public.

The jury’s comment from the 1977 New South Wales Merit Awards on the ‘money
and time’ spent on Elizabeth Bay House was very telling. Along with the opinions
expressed through newspaper articles at this time, it indicated how the public
expected the government to be accountable for its expenditure of public funds. This
included the benefits derived by the community.

The final cost of $750,000 to restore Elizabeth Bay House was a substantial
increase from the 1973 estimate of $275,000. Faced with footing the $500,000
difference, the new Labor government wanted to distance itself from the high
expense incurred by its predecessor.\textsuperscript{84} After visiting Elizabeth Bay House on 17
June 1976, Wran noted the great expense spent and announced that ‘the cost
involved is outrageous and we must ensure the public gets the most benefit from
money that has already been spent’.\textsuperscript{85} Wran’s reaction was a criticism of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[82] Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
\item[83] Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
\item[84] Ken Hooper, "$750,000 Home for Mayor . . . If Labor Gives the Green Light", \textit{The Daily
\item[85] anon., "Historic Home Costs out of Hand, Says Wran", \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 18 June
\end{footnotes}
previous government’s plans to retain the publicly owned house for essentially private use by the Sydney City Council.

Wran’s response was initially viewed as being anti-heritage. Writing to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the historian Rachel Roxburgh suggested that Wran should consider the cost of restoring Elizabeth Bay House ‘to the large sums that are spent on education’:

> Part of this expenditure is devoted to the teaching of history through art and architecture – and how can children be expected to take this seriously when they see the few remaining examples of their own early culture neglected or destroyed?’

For the Premier, such views ‘seemed to have missed the point of the stand that I have taken over the restoration of Elizabeth Bay House, particularly by asserting that I have, in some way, attacked the concept of its restoration’. He continued in his open letter:

> I have done no such thing and, in fact, I applaud its restoration.

> However, I see little point in the expenditure of large sums of money to retain historic buildings, such as Elizabeth Bay House, unless the taxpayers, whose money is spent, are able to derive some enjoyment from its restoration.

> There is no doubt whatever that under the terms of the original agreement the benefit of the restoration would have been enjoyed by a few people and that the public’s involvement was of secondary interest.

Wran dissolved the 1975 agreement between the State Planning Authority and the Sydney City Council and, once again, a use was sought for Elizabeth Bay House. Looking interstate for guidance, Wran noted that the South Australian government had purchased Ayers’ House, the home of the State’s first Premier, and restored it as a ‘tourist and civic attraction’ with a restaurant.

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87 Neville Wran, "Mr Wran and Elizabeth Bay House", (Letters to the Editor) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1976, 7.
88 Ibid.
Wran envisaged similar plans for Elizabeth Bay House, indicating that, ‘It’s going to be converted into what I hope will be a very pleasant place for the people of Sydney to dine and wine, very much like Ayers’ House in Adelaide’ and added that he ‘would like to see it developed [with] a public restaurant on the ground floor and an exhibition centre on the first floor’.  

The public’s reaction to the restaurant proposal was not favourable, with one *Sydney Morning Herald* reader expressing:

> To accept the suggestion of Mr Wran to use the building as a restaurant or reception house would do an injustice to the building. To convert the work that has already been completed to something less to cater as an eating house is merely wasting funds already well spend.

![Cartoon of Elizabeth Bay House converted into a casino](Daily Telegraph, 18 June 1976).

On 18 June 1976, the *Daily Telegraph* published a cartoon, showing Elizabeth Bay House as ‘Neville’s Nook’, with a casino and the ‘Restaurant Chez Wran’ (Figure 4.15). It facetiously suggested that Wran was merely stopping the Sydney City

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90 Ibid; Hooper, "Vip Mansion 'for Public". 5.
Council from using the house so that it could be the headquarters for his political and trade union cronies.

Clive Lucas also did not support the idea of turning Elizabeth Bay House into a restaurant and wrote to the Premier requesting a meeting. During their discussion, Wran accepted Lucas' offer to convene a meeting of heritage and museum experts to determine appropriate uses for the house. This meeting was held in the dining room at Elizabeth Bay House and Lucas recalled that there were about thirty people, including John Morris, the Director of the National Trust, Daniel Thomas and William Bradshaw, the antique dealer who assisted in sourcing the furniture for the house. The group agreed that Elizabeth Bay House should become a house museum.

The Premier accepted this recommendation and announced in February 1977 that the house would be opened to the public on 12 March 1977. The ground floor was to become a house museum and the upper floor used for changing exhibitions 'reflecting aspects of life, arts or sciences of the period of the house' (Figures 4.16 and 4.17). At the same time, an interim trust was appointed to manage the house, which included Clive Lucas, William Bradshaw, Jack Willis (Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) and Dr Peter Stanbury (curator of the MacLeay Museum at the University of Sydney).

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93 Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
94 Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
Figure 4.16
Prizewinners of 'Name the Emblem' Competition visiting Elizabeth Bay House with Premier Wran on 14 May 1980 (ML – GPO3 10399). Most of the original furniture in the Drawing Room was sold to the Colonial Government for the furnishing of the new Government House in 1845. The inventory for the sale formed the basis for furnishing the museum.

Figure 4.17
Prizewinners of 'Name the Emblem Competition' being shown through the Library, Elizabeth Bay House. 14 May 1980 (ML GPO 3 – 10400).
The public response to the opening of Elizabeth Bay House was tremendous, with a weekly average of 1,400 visitors during the first year. By October 1977, a mere seven months after its opening, attendances had reached 14,771. The ongoing publicity surrounding the restoration and future use of the property had generated much public interests and the popularity of the house museum justified Wran’s decision to maintain the property for public use. Looking back on the events, Wran surmised how his party:

Being an egalitarian group and thinking it was much more important for the community to have access to these remaining architectural treasures, we decided that Elizabeth Bay House would not be a home for the Lord Mayor, but would become a museum which would allow people to see how their wealthy ancestors lived and the style of furniture they had. But we were really trying to make a point that these parts of our heritage would be preserved. That they’d be preserved for the people.

The success of Elizabeth Bay House as a house museum also confirmed Clive Lucas’ status as a heritage architect and he was awarded the Order of the British Empire for his contributions to conserving Australia’s heritage in 1977. Leading up to the museum opening, Lucas received special mention, with the newspaper columnist Leslie Walford writing that:

Clive Lucas especially is the new creator of Elizabeth Bay House, for his research, guiding hand and total interest have assured its sympathetic revival. Nothing escapes his eye, and he has the feeling for true restoration.

Lucas later established his own architectural firm that specialised in heritage conservation.

Following the appointment of an interim trust, Wran introduced the Elizabeth Bay House Trust Bill on 6 October 1977, stating:

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99 "Second Reading of Elizabeth Bay House Trust Bill, 12 Oct 1977", in Ibid., 8781.
100 Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
101 Walford, "A Piece of Our Past Restored".
This bill seeks to establish a trust to ensure that the house is preserved as a place of historical and architectural merit and continues to be made available to the people of New South Wales for their enjoyment as a place of educational and cultural interest. The ground floor of the house has been furnished according to the 1830-50 period when it was built and the first floor is used as exhibition space. Indeed, Elizabeth Bay House opens a new era in the presentation of historic houses by offering not only static displays of furniture and furnishings but continually changing exhibitions dealing with social and cultural history. The bill seeks to vest the proposed trust with all powers necessary to preserve, manage and control the house.¹⁰²

The main features of the Bill were drafted to ensure direct government control over all aspects of management. Future alterations required government consent and all staff were to be appointed under the Public Service Act. Special reference was made to the employment of a curator, who apart from being responsible for the daily management of the house, would also act as the secretary to the newly formed Trust. James Broadbent was subsequently employed as the first professional house museum curator in Australia and continued working with the Historic Houses Trust until 2003. Like Lucas, Broadbent played an influential role in the history of the house museum. His work at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House pushed house museum curatorship into new territories and placed Australia at the forefront of heritage and museum practices. These two properties are examined in Chapter 6.

Unlike Vaucluse House, which suffered from a lack of government funding, the Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act included an annual endowment for ‘exhibits, the cost of alterations to the house and incidental expenses’. The Treasury also provided for the operational expenses of the museum. Furthermore, as a statutory authority, the Trust was directly accountable to the State government and therefore required to prepare an annual report to Parliament.¹⁰³

In his second reading of the bill, Wran reiterated his objection to the initial City of Sydney proposal, stating that:

¹⁰³ "Second Reading of Elizabeth Bay House Bill, 12 Oct 1977", in Ibid., 8783.
When I opened the house to the people of this State, I said on that occasion that my government would not have the cheek to use the first floor of the house as a residence, which the Liberal Government of that time clearly intended. At the time when my Government took office the architect’s brief for the restoration provided for the first floor to be made into two luxury V.I.P. flats, with an office overlooking Sydney Harbour.

The Honourable member for Bligh has come up with the proposal that this marvellous piece of our heritage be snatched back from the people of the State for use as a residence for the Premier. He seems to be thinking along similar lines to the proponents of the V.I.P. residence idea. It is a proposal that is certainly not worthy of consideration by this Government. In fact, the very idea shows a complete misunderstanding of the nature and purpose for which the house was restored and which it at present serves.104

The statement by the Liberal member for Bligh, Mr Barraclough, simply highlighted not only the previous government’s inability to understand the purpose of restoring Elizabeth Bay House, but also in understanding the public’s expectations of equitable access and input in the management of heritage sites.

When debating the Bill, the Opposition emphasised that it was the former Liberal-Country government who initiated the restoration of the house and that:

> It is a good thing that a trust be established to administer it so that it will be preserved for the public enjoyment in the way the former government intended.105

But it was apparent that the aims of each party were fundamentally different. The Opposition continued to support its initial proposal, and noted its concern that the City of Sydney Council was not receiving an economic return or benefit from its indirect investment in Elizabeth Bay House:

The decision of the Government of the day to place the land and building in the care of the Council of the City of Sydney was prompted to a degree by the fact that the council had, over a period of years, contributed fairly heavily to the County of Cumberland Development Fund from which was financed the acquisition of land for open space and recreational development and, unlike other metropolitan councils that

104 “Second Reading of Elizabeth Bay House Bill, 12 Oct 1977”, in Ibid., 8781-8782.
105 Mr Coleman (Fuller), “Introduction of Elizabeth Bay House Bill, 6 Oct 1977”, in Ibid., 8568.
contributed to the fund, had not derived any particular benefit from the fund. It seemed reasonable that it should get something in return.106 Furthermore, the Opposition also lobbied that the appointment of ‘suitable trustees’ should include the Liberal member for Bligh in whose electorate Elizabeth Bay House was situated.107 Apart from being a Liberal member, Mr Barraclough considered himself an ideal candidate, with the simple reason that:

I have lived in this area all my life. I was born in Double Bay and I grew up near Elizabeth Bay House.108

Wran had different ideas on the matter. His selected the interim trustees based on their professional expertise and he maintained this decision when appointing members to the Elizabeth Bay House Trust. Even after being voted out of office, the Liberal-Country party’s preoccupation with deriving a profit from Elizabeth Bay House and inherited entitlements epitomised the assumptions and priorities of the former government. It also revealed why it was incapable of understanding or addressing community concerns over the redevelopment of inner-city historic neighbourhoods, or comprehend the value of conserving historic and natural areas for cultural rather than monetary reasons. Notwithstanding the debates, the Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act was passed unopposed by both Houses of Parliament in 1977.109

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Up until the 1970s, the heritage movement had evolved slowly and was represented by a small sector of the community. From the 1970s, efforts to conserve Australia’s heritage became a mainstream concern, and involved a broader range of people. In addition to the long-standing middle-class interest groups (like the RAHS and the National Trust), the heritage movement included the working-class, trade unions, professional architects and planners, and also the Federal and State governments.

106 Mr Coleman (Fuller), “Second Reading of Elizabeth Bay House Bill, 12 Oct 1977, in Ibid., 8786.
107 Mr Coleman (Fuller), “Introduction of Elizabeth Bay House Bill, 6 Oct 1977, in Ibid., 8568.
109 Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act, 1977 (NSW).
The conservation of Elizabeth Bay House and its conversion into a house museum embodied the political, social and professional influences that transformed the heritage movement during the 1960s and '70s. The adoption of new heritage practices was initiated by the introduction of empirical conservation methods at Elizabeth Bay House, and was generated by emerging heritage professionals. The decision by Premier Wran to convert the building into a house museum in 1977 was driven by political events that included the green bans movement and changes to both Federal and State governments in the 1970s.

The green bans were remarkable for several reasons. It was the first time that an organised labour movement, such as trade unions, considered the social responsibility and impact of their work on the wider community and environment. Politically, the bans contributed to the demise of the twenty-three year Conservative Federal government, and the end of the decade long Liberal-Country government in New South Wales. In government, Liberal-Country party acknowledged the cultural importance of Elizabeth Bay House but acted as a private owner when considering its future use. The decision to turn the house into a Mayoral residence and reception venue was determined without regard to the wider community. Although the plan made limited allowance for public access, it was a secondary concern. Addressing these public concerns, both the Whitlam and Wran governments introduced more sensitive heritage regulations that met public expectations that remain the backbone of Australia’s planning process.

More importantly, the green bans demonstrated that the responsibility of environmental and heritage conservation was not the preserve of a particular group to the exclusion of others. The green bans included ‘middle-class matrons’, working-class residents, and trade union labourers. The sheer political power of the bans stemmed from the mobilisation of support from all community sectors, irrespective of class differences. This was confirmed with the three-year green ban on The Rocks, and how this effectively crippled the government’s development agenda and the building industry.

Changes were also occurring within the traditional base of the heritage movement. More attention was paid to how heritage places were conserved and interpreted, as professionals from the different disciplines of archaeology, history and architecture introduced new techniques and philosophies to heritage practices. The conservation
of Elizabeth Bay House heralded a new generation of heritage professionals who relied on empirical techniques of research and analysis. It was at Elizabeth Bay House that Australia's first professional heritage architect and house museum curator were employed. Conservation was no longer undertaken on an honorary or amateur basis, but became a recognised profession in its own right.

The status of the heritage profession was further reinforced with the introduction of heritage legislation. Responding to public calls for greater government protection of heritage places, both the Federal and New South Wales governments introduced a range of heritage legislation in the 1970s, including the *Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act* in 1977. The objectives of these provisions were explained in relation to social wellbeing, equitable public access and education. However, and somewhat ironically, the regulation and professionalisation of heritage practices meant the demise of community control. Groups that were formerly responsible for conserving heritage places were, as a result, marginalised from this process.

The issues of professionalism (and what this entailed), the government’s role in protecting heritage places, and its provision for equitable access and public representation, all influenced how Elizabeth Bay House was conserved and interpreted. These aspects represented a new heritage order, and the Elizabeth Bay House Trust served as a model for the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales when it was created in 1980. The objectives and functions of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust remained as hallmarks of the current heritage system in Australia, and strongly influenced how the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales managed its house museums during the 1980s and '90s.
Figure 5.1  Ann Toy and Peter Watts in the kitchen at Vaucluse House. 1981 (HHT).
DEFINING ‘PROFESSIONALISM’ THROUGH THE HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Reinterpreting Vaucluse House

INTRODUCTION

In the decades after World War II, house museums were synonymous with the National Trust. From 1980 however, the genre has belonged to the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT). The HHT is the only government agency in Australia with the specific task of conserving and managing house museums, and leads the field in this country and overseas. Extending the responsibilities of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust, the new HHT initially included Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House.¹

This chapter examines the expansion of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust into the HHT in the context of an emerging multidisciplinary profession of architects, historians, archaeologists and curators in the 1960s, and the creation of a heritage bureaucracy in the 1970s. The enactment of the Historic Houses Act (NSW) in 1980 completed the transformation of heritage practices from the amateur arena to ‘experts’ and the government. Central to this process was the dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust by the State government and the transfer of Vaucluse House to the newly formed HHT. The Vaucluse Park Trust was an example to all amateur heritage groups, with its unceremonious dismissal signifying the official marginalisation of non-professionals from the heritage movement.

¹ The Historic Houses Trust currently manages twelve properties including Elizabeth Bay House, Vaucluse House, Elizabeth Farm, Government House, Hyde Park Barracks, Justice and Police Museum, Meroogal, Museum of Sydney on the site of First Government House, Rouse Hill Estate, Susannah Place Museum and The Mint. Lyndhurst, formerly the head office, was sold in 2005.
The second purpose of this chapter is to examine the HHT's role in defining heritage 'professionalism' and establishing itself as an expert body in such practices within a relatively short period. This was made possible through its management and re-interpretation of Vaucluse House during the early 1980s. The conservation and interpretative systems established at this property served as a prototype for future house museums managed by HHT and other organisations, including the National Trust.

Staffed by the new generation of heritage and museum professionals, the HHT was characterised by the adoption of social history methods and categories, use of new specialist heritage terminology, and adherence to internationally recognised museum and conservation principles. These attributes were equated with 'professionalism'. The newly formed Trust was also placed within the Arts portfolio of the State government and hence benchmarked with other cultural institutions like the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Australian Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. This served not only to differentiate the newly formed Trust from previous voluntary groups like the Vaucluse Park Trust and the National Trust, but also generated an aura of expertise and credibility.

The formation of the HHT also marked a new direction in the house museum movement in Australia. The period house museum, previously espoused by the National Trust, was gradually abandoned. From the 1980s, house museums were conserved and interpreted as forms of empirical material evidence, rather than as generic representations of an idealised architectural or decorative style. Instead, historic interiors were recreated to provide an accurate and authentic picture of the former occupants and their domestic surroundings based on empirical historical and physical research.

The philosophical and methodological approach adopted by the HHT reflected international trends in standardising heritage and museum practices. This phase of the heritage and museum movements had its genesis in the 1960s. The professionals trained during this period were influenced by the new social history from America and Britain, and the creation of international heritage and cultural protocols by organisations like UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations) and ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites). These heritage professionals became the government advisors and staff
in the 1970s, and were responsible for creating the current heritage and museum system.

PILLARS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY HERITAGE BUREAUCRACY: SOCIAL HISTORY, INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS & PROFESSIONALS

Elizabeth Bay House was endorsed by the government as the ‘model house museum’ because its restoration was based on empirical methodologies, and its exhibition program promoted a scholarly ‘dealing with our social and cultural history’. Although Clive Lucas was publicly credited with introducing such methods to heritage conservation in Australia, he actually belonged to a wider circle of academics, and university-trained architects, historians and archaeologists, who joined the heritage movement in the 1960s. Like their amateur predecessors, they too lobbied for greater legislative protection but differed in their approaches to develop and implement more scholarly and uniform heritage practices.

For this particular generation, the opportunity to implement their ideas arrived with the Hope Inquiry on the National Estate in 1974, and the Piggott Inquiry on museums and national collections in 1975. Academics and practitioners (like John Mulvaney, Miles Davies and Anne Bickford), who agitated for greater government heritage protection during the 1960s and ‘70s, became the expert advisors for the Whitlam government and subsequent Federal and State governments. This collaboration meant that the social history paradigm, and the push for a uniform heritage system that characterised this particular generation of campaigners, were transferred from academia to the government.

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2 The ideals of historical ‘authenticity’ and ‘accuracy’ would be fully expressed through Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House and is discussed in Chapter 6. The impact of cultural history would initiate changes in house museum practices from the mid-1980s, and is examined in Chapter 7.

Social History: A New Perspective to Examining the Past

For over a century, the Australian heritage movement had evolved without reference to any particular academic discipline or methodology. Both the government and heritage professionals espoused this as the main reason for intervention in the 1970s. As such, the new breed of heritage and museum practitioners sought to legitimise their craft by situating their work within scholarly frameworks.

Social history provided a fashionable solution, both theoretically and methodologically. It continues to hold sway in heritage and museum practices, although it is more by name than practice since the popularisation of cultural history in the 1980s. The emergence of social history in the 1960s is often explained as a reaction against the 'great man, great events' historical narratives that were prevalent from the late nineteenth century. Such accounts focused on the political, military and economic development of nations and their social elites.

As Richard White and Hsu-Ming Teo noted, social history emerged at a time when ‘social movements sprang up calling for the democratisation of western societies, and for constitutional rights to be translated into tangible legal and occupational rights’.

The impact on historical research was that:

From the late 1950s onwards there was a gradual shift of attention from political and social elites to various social groups which have been disadvantaged in one way or another. Histories of the working classes, women, blacks, indigenous peoples and immigrants during the 1960s and 1970s: two decades which witnessed global civil rights movements, student protests, union activity, the feminist movement and – in North America and Australia – indigenous rights movements.

The new social historians challenged the traditional emphasis on ‘political and social elites’ by focusing their research on ‘society’ and referring to the social science of sociology, and later anthropology, for theoretical and methodological guidance. Sociology provided new historical categories that included the

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4 Richard White and Hsu-Ming Teo, (eds.), Cultural History in Australia (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), 5.
5 Richard White and Hsu-Ming Teo, "Introduction," in Richard White and Hsu-Ming Teo, (eds), Cultural History in Australia, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), 5.
‘elements’ of society, such as ‘social groups, social movements, social ideologies, and the ‘culture’ of societies’. It also provided seemingly disempowered groups with agency, and therefore the capacity to effect social change both historically and in contemporary society.

In Britain, social history provided an alternative approach to the predominant economic and political framework. Although a Marxist historian, E.P. Thompson’s seminal 1963 publication, The Making of the Working Class, exemplified the new historical direction of this period. Rather than interpreting working-class history on the political periphery of industrialisation and labour movements, Thompson placed the working-class at the centre of his study, and examined how as a group, its experiences defined a collective identity that was relational to other social groups. Parallel studies were also being undertaken in America. For example, Herbert G. Gutman’s, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History, departed from conventional labour history by ‘giving primary attention to the worker as trade unionist’ and approaching history as a social science.

In addition to new historical subjects and categories, social historians also advocated a new method of systematic research that analysed quantifiable documentary evidence. As Paula Fass explained:

Social historians believed in exhaustive research, not for its own sake, but in order to expose to disciplined examination as many new sources as possible of a more ample past. They were always searching for new veins of material – wills, court records, the census, parochial newspapers.

Patterns of social organisation and function were determined through statistical analysis. Census records, birth, death and marriage records were used to examine domestic and family life, an area previously overlooked.

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Yet this systematic methodology was also the main weakness of social history. It produced positivist histories where individual experiences were subsumed by broad conclusions about different social groups. It also assumed that using quantifiable evidence objectified historical research, but the interpretation of such data is never self-explanatory. They were used to support pre-conceived notions of normative or deviant behaviour, and definitions of social structures and groups. Also statistical records did not necessarily include everyone. It is difficult to imagine that individuals wishing to avoid official notice would actively participate in a census. As such, these studies provided generalised overviews of sections of society, rather than its entirety.

By the late 1970s, social historians broadened their scope of inquiry into what is labelled ‘cultural history’. Influenced by the disciplines of anthropology, historians adopted a different meaning of ‘culture’, which defined it as the shared values, ideals and meanings of social groups, and their symbolic representation through material objects. This also widened the notion of ‘culture’ from one limited to ‘high’ cultural expressions (such as art, music, and literature), to encompassing all tangible expressions of cultural activity.

For the first time, everyday objects were considered legitimate sources of evidence. Cultural historians sought to understand the values represented and generated by different actions and material objects, and how this reflected the experiences and relationships between individuals and social groups. Not only did this encourage a multi-disciplinary approach in historical research, but it would also change the direction of the heritage and museum movements.

At the forefront of this paradigm shift were the American academics, Henry Glassie and James Deetz. Published in 1975, Henry Glassie’s seminal *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* was one of the first studies that demonstrated the potential and importance of ‘folk’ or vernacular architecture within the historical record.9 He found that:

> A method based on the document is prejudiced; fated to neglect the majority of people, for they were nonliterate and, within the boundaries of literacy, to neglect the majority

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of people, for they did not write. Even today in societies of almost universal literacy, it is a rare soul who bequeaths to future historians a written account of his thought... How can you study a society if you attend only to the expressions of a small and deviant class within the whole?  

Through his structural examination of eighteenth and nineteenth century houses in the Gum Springs and Orchard communities between Charlottesville and Richmond in Virginia, Glassie was able to trace collective cultural values and ideas about the communities who built them.

Glassie’s study had a profound influence on the new generation of historical archaeologists. James Deetz’s highly influential 1977 publication, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, challenged the predominant functionalist interpretation of artefacts by describing archaeology as:

The study of past peoples based on the things left behind and the ways they left their imprint. Chipped-stone hand axes made hundred of years ago and porcelain teacups from the eighteenth century carry messages from their makers and users. It is the archaeologist’s task to decode those messages and apply them to our understanding of human experience.  

Also influenced by anthropology, Deetz’s analysis assumed that artefacts were expressions of cultural values and ideals. He defined material culture as:

The segment of man’s physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans. This definition will more than comfortably accommodate... Siberian fish hooks, office buildings, banjos, standing rib roast, and a number of objects too numerous to mention here. But what of topiary work or perennial borders of flowers? This query is not quite as silly as it might seem at first. Nevertheless when we cut a privet, or shape a dwarf pine tree, we are modifying world material according to a set of cultural plans.  

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10 Ibid., 8.
12 Ibid., 10.
All forms of material culture were worthy of study, regardless of age, form or use. No longer limited to the study of prehistoric or classical cultures, Deetz broadened the definition of archaeology to include:

...the spread of European culture throughout the world since the fifteenth century and its impact on indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite the Eurocentric slant, the development of historical archaeology elevated the ‘modern’ world and all its paraphernalia, as a legitimate area of research. Rhys Isaac’s Pulitzer Prize winning study, \textit{The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790}, exemplified the anthropological basis of cultural history.\textsuperscript{14} Ethnography was combined with traditional historical sources to understand the symbolic meanings of everyday objects, settings and situations. Using this approach, Issac examined the process of social change in eighteenth century Virginia through the evolving meanings expressed through social interactions and the cultural environment.

The impact of cultural history practices on the heritage movement was not immediate. The transition of ‘social history’ into ‘cultural history’ coincided with the passing of the Federal \textit{Australian Heritage Commission Act} in 1975, the New South Wales \textit{Heritage Act} in 1977, and the \textit{Historic Houses Act} in 1980. Yet the conservation philosophy espoused by the government and its heritage advisors through these legislations corresponded more with the social history practices of the 1960s. The emphasis on empirical research as a means to objectify the conservation process formed the basis of the heritage charters created by international bodies like UNESCO and ICOMOS. These documents were adopted by the Australian government as the basis for the current heritage system.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{14} Rhys Isaac, \textit{The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790} (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA. and University of North Carolina Press, 1982).
UNESCO and the Global Standardisation of Cultural Heritage Principles

Formed in 1946, UNESCO played a major role in standardising the concept of 'heritage' and conservation practices on an international level. Its key aim was to:

encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.15

Australia, led by the Chiefly government, was one of the nineteen founding signatories to UNESCO. UNESCO's sphere of influence extended from its World Heritage Convention and the adoption of the Venice Charter. These documents were central to the development of the Australian heritage system, and formed the basis of the Australian Burra Charter.

In 1972, the principles of UNESCO were formally expressed through the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.16 Also known as the World Heritage Convention, it defined heritage as the tangible elements of the natural and cultural environments that possessed 'universal historical, aesthetic, ethnological, scientific, anthropological, conservation or natural value' and advocated the creation of a 'World Heritage List'.17 It also specified the need for 'active and effective' involvement by each 'State' in establishing:

An effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, organised on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods.18

Australia became the seventh signatory in August 1974 and successfully lobbied to become a member of the three advisory bodies of the World Heritage Committee.19

15 'World Heritage' in http://whc.unesco.org - accessed 18 February 2005
16 UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Adopted by the General Conference at its seventh session, Paris, 16 November 1972).
17 Ibid., Section 1. Definition of the Cultural and Natural Heritage.
18 Ibid.
19 In addition to the World Heritage Convention, the Whitlam Government also ratified three other UNESCO Conventions. These included the 1971 Convention for the Protection of Producers of Phonograms against Unauthorised Duplication of their Phonograms in March
As a means of identifying sites for the World Heritage List, UNESCO implemented the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter, 1964)*. The *Venice Charter* was the first internationally recognised statement of conservation principles. It was drafted in 1964 as a response to the ad-hoc restoration of historic buildings during the post-war reconstruction in Europe, where the urgency of the task meant that decisions regarding the repair or restoration of historic buildings were often made in haste.

The philosophies of early nineteenth century Romanticism and the Victorian neo-Gothic revival movements epitomised by William Morris and John Ruskin were apparent in the *Venice Charter*. This included the prevailing focus on the physical fabric and authenticity that characterises current practices. Under the Charter, the aim of ‘restoration’ was:

> to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents.\(^{20}\)

The overriding principle was one of minimal intervention, with an emphasis on maintenance. Reconstruction was discouraged, allowing only for the re-assemblage of existing parts.

The widespread adoption of the *Venice Charter* as ‘best practice’ for conservation methods was vital in the development of the current internationally based heritage system. As William Logan, the UNESCO Chair of Heritage and Urbanism wrote:

> Despite the specificity of its origins, it became the benchmark for principles governing architectural conservation and restoration for over 30 years and remains unrevised to this day. It still stands today as a basic document establishing standards for historic preservation.\(^{21}\)

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The entry of heritage professionals into the government administration meant that both the World Heritage Convention and the Venice Charter were used as the starting point for creating an Australian heritage system.

The Burra Charter: The Influence of Social History and International Heritage Conventions on Australian Practices

In light of the green bans and the defeat of the federal Conservative government, the newly elected Whitlam government prioritised natural and cultural heritage issues. Its initiation of the Hope Inquiry into the National Estate in 1973 was a significant step in the heritage movement. For the first time, the Australian government acknowledged that the state had a responsibility to protect places of heritage importance. It also provided academics and professionals (like John Mulvaney, Miles Lewis, Isabel McByrde and James Broadbent), the opportunity to give evidence and make recommendations on how such places should be managed.\textsuperscript{22}

From the beginning, Australia’s heritage bureaucracy was positioned within an international context. The Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate turned to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention to define ‘cultural heritage’.\textsuperscript{23} It also recommended that Australia ratify this Convention, and that ‘early consideration should be given to Australia becoming a member of... ICOMOS’. The Venice Charter provided a methodological starting point for a standardised Australian heritage framework.

The recommendations of the Hope Inquiry led to the enactment of the Australian Heritage Commission in 1976. The government’s reliance on heritage professionals to establish and implement a heritage system effectively merged the two groups. It transformed the burgeoning academically based heritage segment into a recognisable professional group. Under the umbrella of the Australian Heritage Commission, this generation from the 1960s laid the foundations of the current heritage system in Australia.

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\textsuperscript{22} Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate, Report of the National Estate: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate, Appendix C.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., Section 2.6.; UNESCO, Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Article 1.
As the first Director of the AHC, Max Bourke recalled the main priorities were to establish a network of heritage specialists, and for Australia to become a member of ICOMOS because:

If the Commission was to function well we needed a strong non-government network of both professional organisations and specialist voluntary bodies with similar general aims... you could pass laws and set up Statutory authorities but unless there was an informed and active community with inputs from an informed base of professional practice then you were unlikely to produce sensible debate or outcomes on the conservation of the cultural and natural heritage.24

The AHC also believed that a Charter specific to Australia was required to provide an ‘ethical basis for a contemporary ‘philosophy’ of Australian conservation practice’.25

The formation of Australia ICOMOS in 1977 presented the perfect opportunity for drafting such a document. At the first National Conference of ICOMOS in April 1976, it was:

RESOLVED that Australia ICOMOS should prepare a statement suitable for interpretation and application by Commonwealth, State and local government authorities and private institutions. The statement should emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to heritage conservation, and should discuss the contribution that can be made by various disciplines and skills, and should outline the process by which alteration or conservation of historic structures or sites should be carried out.26

The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance was adopted at the 1979 ICOMOS meeting, held in the South Australian mining town of Burra Burra.

Drawing upon the Venice Charter, Australia ICOMOS adopted a similar philosophy of minimal change and intervention, which was embodied in the statement, ‘Do as

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25 Ibid.
26 Australia ICOMOS Proceedings, Beechworth, April 1978, 169; quoted in Ibid. 15.
little as possible, as much as necessary'. There were however limitations to the applicability of the Venice Charter to Australia's heritage because it was devised specifically for the European cultural environment. It did not consider the cultural needs of indigenous communities, or the very different climatic and physical conditions of other countries. Furthermore, conservation philosophies had changed since 1964.

Reflecting the multidisciplinary membership of ICOMOS, terms such as 'monuments', 'sites' and 'architectural heritage' that were used in the Venice Charter, were substituted with 'place'. Jim Kerr explained how these terms reflected a 'neutral or multidisciplinary approach' and were adopted to 'avoid defining the fields of architects, engineers, archaeologists, historians etc'. It also reflected a broader understanding of heritage, which considered the physical setting of a structure or place, as part of its overall cultural value, as well as 'social' and intangible values.

The philosophical approach espoused through the Burra Charter pivoted around the notion of 'cultural significance', which included the 'aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations':

Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.

Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups.

The principles, processes and practice outlined in the Burra Charter were based on the premise that:

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27 This phrase became the catch-cry of heritage practitioners. It appears in the Charter Preamble: 'do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it usable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained'. Australia ICOMOS, The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (the Burra Charter) (Canberra: Australia ICOMOS, 1981), 1.


Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance.\textsuperscript{30}

The \textit{Burra Charter} provided a common conservation language in Australia by creating specialist terminologies, definitions and usage.

In addition to being involved in drafting the \textit{Burra Charter}, Kerr also devised the concept of \textit{The Conservation Plan} as the primary tool for implementing the principles advocated through the \textit{Burra Charter}. It established the process for identifying, assessing and managing the ‘cultural significance’ of historic places. While both the \textit{Burra Charter} and \textit{The Conservation Plan} have been revised, they remain the primary tools in Australia’s heritage planning system on all levels of government. In New South Wales, the \textit{Heritage Manual} issued by the Department of Planning and the Heritage Office was based upon these documents, and has become the ‘bible’ for heritage practitioners.\textsuperscript{31} It includes guidelines and procedures for different aspects of heritage management, from research to the preparation of different types of heritage assessment reports, to conservation techniques.

In less than two decades since heritage legislation was introduced, heritage conservation has become one of the most highly regulated and prescribed areas of the planning system. Its impact also extended to the management of house museums, and provided the impetus for the creation of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales in 1980.

\textbf{CEMENTING GOVERNMENT AND PROFESSIONAL CONTROL: SIDELINING COMMUNITY HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS THROUGH LEGISLATION}

The green bans, changes of both federal and New South Wales governments, and the subsequent introduction of heritage legislation in the 1970s, revealed how the regulation of heritage conservation was politically motivated. As discussed in

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., Article 1.4.
\textsuperscript{31} New South Wales Dept. of Urban Affairs and Planning and New South Wales Heritage Office, \textit{NSW Heritage Manual} (Sydney: Dept. of Urban Affairs and Planning, 1996).
Chapter 4, the conversion of Elizabeth Bay House into a house museum and the passing of the Elizabeth Bay House Act by the newly elected Labor Wran administration were politically expedient. Wran acknowledged that he had little knowledge or interest in cultural heritage issues, but was willing to address public concerns and accept advice from ‘experts’. The positive public response to the opening of Elizabeth Bay House strengthened the partnership between the government and heritage professionals.

Just as Clive Lucas had advised Premier Wran on the management of Elizabeth Bay House, Lucas was also instrumental in suggesting that all government owned house museums be placed under a single administrative body. Prior to the Historic Houses Trust, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Planning and Environment Commission were responsible for government-owned historic buildings. Lucas’s recommendation stemmed from his work at Vaucluse House in 1975. Having been engaged as a heritage architectural consultant by the Vaucluse Park Trust, he openly disapproved of the seemingly unscientific approach of previous honorary architects.

This issue came to a head over the restoration of the kitchen. In May 1974, the Secretary and Manager of the Vaucluse House Trust reported that cracked and drummy plaster had been removed from the chimney breast in the kitchen revealing ‘the most beautiful dressed sandstone blocks’:

This leads the writer to believe that when originally built it was not covered in plaster. We also consider that the range at present in situ is not the original as the oven to the left of this, in what we think was a large open fireplace, has non-keyed in-filling of brick. Neither do we consider that the draught-screening wall is original. This is also built of plaster covered brick and is not keyed to the stone of the chimney breast. We feel that our opinions are logical on the grounds that Wentworth had a large family and a fairly substantial staff of servants and convict labourers all of whom would almost certainly have received cooked meals from the central kitchen.

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32 Interview with Neville Wran, 18 February 2004.
33 Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
34 Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
Supported by Cobden Parkes, a Vaucluse Park Trustee and the Government Architect from 1935 to 1958, the Secretary requested permission from the Trust to remove the remaining plaster from the chimney breast and the existing range, and also to demolish the draught screen.

This request coincided with Lucas' architectural study of Vaucluse House. His findings were not dramatically dissimilar and he recommended:

1. That the bricked up section of the fireplace be removed and the stove restored as we believe it to have been during W.C. Wentworth's occupation of the House.
2. That the draught screening wall be demolished, but that all bricks and tiles be carefully preserved and stored.
3. That a suitable mantelshelf be fixed in the position as revealed by recent examinations of the chimney breast.
4. That the stonework of the chimney breast be restored and repaired, the areas above the mantelshelf being re-rendered and the areas below being painted matt white so that the form of the stonework is not obscured.
5. That the matter of a hood above the mantelshelf be held in abeyance pending further research.

Although the Trustees waited for Lucas' recommendations before commencing any work, Lucas was not impressed with the Secretary's architectural detective efforts. He approached the Premier with the idea of expanding the role of the professionally-based Elizabeth Bay House Trust to include Vaucluse House.

The Historic Houses Bill and the Dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust

The drafting of the Historic Houses Bill in 1979 corresponded with the Government's overall strategy to centralise arts management in New South Wales. Created in 1976 within the Premier's Department, the Division of Cultural Activities was responsible for providing advice to the Premier in the areas of the

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36 Cobden Parkes was also the second son of Sir Henry Parkes. He started his employment in the Government Architect's branch as a cadet in 1909.
arts and culture, and for implementing cultural assistance programs. It also oversaw the restoration of government-owned historic buildings (including the Ultimo Tram Depot and Powerhouse, the Mint and the Hyde Park Barracks) and administered the opening of the Powerhouse Museum and the Hyde Park Barracks Museum in the 1980s.

Declaring particular buildings as being of ‘State’ cultural significance and converting them into museums was an effective means of defining which historic places were considered to be of heritage importance, and how they should be conserved and used. Such projects demonstrated that government support for heritage and the arts was not limited to grants and the provision of protective legislation. By actively conserving and interpreting its heritage assets, the Government was able to influence the direction of the heritage movement and reinforce its position in the field.

Heeding Lucas’ advice, Wran followed the public success of the Elizabeth Bay House museum by expanding the Elizabeth Bay House Trust to include other historic houses. On 9 March 1979, Wran issued a draft Cabinet Minute to the Minister of Planning and Environment. It outlined the ‘Proposed legislation to establish a Historic Houses Trust’ to manage and maintain house museums in Government hands. This paper summarised the purpose of the legislation and contained twenty-four recommendations regarding the object, structure and operation of the proposed Trust.

Most importantly, the State government outlined the roles and functions of a museum, and more specifically, those of the house museum. A museum was defined as:

an institution established in the services of society and of its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for

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40 Neville Wran, ‘Proposed legislation to establish an Historic Houses Trust’ (Cabinet Minute), 9 March 1979, in Historic Houses Trust File (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).

41 Ibid., 2-3.
purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his
environment.\textsuperscript{42}

Within the context of this generic definition, a house museum was defined as:

a house or similar building of historical or architectural importance which has either
survived intact or been restored and its furnishing re-interpreted in a way that is
consistent with its original use. As a museum allowing public access, it would be
charged with a responsibility for the research and exhibition of such items of cultural,
domestic, social or political importance as the nature of the house dictated. The house
would by definition include its whole curtilage, including any landscaping, planting,
horticultural or pastoral use, the preservation and presentation of which would be
essential to an understanding of the house.\textsuperscript{43}

This statement merged the definitions of heritage and museums into one. The
determination of heritage buildings continued to be based primarily upon
architectural merit or historical association, although this was broadened to include
the curtilage and landscape setting - aspects ‘which would be essential to an
understanding of the house’. ‘Public access’ was also a central component of a
house museum, as were research and education – functions considered central to a
museum’s role.

According to the government, a Historic Houses Trust was required because the:

The management of museums, particularly house museums, demands a high degree of
scholarship and expertise. By placing house museums under one authority in an
administrative area already responsible for museums, the proposal allows such criteria
to be met in the most efficient and economic way possible. Separate administrations
do not encourage a uniform approach to the management of house museums.\textsuperscript{44}

The government had credited itself with the restoration and opening of Elizabeth
Bay House, including the conservation methods that differentiated it from previous
restoration projects and house museums. The use of heritage professionals and
empirical methods, and an emphasis on public access were the central components

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
of the *Elizabeth Bay House Trust Act*, and these were transferred to the *Historic Houses Bill*. The *Heritage Act* offered legal protection of heritage places, but the *Historic Houses Act* legislated who was permitted to conserve these places and how this was to be undertaken.

In his introduction to the *Historic Houses Bill* on 19 March 1980, Wran noted how:

> This legislation will ensure that the finest houses in New South Wales will be preserved and maintained for future generations in accordance with consistent and uniform standards of professional care. The intention of the Historic Houses Bill is to provide for house museums to be brought within the same government administration and to be responsible to a single trust. This will allow the uniformity in the administration of these museums and ensure that research, exhibition and educational programmes will be co-ordinated with each other and with those of other State cultural institutions.\(^{45}\)

Referring to the work of previous heritage and museum organisations, Wran acknowledged that:

> In the past, historic houses have been acquired for preservation by the Government under various Acts of Parliament as well as by the National Trust. I should stress that these bodies in general have discharged their responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication.\(^{46}\)

In order to justify the necessity of the Historic Houses Trust, however, it was inevitable that the Labor Government highlighted the perceived shortcomings of earlier house museums and the need to regulate this area of heritage practice.

No doubt mindful of the reflected glory, Wran cited Elizabeth Bay House as 'probably the best example of a house museum in Australia'.\(^{47}\) This was due to its curators who:


\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 5502.
have maintained a high standard [and whose] expertise have brought a knowledge of architecture, decorative arts and Australian to the exhibition and research programmes.\textsuperscript{48}

The Elizabeth Bay House Trust was also credited with ‘maximising public usage’, and its members ‘have shown themselves to be diligent and imaginative’.\textsuperscript{49} Praising its professional staff, and the professionally based Trust, Wran claimed that:

In short, Elizabeth Bay House is a model of what a house museum should be. Its presentation of permanent and contemporary exhibits conforms to international standards.\textsuperscript{50}

The proposed Historic Houses Trust was to initially include Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House. The Opposition questioned ‘why the Labor Government has selected Vaucluse House . . . to be the first to fall under the provisions of the Historic Houses Act’.\textsuperscript{51} As Rosemary Foot, the Liberal member for Vaucluse pointed out, the house was not in physical danger and was already being managed by a well-organised Trust. Furthermore, there were other government-owned properties in greater need of attention, such as Elizabeth Farm at Parramatta and Throsby Park at Moss Vale.\textsuperscript{52}

The selection of Vaucluse House was deliberate. It was the most notable house museum in Australia, due to its historical association with William Charles Wentworth and was Australia’s answer to America’s Mount Vernon as the shrine to the nation’s founding father. The honorary Vaucluse Park Trust had managed the house for seventy years, and its humiliating dismissal through the \textit{Historic Houses Act} served to demote the status of all community heritage organisations. This was justified by presenting Vaucluse House as a second-rate house museum in need of urgent rescue. As Clive Lucas critiqued, Vaucluse House was a house of national importance, which was being run by the local ‘butcher, baker and candlestick maker’.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} “Second Reading, Cognate Historic Houses Bill, 26 March 1980”, Ibid., 5998.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 5999.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Clive Lucas, 14 December 2004.
By contrast to Elizabeth Bay House, Vaucluse House was considered inferior. Despite paying tribute to the Vaucluse Park Trustees for their dedication in ensuring the popularity and maintenance of the house, Wran felt that:

> It remains true, however, that the house has been without the specialized knowledge and direction of a professional curator able to serve the house and to plan its upkeep and exhibition standard on a day-to-day basis. Without such professional assistance it is inevitable that in such matters as the choice of items for display, the style of display and the extent and quality of research and related activity, standard will fall below those established by other institutions.\(^{54}\)

The solution was to place both houses under one administration, so that their future management would conform to 'uniform standards of management, and ensure the greatest possible efficiency and co-ordination in presenting the early history of the State to the public'.\(^{55}\)

The *Historic Houses Bill* was promoted as a means of introducing 'modern notions of administration' to the management of historic buildings.\(^{56}\) In short, the State government believed that the administration of cultural and arts activities should be guided by professional staff, rather than by 'gifted and dedicated amateur and honorary trustees' because:

> No longer is it possible to leave vital matters such as the preservation of papers that may exist... or the furniture, or fabric on the furniture or the walls, to people who do not know much about them.\(^{57}\)

It was within this context that special reference was made to Clive Lucas, and how the Vaucluse Park Trust engaged this 'most qualified preservation architect' because it realised:

> that their collective wisdom does not necessarily include enough knowledge to do all that is required to look after the buildings.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) "Second Reading, Cognate Historic Houses Bill, 26 March 1980", Ibid., 5994.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 5995.
The Trustees were in a losing situation. The commissioning of Lucas was part of a 15-year plan to restore and refurnish the house to appear as in 1845, the height of William Charles Wentworth’s career. This was in line with contemporary house museum practices that provided a more empirically-based interpretation. As non-professionals, however, their work was immediately dismissed as amateur and uninformed. Engaging professional heritage consultants was perceived as an admission of their inadequate skills as heritage managers. As such, the New South Wales government sought ‘to recognize by statute that the trustees cannot be expected to discharge all of these functions’.

The Government was careful not to base its reason for creating the Historic Houses Trust solely on the perceived inadequacies of voluntary museum and heritage organisations. The Government also rationalised its decision by citing similar precedents from overseas and how ‘it will bring the administration of historic houses owned by the State into line with the procedures that exist in the United Kingdom and the United States of America’. The regulation of house museums was promoted as ‘the natural progression for the State of New South Wales to take in the preservation of its historic houses and buildings’.

The Labor Minister, Mr Rodney Cavalier, explained that while private and semi-private groups previously conserved historic buildings, ‘the rush of change and the seemingly unstoppable notion of progress in the past century’ had led to the ‘increasing need for government to become involved directly in acquiring and maintaining historic buildings’. Not surprisingly, Cavalier did not mention that the pressure to demolish historic buildings had been generated mainly by State governments through various schemes to demolish and redevelop The Rocks, Macquarie Street and other inner-city areas since the start of the twentieth century.

Attempting to place New South Wales within an international context, Cavalier drew examples from the United Kingdom and America. He noted how that in

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 5993.
61 Ibid., 5992.
62 Ibid.
63 See Chapter 4 for the discussion on the pro-development stance of the NSW government, its impact on The Rocks and the resulting green bans.
addition to the National Trust, the government sponsored Architectural Heritage Office provided a substantial level of aid to heritage conservation. It was to the house museum movement in the United States however, that Cavalier saw direct parallels with Australia.

Making special mention of Mount Vernon, he referred to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association as the ‘quaint organization known as the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Society’. The political propensity of Pamela Ann Cunningham as the founder and leader of the MVLA could hardly be described as ‘quaint’, but Cavalier’s patronising comment reflected the prevalent dismissive attitude towards voluntary organisations, especially those with a large female membership.

He also diminished the role of the MVLA by incorrectly stating that while the organisation had acquired Washington’s property, it was due to the direct and increasing involvement of the American government that ensured its ongoing survival. Contrary to this claim, the MVLA remained a private organisation that operated without financial assistance from either state or federal governments.  

Nevertheless, by equating Mount Vernon with Vaucluse House, Cavalier legitimised the New South Wales government’s decision to dismiss the longstanding Vaucluse Park Trust.

Apart from introducing professional and standardized heritage practices to house museums, the State government also promoted its Historic Houses Bill as a means of ensuring greater public access to State-owned heritage sites. Framed within such terms, the Opposition had little scope for objecting to the Bill. Speaking on behalf of the Opposition, Mr John Barraclough accepted that:

"Today the public demand more ease of access to historic buildings. The fact that the public will receive greater ease is a plus for the Government. The community does not want anything to happen to cause damage or deterioration to historic houses, their

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fixtures and fittings. What the community is looking for is the type of thing provided by this bill.66

In short, the Historic Houses Bill included all the aspects that were ignored by the previous Liberal-Country government. In light of the green bans, the Opposition could hardly boast a community-oriented record in government. Nevertheless, it did raise some pertinent questions about the Historic Houses Bill in the area of community relations.

Despite its claims for ensuring greater public access to historic buildings, the Bill was effectively disenfranchising the very community that was responsible for the creation of Vaucluse House as a house museum and the maintenance of the historic building since 1910. As Rosemary Foot remarked in Parliament:

If it had been left until the Heritage Bill of 1977, it would now be a crumbling wreck, ruined by white ants and by dampness destroying the stonework.67

Despite being owned by the State government, the monies needed to maintain Vaucluse House were largely derived by the fundraising efforts of the Vaucluse Park Trust, which:

has evidenced the care of its approach to its tasks by investing its own money and hundreds of hours on the restoration and maintenance of the house, particularly throughout the 1940’s, 1950’s and 1960’s [sic].68

It would appear that it was the State government, rather than the voluntary Vaucluse Park Trust, which was neglectful in its responsibilities.

Furthermore, the Opposition insightfully observed that the museum settings at Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House highlighted different philosophical approaches. The Member for Vaucluse also noted that the period room settings at Vaucluse House were not dissimilar to English house museums, which ‘aim to recreate the feeling of a home of its period’.69

66 Ibid., 5991.
67 Ibid., 5997.
68 Ibid., 5998.
69 Ibid., 5997.
The reasons surrounding the appropriation of Vaucluse House were not really about ensuring public access or improving house museum practices. Over 95,000 people visited Vaucluse House in 1978-79, generating $35,000 in revenue compared to 89,957 visitors in 1980-81. The Vaucluse Park Trust was also aware of changing house museum practices and was endeavoring to reinterpret the room setting to reflect Wentworth’s occupancy in 1845 through a 15-year plan involving Clive Lucas. In 1973, the Trust drafted a museum policy that stated:

Apart from maintenance, the emphasis at Vaucluse House is to be placed on its historic aspects and its education value.

In response to Wran’s Parliamentary address on 19 March 1980, Keith Doyle, the President of Vaucluse House Trust issued a statement defending the Trust. Objecting to Wran’s claim that Vaucluse House had ‘suffered in comparison to Elizabeth Bay House for lack of expertise’, he noted that:

The consultant architect to the Vaucluse House Trust for the past five years, and whose advice the House Committee has followed most closely, is architect Mr Clive Lucas, the present chairman of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust.

In addition, the consultant on whom the trust relies for accurate historic development of the gardens is Mr James Broadbent, until recently the curator of Elizabeth Bay House.

It would be reasonable to presume that both these gentleman have served each historical site equally well.

Doyle also cited an impressive list of honorary advisers, including Professor J. M. Ward, Challis Professor of History at the University of Sydney, Professor Manning Clark from the Australian National University, Suzanne Mourot who was formerly


the head librarian at the Mitchell Library and Dr. L. A. S. Johnston, who was the Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens.73

Backed by Woollahra Council, a petition with 480 signatures in opposition was delivered to the government but the objections from the Vaucluse Park Trustees and local residents went unheeded. The Lower House passed the legislation on 26 March 1980, a week after it was introduced. The Vaucluse Park Trust became a scapegoat justifying the government’s intervention in the management of Vaucluse House and the house museum movement, and the efforts by the fledgling heritage profession to secure its position within the government sponsored heritage system.

THE BEGINNING OF THE HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The Historic Houses Act was gazetted on 27 June 1980 and the Historic Houses Trust created on 1 July 1980.74 The HHT was situated under the umbrella of the Division of Cultural Activities within the Premier’s Department. Its sister organisations included the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australian Museum, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney Opera House, Observatory and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Under the Act, the primary objectives of the HHT were:

(a) To manage and maintain as house museums the buildings vested in or acquired (either as property of the Trust or otherwise) by the Trust having regard to their historic and architectural interest, to conserve these buildings and to manage and maintain their appurtenant grounds.

(b) To use such buildings to provide such educational and cultural services in relation to those buildings as in the opinion of the Trust would increase public knowledge and enjoyment of these buildings and their place in the heritage of the State.75

73 Doyle, "Reply by Chairman", 2.
75 Historic Houses Act 1980.
The new Trust consisted of seven trustees, appointed by the Governor of NSW. Five of the trustees were nominated by the Premier, one by the Minister of Public Works, and the other by the Minister of Planning and Environment. The Act outlined the powers of the Trust in relation to the acquisition, maintenance and use of its properties, and provided for the appointment of a Director of Historic Houses, curators and other staff deemed necessary for the administration of the Act. The Trust was funded through the Treasury, and as such, was required to submit an annual report to the Parliament.

The first Trustees consisted mainly of heritage and museum professionals, and government representatives. The Chairman, Peter Stanbury, and Clive Lucas, were both formerly on the Elizabeth Bay House Trust.\textsuperscript{76} Richard Rowe continued on from the Vaucluse Park Trust. A professional architect, Rowe was also Vice-President of the National Trust Board from 1973 to 1981, and President from 1981 to 1984.\textsuperscript{77} Government representatives included the Government Architect, J. W. Thomas, and the Director of the Heritage Council, Mr M. Sherman. The other trustees included Delicia Kite, a Labor member of the New South Wales Legislative Council from 1976 to 1995, and Miss H. Halse Rogers, a respected public servant and the Jill Wran’s aunt.

\textbf{New House Museum Practices: Creating an aura of professionalism, uniformity and efficiency}

These Trustees played a pivotal role in setting the direction of the organisation. Created under the banner of professionalism, uniformity and efficiency, the HHT spent its first year defining and substantiating its status as a professionally-based heritage and museum organisation. The formation of the HHT was, in part, politically motivated, and despite the State government’s claim that the \textit{Historic Houses Act} was necessary to ensure professional and uniform standards house museum practices, the Act did not specify what this actually meant or what it entailed.

\textsuperscript{76} Peter Stanbury was also the Director of the Macleay Museum.
\textsuperscript{77} I. F. Wyatt, \textit{Ours in Trust: A Personal History of the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.)} (NSW: Willow Bend Press, 1987), 182.
As such, the HHT directed its initial energies to clarifying its role within the parameters of the Act. In the first Annual Report to Parliament, Peter Stanbury noted how the year was spent establishing 'a sound basis on which to grow rather than for spectacular results'.

As Chairman, he recognized that the Trust was:

a unique organisation in Australia and the Trustees [were] conscious that others will look to the Trust for ideas and methods of maintaining and curating historic house museums.

His aim was to 'maintain the highest possible standards in its work and at the same time to present its properties in a lively and creative way'. In achieving this goal, Stanbury remained true to the ideal of empirical and objective methodologies and stated that:

The Trust is endeavouring to base the work of conserving its houses on a solid foundation of research of both documentary and physical sources.

Apart from clearly identifying its philosophical and methodological approach, the HHT was also faced with the challenge of demonstrating that it was the expert in the museum field. The long-standing Vaucluse House Trust had been controversially dismissed and the HHT had to prove its worth.

The main thrust of the Historic Houses Act was the standardisation of house museum practices, and the provision of professional staff. During its first few years, the Trust concentrated on developing policies and guidelines to create a uniform system for the acquisition, conservation and interpretation of its properties. In dismissing earlier house museum practices, the HHT was required to consciously define its role, philosophy and methodology. Such organisations had not existed previously, nor were house museum manuals based on social history and standardised heritage practices available.

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79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
An impressive body of research material, acquisition and conservation policies, conservation plans, museums plans, objective statements and housekeeping guidelines were prepared between 1980 and 1983. In October 1980, three months after its inaugural meeting, the Trustees tabled its ‘Draft Policy Statements’ to the Premier. The ‘Policy and Objectives Statements’ document was finalised and submitted to the Premier’s Department in February 1982. The purpose of this document was to ‘expand upon the objectives of the Trust as set out in the Historic Houses Act, 1980, and sets out some guidelines for the future’. The Trustees perceived their role as ‘one of conservation, management and interpretation of the fabric, contents and grounds in its care’:

The Trust seeks to explain its properties to the public by establishing expertise in the history of New South Wales and the history and conservation of architecture, horticulture and the decorative arts.

The Trust’s central objective of presenting house museums will necessitate specialized management. Each building will require an individual approach and it is proposed that a thorough management plan be prepared for each new property.

The theme of ‘expertise’ and ‘specialisation’ flowed into the ‘Objectives and Guidelines’, which outlined three main goals:

(i) to act as the responsible authority for the conservation and presentation of those properties and presentation of those properties acquired, thus avoiding fragmentation of ownership and control of such properties

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81 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Vaucluse House Garden and Park Conservation Plan’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 21 (31 May 1982), Item No. 7(b); ‘Policy and Objectives Statements’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 22 (29 June 1982), Item No. 10; ‘Vaucluse House - Buildings: Conservation Policy’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 24 (30 August, 1982), Item No. 10; ‘Vaucluse House Buildings - Statement of Significance’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 24 (30 August, 1982), Item No. 10.; ‘Acquisitions Policy’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 28 (20 December 1982), Item No. 3(f); *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 29 (16 February 1983), Item No. 3c; ‘Elizabeth Bay House, Review of Acquisitions Policy’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 28 (20 December 1982), Item No. 3(f); ‘Vaucluse House - Draft Acquisitions Policy’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 28 (20 December 1982), Item No. 3(f); ‘Vaucluse House - Future Acquisitions Policy’, *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 28 (20 December 1982), Item No. 3(f).


84 Ibid., 29-30.
(ii) to so manage properties that they may be appreciated by all people, whether they be young or old, native-born or immigrant, resident or visitor, privileged or disadvantaged. The grounds will be considered as an integral part of the presentation, as will any historical associations that a house may have.

(iii) to make available the knowledge and techniques required to conserve and present domestic buildings in an historically authentic manner.

The tasks involved in achieving these goals where summarised into three areas:

(i) specialisation, research, conservation and presentation
(ii) education and publication, and
(iii) community service.\(^{85}\)

In outlining the aims and goals, the Trust created a hierarchical structure to house museum management where:

Each of the major houses should be under the control of a curator, who should be supported where appropriate, by administrative, exhibition, education and publication staff.

The role of the education officer, in liaison with the Curators, is to increase public knowledge and enjoyment of the Trust’s properties through educational programmes and materials which encourage active participation.\(^{86}\)

Community participation, access and education were highlighted throughout the document, but this was considered a passive component. Despite describing it as ‘active’ learning, the content and style of the programs were determined by curatorial and educational staff. The Trust noted:

as a high priority the appointment of education, exhibition and publication officers. The education programme must cater for all sections of the community.

The education programme may include talks, guided tours, lectures, films, audiovisual presentations, exhibitions, activities, catalogues, leaflets, posters, magazines.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 31-3.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 32-3
publications and theses; these publications should create interest, encourage enquiry and stimulate the imagination.87

The Trust perceived ‘community service’ as providing advice and information about historic houses and heritage, and how it:

should cooperate and advise, when requested, other organizations involved with historic houses, whether they are Government bodies, private organizations or individual members of the public, as funds allow.

The Trust should acquire an administrative and information centre. This centre should be part of an historic property and preferably contain a library, reference materials and facilities for the conservation and presentation of historic houses.

The facilities of the information centre should be available to all members of the public.88

The Trust opened a Resource Centre and Library as its head office, Lyndhurst in 1985.89

Manufacturing Heritage Expertise and Experience

The HHT did not confine its activities to conserving and interpreting its historic house museums. It also established itself as an authoritative body in the heritage and museum fields by producing technical heritage reports and providing education and public programs to ‘instruct’ other organisations and individuals on heritage practices.

The HHT introduced new terminology to house museum practices through these documents. Adopting the principles of the Burra Charter and Kerr’s ‘Conservation Plan’, the preparation of such documents were required to determine the ‘cultural significance’ of a historic site, which would then guide the ‘conservation policy’. This followed a prescriptive process. The Vaucluse House Garden and Park

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 33.
89 The late Caroline Simpson’s children gifted the majority of their mother’s decorative arts and furniture to the Trust in 2004, the Resource Centre was renamed the Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection.

237
"Conservation Plan" included a diagram from J.S. Kerr's *The Conservation Plan*, which explained how this involved two stages (Figure 5.2).90

![Figure 5.2 Flowchart in the Vaucluse House Garden and Park Conservation Plan showing a systematic approach to heritage conservation management.](image)

'Analysis' was undertaken during Stage 1, and involved the collation of documentary and physical evidence. The 'analysis' of this material determined why the historic site was important, and this was summarized in the 'Statement of Significance'. Stage 2 involved developing a 'Statement of Conservation Policy' and 'Policy Implementation'. This was derived from the 'constraints arising from the Statement of Significance' and considered in relation to 'external requirements', 'client's requirements' and the 'physical condition' of the site.

The HHT also positioned itself as the expert in the field by providing manuals, seminars and exhibitions about the conservation and interpretation of house museums and their contents. One of the first exhibitions at Elizabeth Bay House was "Good Housekeeping", which examined the historical methods of caring for a

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house and how these techniques were incorporated into the housekeeping procedures at Elizabeth Bay House (Figure 5.3). It was subsequently redesigned as a travelling exhibition for regional centres in New South Wales. Displayed in Lismore, Lake Macquarie, Albury and Orange, the curators noted how:

It has had the dual effect of expanding awareness of Elizabeth Bay House and of assisting regional museums who lacked trained exhibition and research staff to mount and interpret their collections.\(^\text{91}\)

The Trust also published the *Housekeeping Manual* on the procedures for maintaining objects and soft furnishings at its properties.\(^\text{92}\) This manual was updated in 2004 with the publication, *The art of keeping house*, which included a more detailed history of housekeeping and maintenance of historic dwellings.\(^\text{93}\)

![Figure 5.3](image)

*Figure 5.3*

*For the 'Good Housekeeping' exhibition, Elizabeth Bay House was created to look like it was being spring cleaned (HHT Annual Report 1982-83, 12).*

In the same year that the "Good Housekeeping" exhibition was held, the HHT (together with the Australian Council of National Trusts) organised a seminar on Museum Houses. Peter Watts explained that:

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\(^\text{91}\) Jennifer Stackhouse and Nicholas Coffil, "Good Housekeeping Travelling Exhibition, 25.5.1983", *HHT Minutes*, Meeting No. 32 (30 May 1983).


REINTERPRETING VAUCLUSE HOUSE

The purpose of the conference is to bring together those people responsible for the management of museum houses throughout Australia, to discuss matters of mutual interest, and to see and hear something of the approach being taken at different houses.

During the past few years the approach to the restoration and preservation of historic house museums throughout the world has undergone a reassessment. As a result many house museums are undergoing radical change following detailed research and examination. This is allowing a much more objective approach to the presentation and interpretation of existing and future house museums. . . . In New South Wales the results of a radical reassessment of one property can be seen in the changes presently taking place at Vaucluse House. Other similar work is happening around Australia.94

All the speakers were drawn from government heritage agencies, museums or were heritage practitioners. These included David Yencken, Jim Kerr and Max Bourke from the Australian Heritage Commission, Terry Lane from the National Gallery of Victoria, and Des Kennard, the Assistant Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Heritage consultants included Clive Lucas, Peter Lovell and Nigel Lewis. Peter Watts, Ann Toy and James Broadbent also presented papers on their work at the HHT. The only representative from the National Trust was Richard Rowe, who chaired the first session. The focus of the seminar was on the management of the house museum within the framework of standardised conservation practices promoted by government agencies.

In 1981, the HHT also hosted a seminar on the 'preparation of Conservation Plans for historic sites'.95 Jim Kerr conducted the seminar, and his professional and academic credentials featured prominently in the program outline. Kerr covered topics such as 'significance', how this is assessed, the 'consequence of inadequate assessment', and the 'relationship between significance and conservation policy'. He also outlined the key "elements" and their sequence in preparing a Conservation Plan as copied by the HHT.

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94 'Museums House Seminar Program', HHT Minutes, Meeting No. 25 (5 October 1982).
95 'Letter to Mr John Morris, Director, National Trust, from Peter Watts, Director, Historic Houses Trust', dated 15 October 1981, in Historic Houses Trust File. 1979-1982 (National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives).
The structure, content and language used in these reports, policy statements and seminar implied a high level of technical and specialist knowledge. Since the 1970s, the prescriptive nature of the heritage system has generally resulted in dismissing any methodologies that varied from accepted practices. It reinforced the notion that heritage conservation should only be undertaken by professionally trained experts.

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW HERITAGE SYSTEM: VAUCLUSE HOUSE UNDER THE HISTORIC HOUSES TRUST

The political and philosophical reasoning for the dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust left a negative lasting impression of its contribution to the heritage and house museum movements. As noted by the first HHT curator for Vaucluse House, Ann Toy, the early Trustees did not realise the significance of Vaucluse House, and its historical associations with W.C. Wentworth and the early social and political history of the colony.

Examining a series of photographs of the museum interiors from 1933, she noted the room settings were ‘jarring and incorrect’, the room arrangements ‘irrational’, with a ‘proliferation of large hand-written labels on many of the objects’ (see Chapter 2).96 She also considered the display of historical objects in showcases in the Drawing Room (that did not relate to the history of the house) as a lack of understanding by the Vaucluse Park Trustees to both the original function of the room, and also its decorative features. Toy contrasted this early approach with the program adopted by the HHT, which was based on a statement of cultural significance, an acquisitions policy, and the conservation and interpretation of room interiors based on historical research to ensure ‘historical reality’ and ‘authenticity’.

For Jo Anne Pomfrett, also a HHT curator, the three phases of Vaucluse House’s institutional history as a museum reflected the evolving attitudes towards Australian history:

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From seemingly little interest; to the invention of myths of great men and grand living; to one which embraces a much wider set of issues and concerns informed by rigorous examination of primary documentation.\(^7\)

In a similar discussion to Toy, Pomfrett also noted how the early Trustees ‘virtually ignored the historic significance of the house’ leading to the demolition of the convict and workers’ cottages on the estate, and how the history of the house was presented according to the ‘great man’ approach, referring only to William Charles Wentworth. This was compared to the current interpretation, which Pomfrett believed was ‘more authentic’ and socially inclusive in its historical consideration of women, Aborigines, and convicts.\(^8\)

In light of the bureaucratisation of heritage, and the creation and endorsement of the *Burra Charter* in 1979, the question must be asked whether Vaucluse House become an entirely different house museum under the Historic Houses Trust.

The dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust and the transfer of the property to the newly created HHT suggested that there was a clear break between the old and new Trust. After a year as Director, Peter Watts reported that:

> Vaucluse House has responded very well to professional curatorial involvement and the results are self evident. There is still much more to be done and during the coming year I see Vaucluse House building on the work already successfully completed. The existence of the Vaucluse House Working Group (Messrs. Lucas, Broadbent, Watts and Miss Toy) which has met monthly has been an especially effective way of deciding on and implementing the restoration and refurnishing programme quickly and smoothly . . . there are important lessons here for future houses. The process of decision making, acquisitions and instructing and approving works at Vaucluse House is as near perfect a situation as could be found anywhere.\(^9\)

As a government agency, the availability of financial and staffing resources certainly transformed the administration of Vaucluse House. The re-interpretation of the house using the social history categories and empirical methods changed the

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\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Peter Watts, ‘Director’s Report, 18 June 1982’, *HHT Minutes*. Meeting No. 22 (29 June 1982), Item No. 6, 16.
appearance and interpretative focus of the buildings, rooms and gardens. Attention was also directed to different historical aspects of the property that had not been considered before, such as the women, children and servants who lived at Vaucluse House. The transformation was not immediate however, and many of the changes undertaken by the HHT were actually begun by the Vaucluse Park Trust as it responded to changing museological practices.

Attempting to carry out the dual role of house museum and general history museum, the Vaucluse Park Trust collected a disparate range of historical objects in addition to items that previously belonged to the Wentworth family. As discussed in Chapter 2, displays of unrelated historic objects were placed amongst the period furniture ensembles. The combination of inadequate funding and a jumbled interpretative direction meant that Vaucluse House was indeed in poor condition by the 1950s.

In 1955, the *Daily Mirror* reported on the “Shocking Neglect at Vaucluse House: Filth, grime on art relics” and the:

> Haphazard arrangement of exhibits, many of which are inadequately or incorrectly labeled, or lack description altogether . . . inclusion of inferior articles without historic, aesthetic, or intrinsic value . . . An almost incredible lack of discrimination is shown in the numerous worthless and commonplaces items that have been added to the collection.\(^{100}\)

Such criticism had long-lasting effect, and re-surfaced during the 1970s as the primary reason for transferring the property to the HHT.

The Vaucluse Park Trust did not ignore such concerns, and was prompted to carefully consider its interpretation direction. In the decade from 1955 to 1965, the Trust re-interpreted the property (Figure 5.4). Reflecting contemporary house museum practices of the time, the Trust decided to present Vaucluse House as a period house museum. It streamlined the house contents to reflect mid-nineteenth century trends rather than specifically to that of the family. While not providing an accurate representation of the domestic interiors by the Wentworth family, the Trust

continued to promote the association with Wentworth as the ‘father of Australia’s Constitution’

![Historic Sydney](image)

**Figure 5.4**
The cover from a set of postcards sold by Nielson-Vaucluse Park Trust to raise funds, c.1956 (Vaucluse House Collection, HHT).

In 1957, the Trustees removed objects that were not provenanced to the house or dated to the mid-nineteenth century.\(^{101}\) Items that did not relate to the period setting of the house were relocated to the Housekeeper’s Room, which was converted into a gallery. The Butler’s Room was converted into a display room for period costumes in 1964.

With the re-interpretation of the main rooms, the Trust employed a Miss Russo to advise on the interior decoration, and relied on the trustee and Government Architect, Cobden Parkes, for honorary architectural advice. The division of male ‘architectural’ and female ‘home interior’ spheres continued from the 1920s. Influenced by the ideals of the Colonial Revival, the furniture arrangements and soft furnishings were based on pre-conceived notions of mid-nineteenth century aesthetics and good taste, rather than being based on historical research. Like many

other historic buildings restored and redecorated at this time, white and cream
colour schemes featured prominently. Both Experiment Farm Cottage and Old
Government House being painted white in preparation for Queen Elizabeth’s visit
in 1954.

Despite turning Vaucluse House into a period house museum, the Trustees
continued to actively acquire objects with direct provenance to the Wentworth
family and the Trustees encouraged the support of Wentworth family descendants.
Mrs Weekes, Wentworth’s granddaughter maintained a close association with
Vaucluse House at this time. Apart from making the covers and curtains for the
bedrooms, she also donated furniture that was originally in the house.\footnote{102}

The ‘Constitution Room’ was retained from the earlier museum period. The Trust’s
President supported Charles Bertie’s 1921 interpretation that:\footnote{103}

\begin{quote}
His library at Vaucluse House was at one and the same time the storm centre and
birthplace of thoughts that powerfully affected the life and destiny of Australia. His
greatest act, the conferring of a Constitution on New South Wales, was probably
designed and polished in the silence of this historic room.\footnote{104}
\end{quote}

Despite being redecorated in 1962, the Library remained as a shrine to William
Charles Wentworth and his role as a political figure and statesman.

Heritage and museum practices are dynamic concepts, and different museological
ideas were coming into play at the end of the Trustees’ program in 1965. The new
‘social history’ and the emphasis on empirical methods were permeating into
heritage practices. Exemplified by Elizabeth Bay House, the Vaucluse Park Trust
was also aware of changing house museum philosophies.\footnote{105}

In 1973, the Trustees prepared a policy document that stated:

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotetext[102]{Vaucluse Park Trust, \textit{NVPT Minute Books 1959-1964} (Vaucluse House Archives, HHT), 15.}
\footnotetext[103]{Ibid., 94.}
\footnotetext[104]{Charles Bertie and Vaucluse Park Trust, \textit{The Story of Vaucluse House and Sir Browne Hayes}
(Sydney: Vaucluse Park Trust, 1921), 17.}
\footnotetext[105]{In 1968, Vaucluse House was declared an ‘historic site’ and brought under the authority of
the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Vaucluse Park Trust continued to manage
Vaucluse House until its transfer to the Historic Houses Trust in 1980.}
\end{flushleft}

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Apart from maintenance, the emphasis at Vaucluse House is to be placed on its historic aspects and its education value.\textsuperscript{106}

The Trust decided to reinterpret Vaucluse House to reflect Wentworth’s occupancy in 1845. Constrained by limited funding, this process was to be implemented through a 15-year plan.

As part of this process, Clive Lucas was commissioned to undertake an architectural survey of the house. It demonstrated that the Trustees were actively responding to evolving house museum methodologies, and appreciated that the greater emphasis on architectural and fabric analysis required input by specialists like Lucas, considered ‘an expert on the restoration of historical buildings’.\textsuperscript{107}

As previously noted, the Vaucluse Park Trust’s work was prematurely halted due to government intervention. Many of the changes initiated through the 15-year plan however, were carried over by the new HHT.

Historical research and ‘the mantra of building archaeology’

As part of the ‘professionalisation’ of house museum practices, the HHT employed full-time curators and staff to oversee the management of its properties. Continuing from the Elizabeth Bay House Trust, Maisy Stapleton remained as curator for Elizabeth Bay House. James Broad bent was engaged as a curatorial consultant for Vaucluse House in October 1980, until the employment of Ann Toy as curator in March 1981.\textsuperscript{108} Broad bent was later employed as the curator of Elizabeth Farm in 1983. As the Trust acquired more properties, Broad bent became the Senior Curator and later the Curatorial Advisor until his resignation in 2003. Peter Watts, who previously worked for the National Trust in Victoria, commenced duties as Director on 1 June 1981 and has remained in this position since this time.\textsuperscript{109} Clive Lucas continued as the consultant conservation architect for both Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{109} HHT, Ibid.
'Professionalism' was defined by the use of empirical and systematic techniques, and the HHT focused on researching and documenting the history, buildings, objects and gardens. This documentary and physical 'evidence' was then used to support the rationale of the decisions and recommendations presented in its conservation plans and policy statements. It was at Vaucluse House that HHT created a system of research, policy development and implementation that became the prototype for all its subsequent properties. As Watts noted, 'the process of decision making, acquisitions and instructing and approving works at Vaucluse House...there are important lessons here for future houses'.

The house museum practices developed at Vaucluse House became the model for the Trust's other museums.

Ann Toy recalled her initial tasks as the curator were to:

- tackle fundamentals like organising the cataloguing of the collection, conservation work, developing a policy of continuing conservation and restoration, working out interpretation programs.

Emphasising the importance for an acquisition or collections management policy, she noted:

- the need for careful research, the formulation of and strict adherence to an acquisitions policy, to ensure that your approach to the recreation of a historic interior is both objective and historically accurate.

Johanna Fischbein was employed to research and catalogue the collection acquired by the Vaucluse Park Trust from 1910 to 1980, and the objects acquired by HHT from 1980 to 1982.

One of the 'most important tasks' was the engagement of Joy Hughes as a consultant historian to research the Wentworth family history. Her research

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110 Peter Watts, 'Director's Report', *HHT Minutes (April-Oct 1982)*, Meeting No. 22, 29 June 1982, Item No. 6, 16.

111 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.


underpinned much of the work and programs developed for Vaucluse House. This included researching the genealogy of the family and revising some family ‘myths’. Toy recalled that:

there was a fair amount of mythology about the Wentworths in some of the old guidebooks and material that had been written, or the family tree that was produced by the family . . . Joy was able to establish the correct line, the family associations.

Hughes also contacted family descendants to record their memories, and to document their collections of family memorabilia. Many of these items, like the William Nicholas portrait of Sarah Wentworth, were later donated or purchased by the Trust.

The influence of new social history categories was also apparent in the areas of historical research, which included ‘each member of the Wentworth family, not just William Charles’. In 1980, Toy noted that ‘William Charles Wentworth was the main figure of Vaucluse House’:

Sarah was his wife and little was known about her. [It] was important to establish the identity of each of the children, particularly the women . . . That has always been a major theme with the Historic Houses Trust.

The aim to ‘balance’ history was apparent in the Trust’s 1988 Bicentenary program that included the exhibitions, ‘Employees in Historic Houses’, ‘Women in Historic Houses’ and ‘Hearth and Home: Women’s Decorative Arts and Crafts, 1800-1930’. The Trust also published three biographies, Sarah Wentworth, Mistress of Vaucluse; Taste and Science: The Women of the Macleay Family, 1790-1850; and The Women of Meroogal.

114 Joy Hughes collaboration with the Trust has spanned over 20 years, undertaking historical research for most of its properties and exhibitions.
115 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.
117 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.
118 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.
In a sense, the HHT had to undertake a ‘stocktake’ of Vaucluse House when it acquired the property in 1980. Watts recalled that:

there was a massive amount of information out there to be found . . . so at the end of two or three years we had a much better understanding about the history of that house. Then we wrote all the policy framework for the house, both the interiors and the architecture, [and] for the gardens. We still follow those principles that we established in those early days. They were strong, they were simple and they were very sound.120

In 1982, three policy documents were prepared, including the Vaucluse House – Buildings Conservation Policy; Vaucluse House Garden and Park Conservation Plan; and Vaucluse House – Draft Acquisitions Policy.121

The Conservation Policy included a ‘Statement of Significance’, which attributed the primary importance of Vaucluse House to its architectural merits and because:

It was the home of one of Australia’s leading statesmen, William Charles Wentworth and has come to be regarded as a “shrine” by many people.122

While maintaining the aura of the ‘great man’, the Trust also broadened the heritage importance of the property to include the “downstairs” rooms, such as the kitchen, scullery, dairy, larder and cellar, and outbuildings, like the stables. In addition to the architectural features, and its association with Wentworth, Vaucluse House was also significant because it provided:

Instruction to the public in the social and political history of New South Wales and on the taste of the mid nineteenth century.123

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120 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2003.
Vaucluse House was transformed from being purely an architectural and ‘great man’ icon, to being part of a broader historical and geographical landscape. The Trust wanted to interpret the estate in relation to other harbourside houses, and how the fortunes of the Wentworths reflected the wealth and aspirations of a developing colony.

The principle conservation policy remained focused on the Wentworth occupancy and stated that:

In general the interior and exterior of the house should be conserved to reflect the occupation of the Wentworth family in the nineteenth century, particularly the period from 1827-1853.

This was supported by the ‘Acquisitions Policy’, which outlined:

The aims in selecting items for this collection have been:

(i) To provide an interior setting that correlates with the architectural period, style and quality of the building,
(ii) To evoke an historically authentic and ‘living’ domestic environment, not only through the choice of appropriate objects but also in the matter of their presentation.
(iii) To reflect the history of the Wentworth family’s occupation of the house and to acquire objects associated with their family history, which indicate their tastes and interests.\(^{124}\)

The recreation of a ‘historically authentic and “living” domestic environment’ were based on inventories and other documentary evidence, and where such material was absent, from ‘documented information about other houses of similar period, style and quality’.\(^{125}\)

Rather than creating period rooms to reflect ‘typical’ nineteenth century tastes, the Trust wanted to acquire objects that reflected the tastes, lifestyle and seasonal


changes of the Wentworth household. It was an extension of the direction taken at Elizabeth Bay House in the early 1970s. In 1978, the Vaucluse Park Trust located an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for the 1853 auction of the contents of the house when the Wentworth family was leaving Sydney to live in England. It included a list of furniture from the drawing room, library, hall and bedrooms, as well as the kitchens, laundry and stables.

The HHT subsequently located the 1853 lease between W.C. Wentworth and his tenant, John Hosking. It was an invaluable document because it included a ‘Memorandum of Fixtures in the Premises’, which itemised fixtures and remaining furnishings from the auction. In addition to other primary material, including family letters and business papers, such historical evidence allowed the Trust to pursue its aim of re-creating historically accurate and authentic interiors (Figure 5.5).

The use and locations of the principal rooms, such as the drawing room, dining room and library, were known prior to 1980 and were the main focus of the museum under the Vaucluse Park Trust. The former Trustees had presented plausible mid-nineteenth century interiors and, while the HHT refurnished these rooms according to documentary evidence and historically-based soft furnishing designs, some changes were subtle and generally noticeable only to those knowledgeable in the decorative arts of the history of Vaucluse House. For example, based on a reference in Sarah Wentworth’s letter to a portrait of Oliver Cromwell that hung above the doorway in the Breakfast Room, Ann Toy found a picture of Cromwell, which was hung in the original location (Figure 5.6).

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126 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.
Figure 5.5
The recreation of the Drawing Room was based on the 1853 inventory and contemporaneous illustrations and descriptions (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982, 14).

Figure 5.6
Recreated Breakfast Room, Vaucluse House, 1982. Note the portrait of Cromwell above the door (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982).
More obvious changes were made to the secondary rooms and service areas of the house. The 1853 lease referred to a set of cupboards at the end of the hall that formed a screen and entrance to a makeshift bedroom for Wentworth’s second son, Fitzwilliam (Figure 5.7). Clive Lucas remembered these cupboards and their removal to the stables by the former Trustees. The combination of historical research and fortunate circumstances allowed the Trust to reinstate the cupboards and recreate the bedroom.

Figure 5.7
The end of the hallway on the first floor was reconstructed as Fitzwilliam Wentworth’s bedroom. This area was originally partitioned off with a cedar screen, which was relocated in the stables (HHT Annual Report 1982-83, 16).

For Ann Toy, such discoveries were important because it showed how:

the house wasn’t completed because of the Depression of the 1840s and there were these idiosyncrasies they took in adapting the house to the family’s needs.129

The Trust also re-interpreted the many former generic bedroom settings to reflect their use by particular family members. These included the Master Bedroom used by William Charles and Sarah, the bedroom for the older Miss Wentworth, and the bedroom and nursery for the younger children (Figure 5.8 and 5.9).

129 Interview with Ann Toy, 23 November 2003.
The HHT also focused on recreating the service wing (Figure 5.10). The former Trust had started interpreting the kitchen, scullery, dairy and larder. This included acquiring a copper battery de cuisine, dismantling the stone, and replacing it with an open fire grate. Following Clive Lucas’ initial recommendation, the brick fire-wall screen around the original stove was removed. Ironically, the HHT later realised through subsequent research that the stove and fire-screen were both present during the Wentworth era, and were consequently reinstated.
Under the Vaucluse Park Trust, the dual use of the house as period rooms and a history museum meant that many of the ‘secondary’ rooms, such as the Housekeeper’s Room and the Butler’s Room were used for displaying costumes and china. The history of the house was displayed in the Stables, and included exhibits on Sir Henry Brown Hayes (the estate’s first owner), New South Wales governors, W.C. Wentworth and the Crossing of the Blue Mountains. The HHT removed these displays and converted the building back to its original use as a coach house, fodder room and stables.

The interpretation of the service rooms and buildings followed the Trust’s conservation policy to emphasise ‘the domestic character of the complex’, and a similar approach was adopted for the garden.\textsuperscript{130} Unlike Elizabeth Bay House, Vaucluse House retained its immediate curtilage that included the driveway, inner pleasure garden, kitchen garden, pasture and remnant native vegetation that formed a backdrop to the estate. While most of the original layout of these areas had survived, elements such as the plants and path surfaces had been replaced by the Vaucluse Park Trust as the grounds were transformed into a suburban park for most of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{130} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, \textit{Vaucluse House Garden and Conservation Plan}, Conservation Policy, Point 4.
As with the main house and service areas, the former Trustees had also intended to restore the gardens to a more historically-based form. In 1979, it commissioned James Broadbent to prepare a *Garden Restoration Report*, who recommended that:

As the layout appear largely intact the principal recommendations are:

1. To simplify the garden by the elimination of modern 'embellishments'.
2. To restore its original detailing.

At present, sections of the garden are maintained to a uniform level and in a similar way. If the garden is to regain its nineteenth century character then each part should respect its nineteenth century function and appearance. For example, the stable and kitchen should not have the same plant and borders as the shrubbery, and the original shrubbery should not have to compete [with], and its importance be obscured by, later plantings.

Secondly, modern detailing [should] be replaced where and when possible by authentic detailing. The concrete paths and edgings are the most obvious intrusions and, more than any other alterations, at once confuse the historic character of the garden, giving it the appearance of an exceptionally well maintained municipal park rather than an important private nineteenth century garden.\(^{131}\)

The HHT maintained a similar interpretative direction through its *Conservation Plan* for the garden and park, which established the aims:

1.3.1 To prepare a long term development plan for the Vaucluse House garden based on a study of the history of the garden

1.3.2 (a) endeavour to restore something of the nineteenth century flavour and detail of the garden to provide a more appropriate setting for the house and to give the garden its own intrinsic merit.

(b) endeavour to rationalise the relationship between the various buildings which has been lost over time.\(^{132}\)

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\(^{132}\) Historic Houses Trust of NSW, *Vaucluse House Garden and Conservation Plan.*
This report was one of the first policy documents prepared by the Trust, and reflected Peter Watts’ background in landscape architecture. Making ‘changes to the garden as soon as the Trust had acquired the property’, Watts noted that:

Even without a policy, it was not difficult to see a thousand tasks that needed doing. It was mostly a process of removal and simplification.\textsuperscript{133}

Attention was initially directed to the main entry and drive, the pleasure garden to the front of the house, and the estate boundaries. Archaeological investigations were undertaken to determine the location and material of the original driveway, the construction and layout of pathways and estate fencing, all of which were reinstated.\textsuperscript{134} This included replacing the bitumen paths with gravel, and reinstating the brick drains. While the basic layout of the shrubbery in the pleasure garden had not changed, the Trust gradually replaced the twentieth century plantings with more appropriate nineteenth century varieties.

The re-interpretation of the grounds was achieved incrementally over a decade. The most impressive component was the recreation of the kitchen garden, which was an essential aspect of the estate in supplying daily provisions to the household. Again, archaeological investigations identified the locations of the garden beds and fencing. Documentary evidence provided an insight into the diverse range of produce cultivated, including grape tomatoes, spinach, onions, pumpkin and herbs. In the late 1990s, HHT reconstructed the kitchen garden under its Head Gardener, Dave Gray (Figure 5.11).

The task of researching and recreating the kitchen garden also revitalised public interest in ‘heritage’ fruits and vegetables. Many of these varieties had disappeared, and the HHT obtained some of its seeds from Britain. The popularity of the kitchen garden was also generated by the ‘Kitchen Garden Festival’, which is held at the property bi-annually (Figure 5.12). The fruits and vegetables provided by the garden were also ‘displayed’ in the kitchen, strengthening the interpretation of the property as a functioning estate with different activities and staff.

\textsuperscript{133} Peter Watts, "Vaucluse House", \textit{Historic Environment}, vol. 1, no. 3 (1985): 25.

Figure 5.11
Recreated kitchen garden at Vaucluse House (Dave Gray, 2005).

Figure 5.12
In 1999, the Historic Houses Trust began its 'Kitchen Garden Festival' at Vaucluse House (HHT).
The Trust’s more inclusive interpretation of Vaucluse House did not mean that it abandoned the mythologised image of William Charles Wentworth as the founding father of Australia’s nationhood (Figure 5.13). The Vaucluse Park Trust had created the ‘Constitution Room’ under the belief that this room was used by Wentworth as the library and study, and the place where the New South Wales constitution was written. The HHT could not determine how this room was used by Wentworth, because it was only specifically referred to as the library in the 1890s. As an exception to its ‘1853 cut-off date’ in its conservation policy, the Trust decided that:

this room should be decorated as a study/library of the 1890s and be used to interpret Wentworth’s role in writing the New South Wales constitution.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Figure 5.13}
\textit{The ‘Constitution Room’ at Vaucluse House in 1982 (HHT, Vaucluse House, 1982).}

This room setting remained until 1991, when it ‘was dismantled ... and the objects returned to other parts of the house to take on the same degree of importance as other tables and desk sets’. \(^{136}\) Without any definitive evidence and faced with being philosophically inconsistent, the HHT converted the room into a gallery to display the history of the Wentworth family.

In Charlotte Smith’s examination of Vaucluse House, she found that:

The social history paradigm has challenged the validity of Vaucluse House’s great man status in a late twentieth-century environment, but not much. William Charles Wentworth’s heroic status as constitution drafter and national builder supported interpretation at Vaucluse House from its inception: a grand-colonial home was transformed into a ‘Mecca for Hero Worship’. But changing historiography challenged this simplistic view of one man’s role in Australian history. The recognition of new histories demanded that museums address inconsistencies and unrepresentative aspects of their presentation. The response at Vaucluse House has been to use historical research to validate all presentation or philosophical changes but not to follow through in interpretation. The process is thus irrefutable and gives an unintentional credibility to the still old-fashioned content. \(^{137}\)

The HHT has certainly continued to place William Charles at the centre of its interpretative focus at Vaucluse House, but it is doubtful as to whether this can be avoided. Without this historical association, the basis of Vaucluse House as a house museum disappears. The Trust has, however, attempted to interpret the history of the house and William Charles in a more contextual manner. While the Vaucluse House Trustees emphasised his political career and the crossing of the Blue Mountains, the ‘Family History Room’ by the HHT interpreted him in relation to his wife and family.

On an interpretative level, the changes to the estate are subtle. The HHT has not overtly challenged the heroic standing of Wentworth, but it has attempted to situate his life within the social and political environment of mid-nineteenth century New


South Wales. The motivation to construct such a grand Neo-Gothic residence was explained as a prime example of social climbing. Wentworth’s mother was a convict, his wife, Sarah, also had convict parents, and two of their eight children were illegitimate. His political ambitions to establish self-government in New South Wales, and his grand architectural plans for his estate were derived from the same desire to attain social recognition and acceptance. This however, was hampered by the 1840s Depression that prevented the completion of Vaucluse House.

The restoration of the service areas, gardens and grounds also situated Vaucluse House within a social structure of colonial life. Instead of being solely a ‘shrine’, the presentation of Vaucluse House was expanded into a functioning estate with a hierarchy of staff and activities. This was similar to the interpretative changes at Mount Vernon, which also opened the service areas and outbuildings to the public. ‘Slave Life at Mount Vernon Tours’ are provided alongside ‘George Washington: Pioneer Farmer site and 16-sided Treading Barn George’ and ‘Washington’s Gristmill at Mount Vernon’ tours. Rather than detracting from the aura of Washington, this new image of Washington as ‘the hardworking farmer’ reinforced and legitimated his legendary status. He was transformed into an ordinary man who achieved great deeds through honest hard work. In a similar way, the broader interpretation of Vaucluse House has provided a more humanised understanding of William Charles Wentworth rather then as a one-dimensional historical figure.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The restoration of Elizabeth Bay House in 1973-76 was a turning point in Australian heritage practices. It marked the entry of professionals, educated in the 1960s in the fields of architecture, history and archaeology. Exposed to the new ‘social history’, this group advocated empirical methods and standardized heritage methodologies. Politically, the decision to convert Elizabeth Bay House into a house museum provided the New South Wales government with a foothold in the heritage movement. Just as the new professionals were using their quasi-scientific practices to differentiate themselves from their amateur predecessors, the government embraced these professionals and their approach to justify its intervention into heritage conservation. It was a mutually beneficial partnership.
The expansion of the Elizabeth Bay House Trust to the HHT in 1980, signified not only the expansion of government control, but also the increasing influence of tertiary qualified heritage practitioners. Legislative measures, such as the Heritage Act 1977, provided the protective tools for listed heritage sites, but the Historic Houses Act delineated how they should be conserved and by whom. Such legislation, in conjunction with conservation principles like the Burra Charter, were instrumental in associating ‘professional’ practices with empirical research methods, social history, an adherence to standardised conservation principles, and tertiary training.

Comparisons between the ‘non-professional’ management of Vaucluse House and the professionally restored and curated Elizabeth Bay House were central to justifying the necessity of the Historic Houses Act, and the dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust. The methodologies of the practitioners from the 1960s represented a philosophical change in the heritage and museum movements, but the label of ‘professionalism’ gave it credibility and legitimacy over previous conservation approaches. This was reinforced by the creation of specialised groups, such as Australia ICOMOS, which widened the divide between professional and amateur practitioners. The efforts by the Vaucluse Park Trust to respond to changing museological approaches were overlooked, and the process of disbanding the Vaucluse Park Trust effectively marginalised and disempowered all community heritage organisations.

The HHT developed a systemised process of research, conservation and interpretation at Vaucluse House, which became the prototype for all its subsequent house museums. Emphasising empirical research, the HHT sought to present a historically accurate setting supported by documentary and physical evidence. Despite this philosophical ideal, the Trust did not abandon the ‘Wentworth as founding father’ myth, and retained the ‘Constitution Room’ until 1991. It highlighted the tension between the newly acquired dual roles of house museums as sites of cultural values, and house museums as sites of historical scholarship.

Comparing the early conservation and interpretation of Vaucluse House to its present presentation by the HHT demonstrated how heritage and conservation philosophies have changed. The work of the early Trustees may seem ‘unprofessional’ and uninformed when compared to current museum and heritage
standards, but as Charlotte Smith remarked, we should not 'continue to judge their actions through social history-focused lenses'.\textsuperscript{138} Even Pomfrett's conclusion noted that her 'analysis looks back on that history from the vantage point of 1994'.\textsuperscript{139}

The dismissal of this early period as ahistorical, unprofessional and lacking in scholarship overlooks the contributions made by these early preservationists to the development of the heritage movement and increasing the public's awareness and appreciation of Australia's past. It was also indicative of the cultural bias within the heritage movement of the late twentieth century, despite claims of objectivity. The ideals of 'authenticity' and 'accuracy' would be fully explored through Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House, as HHT explored the meanings of interpretation and conservation.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{139} Pomfrett, "New Reflections on an Old House: Vaucluse House and Its History as a Museum", 166.
Figure 6.1  Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House (Photographed by Anna Wong, 2005).
TWO SIDES OF THE CONSERVATION COIN: ‘FAKES’ OR THE ‘REAL THING’

Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, the preference for the period room style house museum was abandoned as the ideals of historical authenticity and accuracy dominated the house museum movement. The dismissal of the Vaucluse Park Trust, and its replacement by the HHT of NSW, was driven by the supposed need for professional heritage managers who were trained in empirical and scientific practices. Inheriting Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House, the HHT re-interpreted these properties and re-furnished the interiors to reflect their use by their former occupants using archival and physical evidence.

In essence, however, these house museums continued to be period house museums in that they presented modern recreations of historic architecture and interiors with antique period furniture. The main point of difference was that these houses were interpreted to a specific time and family occupancy, rather than as a generic representation of a stylistic period. Reflecting on the restoration of Elizabeth Bay House in the 1970s, James Broadbent noted that the confusion was generated by the lack of distinction between ‘interpretation’ and ‘conservation’, ‘particularly by architects’.\(^1\) Conservation was guided by empirical research and analysis of the physical and historical evidence, but the subjective belief that historic buildings should be restored to their architectural zenith remained.

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\(^1\) Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
Elizabeth Farm was restored by the Public Works Department within such a framework. Despite being the designated managers of the site, the HHT’s input during the conservation program was limited and its objections to its wholesale restoration were largely unheeded. For James Broadbent, it sparked a crusade to develop a methodology that clearly defined the differences between conservation and interpretation, which culminated in two very different house museums - namely Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House.

This chapter examines how the HHT redefined the house museum in the mid-1980s through its work at these two properties, and in doing so, challenged the architectural focus of the heritage movement. At first glance, the philosophical approach adopted for each house appeared diametrically opposed. Elizabeth Farm, the former colonial home of John and Elizabeth Macarthur, was furnished with ‘fake’ reproduction nineteenth century furniture, whereas Rouse Hill House and its collection of authentic furnishings and objects was ‘frozen’ without restoration. As curator for both these museums, James Broadbent was actually guided by the same philosophical approach and represented ‘two sides of the same coin’, where ‘the distinction between real and fake, between conservation and interpretation, between historical artefacts and explanatory props, [is] explicit’.²

Broadbent attributed his ideas to the nineteenth century art critic, John Ruskin, but he was not alone. The development of these two house museums demonstrated the growing influence of American material culture studies and historical archaeology in Australia. Despite their apparent differences, Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House were based on the notion that the material world constituted a form of historical evidence that not only provided information about the function or appearance of an object, but also an insight into the cultural and historical context of its creator and user. Calthorpes’ House in Canberra, a 1920s bungalow with an intact household collection, was established as a house museum in 1984 based on similar ideas. It assumed that the history and significance of a place was intrinsically linked to the physical integrity of the building, its contents and setting.

Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House elevated the HHT to the forefront of the house museum and heritage movements. Their philosophical basis was innovative.

and sophisticated, and the museums proved to be professionally, publicly and politically popular. As the first museum acquired after Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, the successful opening of Elizabeth Farm allowed the Trust to broaden its responsibilities considerably.

Up to this point, the role of the HHT was restricted to furnishing and managing restored historic buildings as house museums, with the Department of Planning and Environment responsible for their conservation. The Trust did not believe that the two processes were separate and objected to the comprehensive restoration of Elizabeth Farm to an architectural ideal. Nevertheless, the successful opening of Elizabeth Farm as a house museum enabled the Trust to assume full control of its future properties. Furthermore, the Trust was no longer restricted to managing government-owned historic houses. It assumed the task of defining the State’s heritage by actively seeking historic houses which exemplified its philosophical ideals, and broadened the range and type of houses in its portfolio, including Meroogal, Rose Seidler House and Susannah Place.

MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE HISTORICAL RECORD

The conservation and interpretative approach used by the HHT at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate reflected the growing influence of social history, the social sciences, and in particular, American studies in material culture on Australian museum and heritage practices. Up until the 1970s, the interpretative aim of a house museum was to exhibit period settings of high style architecture, decorative arts and furnishings. Beginning as ‘colonial kitchens’ at Sanitary Fairs during the late nineteenth century in America, the concept of the period room and its colonial revival ideals were adopted by major museums in the early twentieth century including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Geffrye Museum in London. Henry Francis Du Pont’s

Peter Watts challenged my claim that the interpretation and conservation of Elizabeth Farm was influenced by material culture studies. He noted that he ‘had no knowledge of American studies’ when he wrote the museum plan for Elizabeth Farm and that it was a ‘creative reaction’ to the circumstances of acquiring an over-restored house that did not include a collection (Peter Watts, per.comm. 2 February 2007). While acknowledging the innovative approach to how Elizabeth Farm was interpreted and furnished, this chapter also draws out the philosophical threads that connected HHT with broader museological trends in Australia, England and America at the time. Refer to Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of the historical development of the period room.
Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate

Winterthur Museum brought the period room genre to its peak. Opened in 1959, it remains one of the most notable period room house museums with an unrivalled collection of colonial American decorative arts and furnishings.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the rise of social history in the 1960s and its reference to the social sciences challenged the romanticised restoration and furnishing of house museums. The work of Henry Glassie and James Deetz in folklore history and historical archaeology during the 1970s was instrumental in garnering acceptance of material culture studies and the validity of everyday objects as evidence. Their anthropological examinations of material culture resulted in the acceptance of vernacular architecture and the domestic cultural environment as important components of the historical record.

Such studies in material culture revolutionised house museum and heritage practices. The potential of the home setting and its 'ordinary' domestic objects as evidence provided a new resource for researching the history of gender relations, domesticity and the working-class - subjects and groups previously silent in traditional documentary sources. Following this lead in the early 1980s, the first wave of material culture studies demonstrated the value of domestic environment in historical research. Ken Ames' study of hall furnishings in Victorian America, Ruth Cowan's study of advertisements, household appliances and its impact on housework, and Lisabeth Cohen's study of working-class interiors and furnishings, were similar in their use of material culture as historical evidence.

This changing tide in historical research was not purely academic. Historians from this era were also leaving their mark at museums and cultural institutions. For

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example, Cary Carson, the Vice President of Research at Colonial Williamsburg, was one of the first social historians employed by the museum in the late 1970s to provide a more democratic and egalitarian interpretation of the historic site. The influence of American material culture studies also filtered into Australian house museum practices in the 1980s. Interpreting Calthorpes’ House in 1985, Anne Bickford drew directly from the work of James Deetz and Cary and Barbara Carson.

Located in Canberra, Calthorpes’ House is a California bungalow that was built and furnished in 1927 (Figure 6.2). It was one of the first houses to be built in the nation’s capital, and was the home of John and Della Calthorpe and their two daughters. After John’s death in 1950, Della remained in the house until she died in 1979. The Commonwealth Government purchased the house in 1984 and conserved it as a house museum - not because the Calthorpes were a historically

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important family, or that the house was architecturally unique, but because ‘its contents, furnishings, and gardens [were] virtually unchanged since it was built’:

So little [had] been altered in the intervening 60 years that it provide[d] the visitor with an unusual opportunity to understand the material world of the family who lived there.8

As the curator, Anne Bickford faced the challenge of justifying the importance of a twentieth century house that contained familiar household objects at a time when the public associated house museums with grand colonial homes filled with rare antiques (Figure 6.3). Rather than determining the value of an object or place by its intrinsic aesthetic characteristics or rarity, Bickford based its significance upon the potential to reveal the cultural milieu in which it was situated. For Bickford, this was a form of ‘material history’ – ‘a history through objects rather than the history of objects’.9 It was concerned with:

the history of artefacts from the point of view of what they tell us about the behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs of the people who used them, and the society which produced them.10

Calthorpes’ House was important because its architectural style was representative of middle-class tastes in the 1920s. Its internal design and configuration also reflected the increasing preoccupation with hygiene and efficiency in housework, as exemplified by the use of clinical white tiles and surfaces in the bathroom and kitchen (Figure 6.4). The objects and appliances revealed changing household technologies, as well as the tastes and interests of the Calthorpe family. Bickford described the house as ‘a window into a lost world; an authentic record which can be read, studied, and interpreted like any other physical document’ and how:11

8 Annie Bickford, Calthorpes’ House Museum Guide (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), 1. It should be noted that the house interiors were partially recreated when it became a museum. Various family members lived in the house between the time that Della Calthorpe died and when the ACT government acquired the property. During this time, room settings were changed. The Calthorpes’ youngest daughter, Dawn Waterhouse, was vital in reconstructing the room settings.


10 Ibid.

Figure 6.3
Most of the rooms at Calthorpe's House, including the living room (above) and dining room (below), were furnished and decorated in 1927 (photographed by John Houldsworth, 1986 (Department of Environment and Heritage).
Figure 6.4
The white bathroom and kitchen reflected the preoccupation with hygiene and cleanliness in the early twentieth century (from Anne Bickford, Calthorpes' House Museum Guide, 2003).
Calthorpes' House and surrounding gardens are genuine survivors and not reconstructions, all areas and items – the furniture, the decorative treatments, the documentation, the intact wall surfaces, the shape of the garden beds, and even the assortment of abandoned items in the cubby house – are of equal importance. The completeness of the collection represents a rare and significant social document.\(^\text{12}\)

The reading of Calthorpes' House as a 'social document' typified the shift in house museum interpretation. Placing such rhetoric aside however, how has this reading of Calthorpes' House changed our understanding of Australian cultural history?

Reflecting social history subjects, Calthorpes' House introduced new areas of interpretation in house museums, such as domestic technologies and family life. Yet, whether its acquisition and interpretation changed how visitors read the cultural environment is questionable. When guided through the museum, visitors were directed to two main points – that the main items of furniture and soft furnishings all dated to 1927 (when Mrs Calthorpe travelled to Sydney to purchase the collection for the newly completed house); and that the house layout and design reflected attitudes of the time (such as the preoccupation with hygiene as reflected by the stark white bathroom and kitchen, and changing childrearing practices that provided children with separate bedrooms).\(^\text{13}\)

The correlation between when the main furniture items were purchased and the completion of the house formed part of the property's importance, but such a focus was at the expense of other ephemera that really distinguished the house from other period room settings. As Elaine Lawson, the former Senior Curator of the ACT Museums and Galleries Unit, observed:

\[\text{A study of interiors of the 1920s might certainly produce an accurate generic sitting room and dining room, but it could never achieve the density of unrelated quirky, personal touches which have been accumulated over the house's lifetime.}\(^\text{14}\)

As a 1927 time capsule, Calthorpes' House could easily be recreated, but it was the family's ephemera that distinguished it from other period room house museums.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{13}\) Based on guided tour of Calthorpes' House in October 2004.
Certainly, details like the bundle of receipts hanging by the kitchen door and the blue cloth for the laundry provided a personal touch, but the focus on the 1920s collection was at the expense of interpreting the historical development of the house and how it changed in relation to the family’s history.

Calthorpes’ House broadened the meaning of heritage to include buildings and histories beyond the colonial period, but this was limited to extending the public’s sense of aesthetics to the twentieth century. Nevertheless, intact furnishings and decorative finishes became a primary criterion for conserving subsequent historic houses as museums. Other house museums with intact collections acquired during this period included Miss Trail’s House in Bathurst by the National Trust, and Meroogal, Seidler House and Rouse Hill Estate by the HHT.

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE? CONSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION AT ELIZABETH FARM AND ROUSE HILL ESTATE

For James Broadbent, the campaign to distinguish between ‘conservation’ and ‘interpretation’, and demonstrate the historical potential of material culture was sparked when researching the history of his own house in the 1970s. “The Cottage”, an 1811 verandahed bungalow in Mulgoa, is one of the oldest surviving timber buildings in Australia. It is currently listed as a heritage place by Penrith City Council, but at the time, the Historic Buildings Committee of the National Trust noted that the house would be worth classifying only if it was restored. It was a statement which Broadbent “reacted to absolutely violently”:

I just couldn’t understand how a house may not be worth classifying unless it was restored, and how restoration could add to the heritage significance of a place.\textsuperscript{15}

He had similar concerns about the ‘juggling of interpretation and conservation’ when he was engaged as the curator at Elizabeth Bay House in 1977. Broadbent recalled how architects regarded a reproduction shutter as being the same as the

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
original item and how this was exacerbated by the ‘wishy-washy’ definitions provided by the *Burra Charter*. Under the Charter, ‘conservation’ included:

> The processes of looking after a place so as to retain its *cultural significance*. It includes maintenance and may according to circumstance include *preservation*, *restoration*, *reconstruction* and *adaptation* and will commonly be a combination of more than one of these.

Such a wide-ranging and all encompassing definition spurred Broadbent to advocate against such practices and to show the:

> distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’, between the conservation and in the keeping of something, and the interpretation meaning translating . . . what the significance of it is . . . that fake shutters and heritage colour schemes have nothing to do with conservation, but they may be the most appropriate way of interpreting the place.

Interpretation and conservation were ‘vastly different, but they [were] opposed only in the sense that they [were] complementary – the obverse and reverse of the same coin’. The analogy became Broadbent’s philosophical trademark statement, where:

> The ‘coin’ is the material culture linked to the place – “linked”, but not necessarily within or attached physically to the place. It is also the appreciation of that material in understanding the place.

It was with such ideas that Broadbent approached the interpretation of Elizabeth Farm, and later the conservation of Rouse Hill House.

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16 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
18 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
20 Ibid.
ELIZABETH FARM: SYMBOLISING ‘THE IDEAS AND AMBITIONS OF THE COLONY’S FIRST FIFTY YEARS’

Located in Parramatta, Elizabeth Farm is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Australia. Coupled with this mark of distinction, Elizabeth Farm was also the home of John and Elizabeth Macarthur (Figure 6.5). As such, this historic home was synonymous with the early agricultural, economic and political history of New South Wales.

Leaving their home in Devon, the Macarthurs with their fifteen-month old son Edward, arrived in the new colony on the Second Fleet in 1790. As a military officer with little prospects of promotion following the end of the American War of Independence, Macarthur improved his ranking by transferring as a lieutenant to the New South Wales Corps, then being enlisted for duty in New South Wales. It was a chance ‘of reaping the most material advantages’ – an expectation that was amply fulfilled.21

In 1792, the Commanding Officer of the New South Wales Corp, Major Francis Grose, appointed Macarthur the regimental paymaster. The position came with a substantial salary increase. When Grose became acting-Governor following Phillip's departure, Macarthur was assigned to the more prominent role of inspector of public works. It was a position that gave him extensive control of the colony's convict labour and materials.

Grose continued his generosity towards Macarthur, granting him 100 acres of land in Parramatta in February 1793. The new estate was named Elizabeth Farm. With his access to convict labour, the Macarthurs were able to clear and cultivate fifty acres. This earned them a further one hundred acres. Convict artisans were also assigned to building their home, and in November 1793, the Macarthurs with their three children moved into their new verandahed bungalow (Figure 6.6).

From such simple beginnings, the Macarthurs and their home became Australian historical icons. In 1908, Mary Salmon described the 'founder' of the 'first Australian home' as 'perhaps the most important man of his day in times when individualism stood out more prominent than it does in this era of great
combines’.\textsuperscript{22} Elizabeth Farm was recognised as the place where ‘Macarthur began his first enterprises in the great industry which from very small beginnings has become our greatest wealth producing asset’.\textsuperscript{23}

The asset was of course wool, and John Macarthur was credited with the successful experimentation of crossing hair-bearing sheep with English breeds, notwithstanding other figures, like Reverend Samuel Marsden, who were also instrumental in the development of the wool industry. Macarthur was honoured as ‘the founder of the Australian Wool Industry’,\textsuperscript{24} but it was not an entirely romantic rags-to-riches story. He was undoubtedly self-determined, but his success was also based on manipulation and conflict with his contemporaries.

Historical accounts, particularly those written in the early twentieth century, presented Macarthur in noble and enterprising terms.\textsuperscript{25} As such, his return to England in 1801 was supposedly to provide evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on the development of the wool industry in the colony.\textsuperscript{26} The real reason for this long voyage was that Macarthur faced court martial after being arrested for wounding the Lieutenant Governor, Colonel Paterson in a duel. Renowned for his quarrelsome and arrogant disposition, it was one of many disagreements with his superiors. Without any witnesses however, the charges were dismissed and Macarthur took the opportunity of his London visit to further his commercial and agricultural interests in New South Wales.

In 1803, he prepared a \textit{Statement of the Improvement and Progress of the Breed of Fine Woolled Sheep in New South Wales}, and as an excellent example of self-promotion, presented himself to Lord Camden, the Secretary of State and Colonies, as the colonial representative of the wool industry.\textsuperscript{27} Having successfully persuaded Camden on the suitability of New South Wales for wool production, Macarthur

\textsuperscript{22} Mary Salmon, "Historic Homes of N.S. Wales: Elizabeth Farm - the Home of the Macarths", (Magazine) \textit{Sunday Times}, 23 August 1908, 21.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} anon., "Australia's Oldest Building: Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta", \textit{Building} (24 November 1938): 25.


\textsuperscript{26} anon., "Australia's Oldest Building: Elizabeth Farm, Parramatta", 25.

returned to the colony with a grant for five thousand acres of land, the promise of a further five thousand acres, and Spanish sheep from the Royal flock. He also obtained permission to resign from the army and received official endorsement to develop a wool industry.

Macarthur selected five thousand acres of the rich pastoral land at the Cowpastures and named his new estate 'Camden' in honour of the Secretary of State. As with Elizabeth Farm, Mary Salmon also paid homage to this property with the hope that 'perhaps grateful Australians will make pilgrimages' to this house:

\[
\text{For not greater services the Greeks made Jason a demi-god. No doubt the Golden}
\]
\[
\text{Fleece was shorn from a merino ram.}\text{28}
\]

It was his wife Elizabeth, however, who assumed the management of the family's pastoral and mercantile interests. Her husband's role in the Rum Rebellion and the illegal arrest of Governor Bligh in January 1808, meant that Macarthur was once again required in London to appear at Major George Johnston's court martial. No longer in the army, Macarthur could not be court martialed for his involvement, but the new Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, was instructed to arrest him as the 'leading Promoter and Instigator of the mutinous Measures'.\text{29} He had little choice but to remain in England until 1817. After an absence of eight-a-half years, he was permitted to return to New South Wales on the condition that he was not to participate in public affairs.

Despite such a setback, it was nevertheless a new chapter for Macarthur, who returned amid much success and accolade for wool production. His wool attracted unprecedented prices in London and he was awarded gold medals for the quality and quantity of his exports by the Society of Arts in 1822 and 1824. This enabled Macarthur to successfully claim the 5,000 acres promised by Lord Camden. The family fortunes were firmly established and he began making improvements to Elizabeth Farm. This included extensions to the family home, which were designed by the fashionable architect John Verge (who also designed Elizabeth Bay House).

\text{28 Salmon, "Historic Homes of N.S. Wales: Elizabeth Farm - the Home of the Macarths", 21.}

\text{29 'John Macarthur to Bathurst, draft with John Macarthur to Elizabeth Macarthur, 19 August 1816', Macarthur Papers (A2898) (ML SLNSW).}
A second house, Hambledon, was also built on the estate in 1824. It provided additional accommodation and also served as a residence for the family’s governess, Penelope Lucas, in her retirement. Fulfilling a lifelong dream, Macarthur also began construction of a grand mansion at Camden (Figure 6.7).

Macarthur’s achievements were marred by his deteriorating mental state, which was characterised by periods of depression and irrationality. Whilst renovating Elizabeth Farm, he ordered his wife to leave the house and not to return until it the works were completed. His condition worsened with the news of his son’s death in London in September 1831. In the following year, he was confined to his former bedroom, now remodelled into the library. He was finally removed to Camden early in 1833 where he died in April. His death attracted very little public attention, with only an obituary in the Sydney Gazette on 15 April 1834. History was more favourable, and Elizabeth Farm remained a symbol of the ‘ideas and ambitions of the colony’s first fifty years’.  

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Figure 6.7
Camden Park by Conrad Martens, 1845 (Dixson Gallery of the SLNSW).

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Elizabeth continued living at Elizabeth Farm until her death in 1850, aged eighty-three. The house remained in the family until 1881, when the estate was sold to Septimus Alfred Stephen for £50,000. He subdivided the property in 1883, creating part of the current suburb of Harris Park. The main house was sold to J.W. Cliff for £6,000, who leased it as a boarding house and then as a glue factory. Facing financial difficulties, he sold the house with six acres of land to William Swann in 1904 for £600.

At a time when heritage conservation received little public attention, the Swann family were responsible for ensuring the survival of Elizabeth Farm. Dilapidated and neglected, William Swann repaired and repainted the house, re-fenced the yards and cultivated the garden. The Swanns regarded themselves as custodians of Elizabeth Farm and made minimal changes to the property (Figure 6.8).

Changing public sentiment after World War II meant that Elizabeth Farm was one of the six buildings in Parramatta to be placed on the Cumberland County Council's List of Historic Buildings in 1961.31 In the era of the Colonial Revival, the

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Cumberland County Council also purchased four acres of land surrounding the house and transferred this to the Parramatta City Council as a public park.\footnote{Ibid., 15.}


Facing old age and unable to maintain the house, the two remaining Swann daughters were required to sell Elizabeth Farm in 1968 (Figure 6.9). It was bought by a specially created Elizabeth Farm Museum Trust, which ensured that it remained in public ownership. It was subsequently resumed by the State Planning Authority in 1973 and transferred to the new Heritage Council of New South Wales in 1978.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure6_9.png}
\caption{Elizabeth Farm, 1968 (National Archive of Australia – A1200 L73989). The Elizabeth Farm Museum Trust purchased the property in 1968 from the Swann sisters.}
\end{figure}
Restoring Elizabeth Farm: A case of conservation or interpretation?

Under the State Planning Authority, the Government Architect’s Branch of the NSW Public Works Department began restoring Elizabeth Farm in 1974. This was managed by the Government Architect, Charles Percy Weatherburn, with the assistance of F.P. Bridges. They recommended ‘that before restoration is undertaken, every possible effort should be made to document the building fully and to determine as far as possible the history of the structure’.\(^{35}\) It was intended that:

> the project should have a scientific rather than a normal architectural basis and the resources of any discipline able to give relevant advice should be called upon . . . [and] decisions based solely on personal taste and individual judgment, no matter how well intentioned, are to be avoided.\(^{36}\)

The future use of the house had not been decided, but the Government Architect believed that it should be restored to the period 1868-1888, ‘showing the building as it was at its peak’ and that ‘all incongruous changes and additions should be removed’.\(^{37}\) A scientific and empirical approach to investigating, documenting and conserving the building was advocated, but the subjective belief that a building should be restored to the height of its architectural form remained.

In 1978, Elizabeth Farm was transferred to the Heritage Council of NSW. John (Ian) Thomson was also appointed the new Government Architect that year. The philosophical basis of the restoration program remained unchanged. The overall intention was to ‘show the architectural philosophies of the 1793-1835 period’ and also the ‘gentle changes’ that occurred between 1835 and 1880.\(^{38}\) Under the supervision of Ian Sansom from the Government Architect’s Branch, the physical restoration of Elizabeth Farm began in 1980. The project was promoted for its use of new conservation techniques and the Heritage Council touted these developments


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 2.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 5.


283
with the headline, ‘Modern technology rescues nation’s oldest house’. This included the use of epoxy resin to treat termite-damaged timbers, and the stablisation of lath and plaster ceilings with a special acrylic emulsion.

The year 1980 also marked the formation of the HHT and its Trustees were already considering future property acquisitions at their inaugural meeting in July. In November that year, they considered the acquisition of three houses, including Rouse Hill House, Elizabeth Farm and Throsby Park. Like Vaucluse House, the State government owned these properties, and there was a general assumption that they would be eventually transferred to the HHT after they were restored. For Throsby Park, the Trust indicated that it ‘had no view of this matter but would evaluate the property if asked to do so by the Premier’. For Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House, however, the Trust believed that it had an important role in conserving and managing these properties.

On 3 December 1980, the Heritage Council issued a Conservation Statement for Elizabeth Farm. It confirmed that the HHT would be the managing authority, and responsible for ‘the interpretation, care, control and management’ of the site. There was to be a distinct separation between the responsibilities of the Heritage Council and the HHT in conserving the property and its subsequent management. As such, the Heritage Council maintained control over the restoration works by the Government Architect’s Branch, with the Historic Houses Trust attending meetings and observing the progress on site. Elizabeth Farm did not vest in the HHT until 1984, the same year as its opening.

Such demarcated responsibilities created difficulties for the Trust, which perceived the tasks of conservation and interpretation as parts of the same management.

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process. Furthermore, the philosophical differences between the Trust, and the Government Architect’s Office and Heritage Council caused much tension. Anne Bickford recalled how ‘the restoration and final presentation became a matter of intense, prolonged and at times acrimonious debate as many different government bodies and conservation specialists attempted to influence the conservation process’. 45

The newly appointed Director of the HHT, Peter Watts, disagreed with the architecturally-based restoration undertaken by the Public Works Department, and indicated that:

The Historic Houses Trust is an organization which regards houses as places where people lived and not as architectural museum specimens. In restoring a house it is just as important to understand the family who occupied it as it is to understand the fabric of the house.46

One particular point of contention was the restoration of the roof. Elizabeth Farm was originally roofed with timber shingles. These were later covered by corrugated galvanised iron in 1880, but evidence of their material and form remained. The new iron roof was left unpainted until after the Swanns purchased the property in 1904, with a circa 1910 watercolour view of the house showing a grey unpainted iron roof. The Trust concluded that the roof was probably painted ‘tile red’ around 1920, when the rise of the Queen Anne Style popularised the use of Marseilles tiles and red roofs.47

46 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Director’s Report, Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982)’, HHT Minutes (April-October 1982), 18.

285
The Public Works Department intended to re-shingle the roof, which ‘meant destroying all the shingles there in order to have a set of fake shingles’ (Figure 6.10).⁴⁸ James Broadbent had been engaged as a curatorial consultant at Elizabeth Bay House and, although not officially involved at Elizabeth Farm, assumed more than a passing interest in the restoration program. Broadbent accepted that evidence from the Macarthur period was more significant than material from the Swann period, but opposed the idea of destroying evidence from this latter stage in order to ‘fake something’. It demonstrated a lack of distinction between ‘interpretation’ and ‘conservation’:

[the] distinction between the real and the fake, between the conservation and in the keeping of something, and the interpretation meaning translating it, letting people know what the significance of it is.⁴⁹

Broadbent challenged the assumption that a reproduction was just as significant as an original object or building element, and became involved in ‘very heated and

⁴⁸ Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October, 2002.
⁴⁹ Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
public rows over what was happening [at Elizabeth Farm] under the name of conservation’, including ‘a stand-up row in front of a lot of people’. 50

The ‘heated’ objections were partially successful. The roof was not re-shingled and the original shingles retained, but the iron roof was replaced and painted red for aesthetic purposes. The Trust considered this decision inconsistent with the overall restoration, which involved removing all decorative finishes and additions from the Swann period in favour of the 1830s Macarthur period. At the insistence of the HHT, the roof was re-painted a ‘natural zinc colour’ a few months before the official opening in 1984, ‘despite the apparent waste of money’. 51

Such disagreements highlighted the need for a uniform approach to conserving a historic building and its interpretation as a house museum. Peter Watts argued against the assumption that the Trust was a management and not a conservation authority, and therefore was responsible for these buildings only when the restoration program was completed. 52 Citing its work at Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, Watts believed that the Trust had the expertise to conserve other historic properties.

These views were formalised in February 1982 through the Trust’s Policy and Objectives Statements, and presented to the Premier three months later. 53 As the Director of the Division of Cultural Activities, Evan Williams supported these ideas, but with the qualification that:

Although many of the courses of action outlined are ones which the Government would endeavour to follow, such matters must be considered in the context of overall Government policy according to prevailing circumstances . . . I should emphasise that a document of this nature which expresses the views of the Trust cannot be endorsed

50 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
51 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 39 (13 February, 1984)’, HHT Minutes (Feb. – July 1984), 44.
52 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Director’s Report, Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982)’, HHT Minutes (April-October 1982), 17.
53 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Policy and Objectives Statements’, Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982), HHT Minutes (April-October 1982), 27-33; ‘Letter from Evan Williams, Director, Division of Cultural Activities, to Peter Watts, Director, Historic Houses Trust, dated 28 May 1982’, Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982), HHT Minutes (April-October 1982).
by the Premier as an expression of Government policy when the implications are so wide.\textsuperscript{54}

In September 1982, the Chairman of the Trust, Peter Stanbury, indicated that an agreement with the Heritage Council had been reached as to when Elizabeth Farm and Lyndhurst were to be transferred to the Trust. Such attempts by the Trust to clarify its objectives and provide a more direct involvement in the conservation of its properties were recognised by the Government with subsequent properties like Rouse Hill House, but not at Elizabeth Farm, perhaps an indication that the Trust had yet to prove itself.

**Furnishing Elizabeth Farm as a Museum of Genuine Fakes**

Despite the continuing control by the Heritage Council, the HHT began planning the museum interpretation and presentation of Elizabeth Farm, which included the preparation of a *Conservation Plan* in 1982.\textsuperscript{56} Explaining the significance of the site, the Trust included many standard statements that referred to Elizabeth Farm as ‘the oldest known European structure in Australia’; a ‘rare survival of early colonial architecture’; and:

\begin{quote}
its association with the pioneering Macarthur family and in particular John and Elizabeth Macarthur, who feature prominently in the political and pastoral development of the colony.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Continuing from Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House, it also highlighted the belief that a house museum setting should be historically specific to its occupants, and added that Elizabeth Farm was significant because:

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\textsuperscript{54} Letter from Evan Williams, Director, Division of Cultural Activities, to Peter Watts, Director, Historic Houses Trust, dated 28 May 1982', HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982)', *HHT Minutes (April-October 1982).*

\textsuperscript{56} Peter Watts, *Elizabeth Farm Conservation Plan* (Unpublished Report for Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1982).

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., Section 6.0.
Its history and atmosphere can be readily evoked because of the large surviving collection of original documentary evidence pertaining to the house and its occupants, and the existence of some of the earliest furniture.58

Compared to other early colonial houses, a large body of documentary material about the house and its occupants had survived. This included a collection of Macarthur family papers consisting of letters, diaries, accounts, inventories, plans and sketches. An 1854 inventory listing the household contents at the time of Elizabeth’s death was particularly useful. Elizabeth Farm was also the subject of numerous paintings and photographs, such as Joseph Lycett’s 1824 ‘Elizabeth Farm’, included in his *Views of Australia* (Figure 6.6).59

Private collections from descendants of the Macarthur family included pieces of furniture and objects originally from Elizabeth Farm. To help collate this information, Joy Hughes was engaged to undertake historical research at Elizabeth Farm in April 1983.60 This involved locating and transcribing letters and accounts by the Macarthurs and their associates that related to the history and furnishing of the house and its garden (Figure 6.11).

Due to the restoration of the house, the period to which the interiors were presented was already determined. The Trust, however, decided that:

> The domestic character of the house should be played up using every available piece of authenticated information. Its use as a family house should be reinforced, but without introducing more authenticated information than is necessary to create believable interiors. The use of abstractions, reproductions and illusions are permitted to achieve this.61

The use of ‘abstractions, reproductions and illusions’ came to fruition with the appointment of James Broadbent as curator of Elizabeth Farm in July 1983.

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58 Ibid.
60 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 31 (11 April, 1983), HHT Minutes (Nov. 1982 – May 1983), 4.
61 Watts, *Elizabeth Farm Conservation Plan*, Section 8.0.
Figure 6.11
Current museum interpretation of the Drawing Room (HHT). The drawing room was refurnished from written descriptions and a watercolour by Elizabeth Macarthur’s granddaughter in c. 1865 (below).

Figure 6.12
The drawing room by Elizabeth Macarthur. Album of Watercolours, c. 1865 (Private Collection, reproduced by HHT. Elizabeth Farm: A History and Guide, 1995.).
Several factors influenced Broadbent's approach to developing an alternative and more refined scheme for presenting a historically accurate and authentic house museum setting. First, the spatial arrangement of the rooms meant that it was 'a beautiful house to walk through' and this was an interpretational aspect to experiencing the house that could not be achieved by roped-off pens. Also, there was the issue of duplication. Elizabeth Bay House, although a grander residence, was a colonial house from the same period and social status. The use of similar furniture pieces at Elizabeth Farm meant displaying a similar collection. The overriding issue, however, was the goal of distinguishing between 'the real and the fake, the conservation and interpretation'.

Looking back on his work at Elizabeth Bay House, Broadbent acknowledged 'what evidence could be gleaned about the interiors as lived in by the Macleays, and what mementos of that family are available have been incorporated into the recreation':

> Yet there is no point in pretending that the rooms at Elizabeth Bay House represent the house as Alexander Macleay knew it. The furniture is not theirs, the interiors are not theirs.  

At Elizabeth Farm, Broadbent wanted to demonstrate:

> that a John Macarthur desk [was] far more important to interpret from a fake, then as a real desk of the 1830s . . . that the historical integrity was actually greater than the piece of furniture that happens to be old.

Instead of using period antique furniture like previous house museums, the interiors at Elizabeth Farm were recreated using replicas of existing Macarthur furniture and belongings, and documented soft furnishings. Fabrication and guesswork was avoided. For example, the main bedroom would usually include a wardrobe, but

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65 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
67 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
because a historical reference could not be found for one at Elizabeth Farm, it was omitted. Yet the inclusion of a replica bed and its soft furnishings effectively interpreted the use, arrangement and style of the room.

Through the descendants of the Macarthur family, the Trust was able to locate and reproduce seven pieces of furniture that were formerly in the house. These included:

1 dressing table; 2 four-post beds; 1 sideboard; 1 table desk and cupboard; 1 cupboard and 1 linen press.\(^\text{68}\)

Smaller items, such as a bonnet, inkwell and toilet mirror were also copied from the family’s collection.\(^\text{69}\)

These items ‘formed the backbone of the interior and maintain[ed] the integrity of the house as the Macarthurs lived in it’.\(^\text{70}\) The ‘icing’ or ‘sugar coating’ however was the more ephemeral soft furnishings such as the curtains, rugs, oilcloths, cane

\(^{68}\) Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 35 (12 September, 1983), HHT Minutes (June – Nov. 1983), 26.

\(^{69}\) Historic Houses Trust of NSW, “Loans from Lady Macarthur-Onslow”, HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 55 (9 September, 1985), HHT Minutes (July-Dec 1985), 29.

mats and chintzes (Figure 6.13). For Broadbent, these items created a ‘pretty’ interior, which would have otherwise been ‘too sparse and austere’. The floors were covered with Indian matting, in reference to the ‘three Calcutta rugs’ mentioned in an 1830 household list. Painted oilcloths were placed in the hallways. A copy of a letter written by Elizabeth Macarthur was placed on a replica writing table (Figure 6.14).

With a house furnished with ‘fakes’, barricades were not required. Visitors were encouraged to sit at Elizabeth’s writing desk, share her thoughts through her letter and admire her view of the garden. The house was also ‘brought to life’ by replicating daily and seasonal changes. Blinds were lowered in the afternoon to shield the interiors from the harsh sun, and the soft furnishings were changed according to the seasons. In winter, the gauze hangings from the bed frames were taken down and re-hung with bed curtains. Fireboards were removed and fires

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\[71\] Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
started on cold or wet days.\textsuperscript{72} It was the combined effect of such miscellaneous objects and daily routines that created a believable domestic setting while still adhering to the aims of historical accuracy.

Elizabeth Farm also appealed to the growing number of historic home renovators, who were eager to accurately recreate heritage colour schemes, decorative finishes and furnishings. The items at Elizabeth Farm were based on contemporaneous patterns, materials, and techniques, and fuelled the revival of interest in colonial arts and crafts. Local artisans were commissioned to reproduce nineteenth century terracotta pots, toys, oilcloths, and curtains. Cane matting was obtained from China, oil lamps from Italy, cane chairs from the Philippines and kangaroo skin rugs from Australia for the library.\textsuperscript{74}

The public’s interest in this aspect of the property prompted the Trust to organise a public program on ‘colonial crafts’ at each of its properties in April 1985. Furthermore:

\begin{quote}
It was felt that these dying crafts [in] lacemaking, bookbinding, decorative paint finishes needed to be revived in an appropriate historical environment.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Craft activities were chosen to relate specifically to each house. Nineteenth century sewing was selected for Elizabeth Bay House, corresponding with the refurbishment of its bedrooms. Stencilling and decorative painted finishes were demonstrated at Vaucluse House, and nineteenth century pottery and bookbinding at Elizabeth Farm.

The culmination of this colonial craft revival, and the reproduction of known Macarthur furniture and objects, was a partially furnished house museum that successfully suggested the domestic environment of the Macarthur family without recreating every element. Broadbent likened the idea to that of a ‘theatre set’, with

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{72} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Elizabeth Farm Report’, Minutes of Meeting No. 51 (13 May, 1985)’, \textit{HHT Minutes} (Feb. – June 1985), 13.
\textsuperscript{75} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 50 (22 April, 1985)’, \textit{HHT Minutes} (Feb. – June 1985), Agenda.
\end{flushright}
museum objects used as stage props to bring the set to life. In the absence of
room barriers and ‘stern-faced attendants’, visitors were encouraged to interact with
the house and its contents.

In hindsight, Broadbent considered the philosophical basis of Elizabeth Farm to be
‘very obvious [and] not very forward looking at all’. At the time, however, it was
an experimental concept, which required subtlety and balance. As Broadbent
recalled, Peter Watts supported the idea, but ‘was willing to hedge his bet both ways
by getting a second set of real period furniture’. Paul Kenny, an antique dealer,
was commissioned to purchase upholstered chairs, a dining table, fenders, tables,
mirrors and lamps in Britain for £2,590. Cedar and Rosewood easy chairs and a
Mahogany toilet mirror were purchased from Armitage Auction in Tasmania for
$1,380. For Peter Watts, the use of period furniture was never a serious option,
and the items purchased were ‘accoutrements, some of which were used and still
are’, including items like the dining table.

Figure 6.15
Jill Wran, James Broadbent
and Sue Hunt at the opening
of Elizabeth Farm, 1984
(HHT).

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76 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
77 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
78 Interview with James Broadbent, 1 October 2002.
79 James Broadbent, “Elizabeth Farm Report”, Minutes of Meeting No. 35 (12 September,
80 James Broadbent, “Elizabeth Farm Report”, HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 35 (12
81 Peter Watts, per.comm., 2 February 2007.

295
In August 1984, the Trust resolved that most of these purchased period pieces were not required and could be sold. This decision was made two months after the opening of Elizabeth Farm on 17 June, in light of the museum's success (Figure 6.15). The property attracted 5,097 visitors in the first fortnight, and 48,000 in its first year. In 1985, Delicia Kite, a member of the NSW Legislative Council, praised the Historic Houses Trust's:

new and unusual presentation policy whereby visitors are not restrained by ropes or barriers but are able to experience the whole house, even to the point of using all furniture in the house.

It was one of the first house museums in Australia that encouraged visitors, including children, to actively experience a historic site and its interiors (Figure 6.16). Kite was particularly impressed with the education program, which was 'booked up to three months ahead'. The program was so popular with teachers and students that school children comprised twenty-five per cent of visitor numbers.

**Figure 6.16**
The use of replica furniture and objects allow visitors to wander freely through the museum.
(Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005)

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The level of visitation also reflected the public’s receptiveness to this new house museum form compared to the traditional ‘hands-off’ period room setting. In 1985, the neighbouring Experiment Farm Cottage struggled to attract more that a 1,000 visitors each month. Elizabeth Farm, on the other hand drew 4,000-5,000 visitors per month.86

Its professional and public appeal strengthened the status of the HHT within the heritage and museums sectors, and also within the State government. From this point, the Trust possessed greater influence and authority in determining which houses it acquired and how they were to be conserved and interpreted.

Greater control meant greater flexibility in experimenting with different house museum forms. The Trust’s involvement at Rouse Hill Estate followed quickly upon Elizabeth Farm. Again, the Trust adopted a non-conventional approach by deciding not to restore the property — an approach directly opposite to Elizabeth Farm. For James Broadbent, it was an opportunity to continue his campaign against romanticised conservation, and to display the other side of the coin.

ROUSE HILL HOUSE: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

The history of Rouse Hill House is one of familial longevity, marked by cycles of prosperity and social decline, over six generations beginning in 1813. The Rouse family were not as socially or politically prominent as the Macarthurs, but their family home became one of the most important historic sites in New South Wales because their story was encapsulated in the house and its intact collection, gardens and outbuildings that represented nearly 170 years of continuous occupation.

According to Caroline Rouse Thornton, a sixth generation descendant of the Rouse family, Richard Rouse built the sandstone Georgian house between 1813 and 1818. It was ‘updated’ with a canopied verandah and a substantial two-storey servants’ wing by subsequent generations, but the original main house remained relatively unchanged.
In 1838, a traveller recorded:

I proceeded along the Windsor Road which from Baulkham Hills to Mr Rouse’s residence, presented a landscape of the most pleasing character. It was really delightful to behold the splendid orchards which skirted the road... After passing the residence of Mr Rouse which is situated on the summit of a lofty hill, and, in the front of which a luxuriant grove of orange trees is planted, nothing worth notice intervenes until the traveller arrives within the sight of the town of Windsor.\(^{87}\)

A hundred and forty years later, another traveller observed:

A bare track leads up from the highway which sweeps past the slumbering old house in a cutting which breaks through the ancient straight driveway... A long hedge runs beside the drive made of olive and geraniums; it is thus a descendant of all those hedges of geraniums in Sydney and New South Wales referred to by earlier visitors.

At the bottom of the hedge, we looked up at the house... two storied with its verandahs on the lower story only, the ghosts of the past descend to welcome us. This house has been in the same family since it was first built in the 1820s.\(^{88}\)

The luxuriant grove of oranges was gone, and the proliferation of mass produced colonial inspired housing estates along the realigned Windsor Road crept precariously close to Rouse Hill House. Had Victor Crittenden continued up the driveway, he would have met Gerald Terry, the last family occupant. By this time, only 8.5 acres of the former 450-acre estate remained.

In a similar story to John and Elizabeth Macarthur, Richard Rouse arrived to a fledgling colony with his wife, Elizabeth, and two children in 1801 with aspirations of wealth (Figure 6.17). Born in Oxfordshire in 1774 to a cabinetmaker and shopkeeper, Rouse also lived the dream of achieving success in New South Wales. This began in 1805, when he was granted 100 acres at North Richmond and was appointed Superintendent of Public Works at Parramatta. His allegiance to Governor Bligh in 1808 resulted in his dismissal from his post, but Governor

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Macquarie reinstated him in January 1810, as well as appointing him auctioneer at Parramatta that October.

![Figure 6.17](Left) Portrait of Richard Rouse. 1847 by William Griffith. (The Hamilton Rouse Hill Trust Collection).  
(Right) Portrait of Elizabeth Rouse. c.1825-30. A similar portrait was painted by William Griffith in 1847 (ML SLNSW – MIN 77).

As Superintendent, Rouse had access to both building materials and labour. He was responsible for the construction of public buildings, tollhouses and turnpikes in the areas of Parramatta, Windsor and Liverpool. This included a tollhouse on the Parramatta to Windsor Turnpike. As an example of his shrewd business sense, Rouse began building a single-ranged inn on the adjacent hilltop in 1813, even though he was not officially granted this area of land until 1816.

Around this time, Rouse also supervised the extensions to Government House in Parramatta for Governor Macquarie and his wife Elizabeth. This involved adding a series of rooms and a stair hall behind the single range of Governor Hunter’s former house. Wings were also added to each side of the main building, which transformed it to its present form. According to James Broadbent, the additions at Government House inspired Rouse to also double his premises, and probably stemmed from his decision to turn the proposed inn into his family residence.89 This coincided with

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his official 450-acre grant in the Castle Hill area, which Macquarie suggested be named ‘Rouse Hill’. This holding increased with a further grant of 150 acres in 1818, and in 1823, Rouse consolidated his estate with the purchase of an adjoining 600-acre property. Rouse Hill now consisted of 1200 acres.

Despite the size of the estate, it was not used for primary production but served as the family seat. The crossing of the Blue Mountains by Wentworth, Blaxland and Lawson in 1813 and the subsequent opening of the area west of the Great Dividing Range promised even greater wealth for the burgeoning colony. The prominent location of Rouse Hill House overlooked Windsor Road, the western arterial from Parramatta. It also served as the gateway to the Rouse’s expansive pastoral and agricultural interests in the west. In 1822, Rouse referred to his ‘Country Seat at Rouse Hill’, and in 1828, he was able to retire to his estate as a landed proprietor of 10,000 acres, increasing to 230,000 acres by the time of his death in 1852.91

Figure 6.18
Family at Rouse Hill, 1859, photographed by Thomas Wingate (ML, SLNSW).

Rouse’s estate was divided between his children, and Rouse Hill passed to the second son, Edwin, who moved into the house with his wife, Hannah. The couple had been living at ‘Guntawang’, the principal family property located west of the Blue Mountains near Mudgee. Edwin continued to extend the landholdings and financial interests inherited from his father. The growing family fortunes enabled him to renovate and extend Rouse Hill House. Engaging the builder-architect

91 Quoted in Ibid. 3.
James Houison, a canopied verandah was added along the lower storey of the main house in 1856 (Figure 6.18).

Edwin died unexpectedly in 1862, and again the family estate was divided amongst the children, with the youngest son, Edwin Stephen, inheriting Rouse Hill at the age of thirteen. His marriage to Eliza Buchanan in 1874 signified the next phase of the Rouse family. Their first daughter, Nina, was born a year later. Their second daughter, Kathleen, followed in 1878. The family lived in easy comfort from the income established by the previous two generations. It also funded further improvements to the main house and gardens.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 6.19**
The house from the north showing the 1865 wing extension and the old stables (Mt. SL.NSW).

In 1865-67, the kitchen buildings at the rear of the house were rebuilt as a large two-storey brick wing and the original section was re-roofed with slate (Figure 6.19). The main rooms on the ground floor were redecorated with marble pieces to the fireplaces and furnished with fashionable Louis revival furniture. New wallpaper dados and friezes, with graining and marbling were painted and stencilled onto the original decorative scheme. Externally, the gardens were extended into a former orchard area and landscaped to include a latticed summerhouse above the old well (Figure 6.20). The pièce de résistance, however, were the stables. Designed by the renowned architect, John Horbury Hunt, they included buttressed brickwork, copper roof detailing and a ventilation fleche and formed the centre of the district's hunting activities.
The high life of parties, race picnics and seasons in town came to an abrupt end in the 1890s, due mostly to Edwin Stephen's poor business sense and exacerbated by the economic depression. The daughters were adults by this stage, and Nina married George Terry from nearby Box Hill in 1895. George was the great-grandson of Richard Rouse (through his daughter, Eleanor). The couple lived in Box Hill, where they had five sons – Geoffrey, Roderick, Edwin, Gerald and Noel. Maintaining an extravagant lifestyle, they were bankrupted and Nina and her husband moved to Rouse Hill House in 1924, shortly after her mother's death.

This began a family rift, with Kathleen resentful of Nina's leisurely life and poor financial management. Nina's sister had taken a very different path. She became romantically involved with Andrew Gaylitt, who was allegedly a Latvian spy and was subsequently refused residency in Australia. Kathleen traveled overseas to visit
him in 1930, and again in 1932. She never returned. She was murdered by bandits and her body was found in a river in Harbin, China.

Edwin Stephen died the previous year, leaving his estate to his daughters. Kathleen had excluded her sister and nephews in her will, and her death almost resulted in the dispersal of the furnishings and contents. Her beneficiaries included Andrew Gaylit who was provided a lifetime interest in Rouse Hill, the ‘King’s School and the Church of England Homes’. In 1934, the King’s School and Church of England Homes declined their entitlements to the furniture, jewellery and stock after appeals from the family.\textsuperscript{92} Fortuitously, the estate remained intact.

In the subsequent years, Nina’s sons began setting up their own households at Rouse Hill. Gerald and his wife occupied the Servants’ Quarters in 1934 before moving to the Cottage. Two years later, Geoffrey Terry and his wife moved into the Servants’ Quarters. Nina and George continued living in the main house.

The family’s financial status improved during the 1950s as land values around Rouse Hill increased. Nina started a family company to enable the subdivision of the estate. The original 450-acre grant was transferred to Roderick, Edwin and Gerald in 1956. Their father, George, died the following year. The brothers transferred the remaining freehold to Rouse Hill Estate Property Pty. Ltd. in 1961, leaving only 106 acres.

When Nina died in 1968, the remaining was subdivided into four lots, with the brothers retaining a 20-acre portion that included the main house. The property passed to Roderick and Gerald in 1972 and the brothers subdivided this last allotment in 1975. Only 8.513 acres, including the main house, stables and surrounding gardens and paddocks remained, with each brother as equal owner.

Nina’s death also meant Gerald and his wife moved into the main house, and Roderick moved into the service wing. Relations between the brothers deteriorated, and so began a long episode bedevilled by legal, government and family problems over the rights of occupancy to the property and ownership of the household collection.

‘In the Public Interest’: Resumption of Rouse Hill Estate and the End of Family Ownership

Rouse Hill was more than a chronicle of one family’s history - it was also a story of government intervention, the supplanting of private rights, and the detrimental effects on family relations. Growing family rifts were complicated by the involvement of the State government and resumption of the estate in 1978 as ‘a place of historic interest’. The historical importance of the property was first brought to notice by the National Trust in 1968, which included the site in its Register of buildings ‘classified A’. In addition to its description of the architectural features and garden design, the National Trust noted that:

Rouse Hill House is one of Australia’s few extant large private dwellings to survive intact from the pre-1822 period . . . The continuous ownership by the descendants of Richard Rouse for a century and a half, and the numerous treasures it contains, renders it a house of the highest importance.

On 5 May 1971, the Governor declared Rouse Hill House a place of historic interest under the Blacktown Planning Scheme Ordinance. It provided the State Planning Authority with the power to acquire the land and buildings ‘for the purpose of preserving it for the public use and enjoyment’.

In 1972, pursuant to a Deed of Family Arrangement, Roderick and Gerald Terry became the owners, as tenants in common, of Rouse Hill House, its contents and remaining land. Each brother continued to reside in separate sections of the house. The Commission of Environment and Planning approached Gerald and Roderick in 1976 with the offer to purchase the property and all the household contents. The negotiations were unsuccessful because Roderick had granted his daughter, Miriam, and her husband, Ian Hamilton, the option to purchase his half-share of the property and furniture that same year. Roderick was suffering from ill-health, and Miriam often stayed at Rouse Hill House to care for him. When the Hamiltons exercised their option in March 1977, they also moved into Rouse Hill House with Roderick.

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93 Government Gazette, 1 March 1978.
95 Quoted by Justice J. Lee in "Minister Administering the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 V. Hamilton and Another," (Supreme Court of New South Wales (Common Law Division), 1983), 182-183.
Gerald Terry, however, was interested in the Commission’s offer. Unbeknownst to either Roderick or the Hamiltons, Gerald had obtained from the Planning and Environment Commission six months earlier on 18 January 1977:

Assurance that you and your wife would be allowed to continue, during your lifetimes, to live at Rouse Hill House, if the building was purchased or resumed by the Commission, and that no other person would be allowed to live in the house without your agreement, other than your brother, Roderick, under the arrangements which have existed for the past 7 years.96

He also commenced proceedings in the Equity Division of the Supreme Court of NSW for the appointment of trustees to oversee the sale of the property. Roderick filed a cross-claim for the division or sale of the furniture and effects. The Commission intended awaiting the outcome of these proceedings with the aim of resuming the property if it passed into other hands. When the Hamiltons informed the Commission in May 1977 of their intention to purchase the remainder of the estate, the Commission began the requisite process for resumption.97

The Minister approved the resumption in principle on 18 June 1977 and the Terrys and Hamiltons were notified on 2 July 1977.98 On 14 October 1977, however, the Minister advised all parties that he was not taking immediate action of resumption but would allow ‘a reasonable time’ for the owners to reach an agreement that would also be satisfactory to the Commission.99 An agreement was not forthcoming and the Minister for Planning and Environment proclaimed Rouse Hill House a historic building, and purchased the land and buildings by notice published in the Government Gazette on 1 March 1978.100 According to the Commission:

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97 "The Minister V. Hamilton," 189.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 191.
The house was resumed to bring it into public ownership and forestall the probability that it would be sold and its valuable contents, which are an integral part of the house, dispersed.\(^{101}\)

In effect, the Government ended 160 years of continuous family occupation. It also jeopardised the survival of the collection by alienating the Hamiltons, whose request to remain in the house in the event of resumption was denied.\(^{102}\)

In December 1978, a Deed of Release was executed between the Commission and Gerald Terry for part payment of compensation for the resumption and his share of the contents. The Hamiltons, who objected to the government's intervention and sought to fulfil Roderick's wish that the property remained in the ownership and occupation of the family, rejected the offer for compensation.\(^{103}\)

Roderick Terry died on 1 May 1980, and the Commission determined in June that the Hamiltons must vacate Rouse Hill House. The Commission was replaced with the new Department of Planning and Environment in September 1980, and as a result, the Hamiltons were not notified until October 1980. Refusing to leave, the Department served upon them a notice to vacate the property under section 97 of the Public Works Act on 18 December 1980.\(^{104}\) In response, the Hamiltons complained to the New South Wales Ombudsman about the occupancy agreement between the Commission and Gerald, and the subsequent notice to quit their premises.

In 1981, the Ombudsman determined that the former Commission had acted wrongfully and:

> The problem about the decision which was taken as reflected in the letter of 18th January, 1977, was that it represented the wishes of one party only, namely Mr G.

\(^{101}\) Ibid.

\(^{102}\) Chief Administrative Officer, Commission of Planning and Environment, quoted in "The Minister V. Hamilton," 189.


\(^{104}\) "The Minister V. Hamilton," 196.
Terry and his children. The other party, namely Mr R. Terry and the Hamiltons, were at this stage entirely unaware of the arrangements which had been made. 105

Due to the lack of consultation with Roderick Terry and the Hamiltons, the Ombudsman found that the Commission’s conduct was unreasonable, and its claim that the Hamiltons were not entitled to occupy the premises was wrong.

These findings did not resolve the ongoing dispute. The Minister for Planning and Environment, Eric Bedford, refused to accept the Ombudsman’s claims of wrong conduct and rejected the recommendation to give both parties joint tenancy of the house ‘until the deaths of Mr. G. Terry and his wife, or their early vacation of the premises’. 106 The government faced the problem of owning the house and grounds, but only half of the household contents.

It was within this minefield of legal wrangling that the new HHT had to consider in relation to its future involvement at Rouse Hill House in 1980. 107 At Peter Watts’ first HHT Board meeting as the new Director in June 1981, the Trustees resolved that:

The Historic Houses Trust is of the opinion that the property known as Rouse Hill House, including its garden and contents, should be brought completely into public ownership and be properly conserved and hopes it will be vested in the Trust and opened, as appropriate, to the public’. 108

In the following month, the Premier offered the Hamiltons a lease, which they refused, stating that they wished to purchase the property. 109

In September 1982, the Premier requested the Trust to inspect the property and advise him on its future management. Eager to establish a role for the HHT, it took

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the opportunity to express 'its interest in the Rouse Hill House and the property be vested in the Trust at the earliest practicable date', and advised that:

A long term, low-key approach to the conservation of the property was desirable. While towing the party line with respect to the resumption, the Trust was nevertheless hinting at an alternative approach to the Public Works Department prevalent full-scale restoration methods.

The main priority for the Trust was safeguarding the collection of furniture and contents. When family and legal disputes threatened to separate the house contents, the Trust emphasised to the Premier:

the very importance of the collection at Rouse Hill House and its concern that this collection may be divided and confirm its support of action to prevent this happening.

The Trust was informed that the situation did not involve the Trust and was a matter for the Department Environment and Planning, evidence that the HHT had yet to attain equal status with other government bodies.

The government's perception of what it considered to be in the public interest superseded the longstanding rights of a family to their ancestral home. As another example of the government's heavy-handed approach, the Minister of Environment and Planning made a legal application through the Supreme Court of New South Wales to evict the Hamiltons. In response, the Hamiltons initiated a cross-claim arguing the resumption was invalid and that their prior interests be recognised. They also sought an order that the furniture owned by the government and themselves be divided.

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In March 1983, Mr Justice Lee ruled that under the *State Planning Authority Act, 1963*, the resumption was lawful and that the Hamiltons be allowed three months to vacate Rouse Hill House.\(^{115}\) Legal issues aside, Lee disagreed with the government’s basis for the resumption and observed that:

> There can be no doubt that the circumstances surrounding the relationship between Mr Gerald Terry and the defendants [Hamiltons] induced the commission to move when it did, but that provides no basis for a conclusion that the purpose of the resumption was merely to prevent the property falling into other hands. One might say that those circumstances provided the occasion for the resumption, but not the purpose thereof.\(^{116}\)

He also added that:

> A resumption of a property of historical interest which has from the beginning, been the home of successive generations of a family calls for humane understanding of the deep and powerful attachment to the property which arises in the occupiers and, on that ground alone, in my view requires that the occupancy of those remaining be as little disturbed during the remainder of their lives as possible.\(^{117}\)

As the resumption was deemed lawful, the Hamiltons’ cross-claim to retain their realty interests was dismissed. The *State Planning Authority Act* only permitted the acquisition of land and buildings, which meant that the Hamiltons retained half-ownership of the contents at Rouse Hill House. The objects that constituted this portion were never specified, and the Hamiltons requested that under the *Conveyancing Act, 1919*, the Court determined the distribution. The Government did not object to this order, and Justice Lee ruled that the matter was to be referred to the Master to ensure ‘a fair and equitable division’.\(^{118}\)

The dispersal of the collection was a serious possibility. Tracking the legal proceedings, James Broadbent remarked how:

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 181, 193, 196, 197.
\(^{116}\) Ibid., 192.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.
\(^{118}\) Ibid., 197-198.
Through its actions, the Government of New South Wales has effectively destroyed what it set out to protect.  

With the question of occupational rights resolved, the HHT assumed a more active role in the conservation and management of Rouse Hill. On 2 November 1983, Peter Watts visited the property with representatives from the Department of Environment and Planning, Premier's Department, Public Works Department and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. The purpose of the visit was to ascertain the proposed division of the contents and the effect on the room settings. Watts believed that the division of the house contents to include a combination of high valued pieces with smaller objects with family appeal provided the best situation, because 'after an even distribution based on value some rooms remained virtually intact'.

Objects that were owned outright by the Hamiltons had already been removed, including nearly the entire contents of the wing they occupied. Despite losing their legal battle to retain partial ownership of the house, the Hamiltons realised the importance of maintaining the family collection together and offered to lease their portion of objects and furnishings in the main house to the Department of Environment and Planning. The Department considered the terms of the lease to be 'unfair', but the Trust emphasised that 'in the ultimate presentation of the house, that as many of the objects as possible remain in the house', and to encourage the Hamiltons not to disperse the objects which they had already removed. Second-time round, the Trust's advice was given serious consideration and weight.

Boosted by the success at Elizabeth Farm, the HHT was attaining a more prominent political profile. At a meeting on 6 December 1984, Peter Watts, Mr Shearman (Director of the NSW Heritage Office) and R. Smyth (the Director of the Department of Environment and Planning) agreed to work jointly with the Public

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119 Broadbent, "Rouse Hill House", 8.
120 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 'Minutes of Meeting No. 37 (14 November, 1983)', *HHT Minutes (June – Nov. 1983)*, 17.
Works Department in conserving Rouse Hill.\textsuperscript{123} It was also agreed in principle that ownership of the household contents would be transferred to the HHT.

This new working group met on 18 January 1985. In addition to establishing a framework for the future work at the property, the Trust’s role was also extended to include the historical research and preparation of a conservation plan. As a consequence, the Trust obtained additional funding from the Premier to prepare the report and also to employ a curator for Rouse Hill Estate.\textsuperscript{124} It was merely a formality when Premier Wran approved, in May 1985, the transfer of the property to the Trust from the Department of Environment and Planning on completion of conservation works. The Department of Environment and Planning held a ceremony at Rouse Hill House to mark the occasion on 25 May 1987.\textsuperscript{125}

With its future role assured, the Trust directed its attention to selecting a curator, preparing a conservation plan, and most importantly, negotiating a lease of the collection with the Hamitons. While respecting the different interests of Gerald Terry and the Hamitons, the Trust’s overriding objective was:

\begin{quote}
  to ensure that the collection remain in the house and that it assumes responsibility for the security of the place and the care and conservation of its collection.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

On 21 February 1986, Peter Watts met with the Hamitons to ascertain the type of lease they envisaged. For the Trust, the purpose of a lease was to enable the collection to be catalogued and recorded, and to also establish a measure of goodwill with the Hamitons as a means of ensuring that the collection remained at

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\textsuperscript{123} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 47 (11 February 1985)’, \textit{HHT Minutes (Feb. – June 1985)}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{124} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Minutes of Meeting No. 47 (11 February 1985)’, \textit{HHT Minutes (Feb. – June 1985)}, 4.
\textsuperscript{126} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, “Rouse Hill House”, HHT Minutes Meeting No. 59 (10 February, 1986)’, \textit{HHT Minutes (Feb. – March 1986)}.
\end{flushright}
Rouse Hill.\textsuperscript{127} Negotiations continued throughout the year, and a lease was signed in April 1987.\textsuperscript{128}

The lease covered an initial period of two years. The main features included the annual rental of the collection at $14,000, which apart from tax and insurance liabilities, was to be spent on the conservation of the collection. The Hamiltons maintained the right to access the collection and were also to be consulted on any decisions relating to their collection.\textsuperscript{129}

This resolved one of the most pressing issues for the Trust. Parallel to its lease negotiations in 1986, the Trust also prepared a \textit{Conservation Plan}.\textsuperscript{130} Finalising the policies hinged on the terms of the lease. Again, James Broadbent played a pivotal role in developing the conservation philosophy for Rouse Hill Estate. According to Peter Watts, the curatorial appointment was ‘a crucial one’ due to the sensitivity of the house and its collections, and the long-standing dispute between the State government and the Hamilton family.\textsuperscript{131} Following the professional and public success of Elizabeth Farm, Broadbent was considered the ‘best qualified person’ for the role, and was agreeable to the task.\textsuperscript{132} Moving from Elizabeth Farm, he commenced his new position in January 1986.

\textbf{Ruskin in Rural Australia}

With the HHT’s involvement at Rouse Hill Estate from 1982, Peter Watts maintained that the site [was] largely a question of management and that:

\begin{itemize}
  \item ibid.
  \item In October 1994, a chattel sales agreement was made with the Hamilton Rouse Hill Trust to acquire its collection and its interest of objects that were jointly owned with Gerald Terry. A similar agreement was reached with Gerald Terry in May 1996, for objects not previously acquired by the Government, or jointly owned with the Hamilton Rouse Hill Trust. This concluded ten years of negotiations to acquire the Rouse Hill collections.
  \item Broadbent, \textit{Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan}.
  \item Historic Houses Trust of NSW, “Curator -- Rouse Hill House/Elizabeth Farm/Meroogal”, Minutes of Meeting No. 55 (9 September, 1985), \textit{HHT Minutes (July -- Dec. 1985)}, 34.
  \item Historic Houses Trust of NSW, “Curator -- Rouse Hill House/Elizabeth Farm/Meroogal”, Minutes of Meeting No. 55 (9 September, 1985), \textit{HHT Minutes (July -- Dec. 1985)}, 34.
\end{itemize}
Certainly it needs conservation work, but this is rather a matter of catching up on past neglect – not a wholesale restoration programme.\(^{133}\)

It was James Broadbent, however, who articulated this view into a coherent conservation framework and challenged popular ideas on how historic buildings should be conserved.

Broadbent’s conservation policy for Rouse Hill Estate reflected his ongoing efforts to differentiate between conservation and interpretation and to promote material culture as forms of historical evidence. His purist conservation ideals were strongly influenced by the nineteenth century art critic, John Ruskin. Born in London in 1819 and educated at Oxford, Ruskin’s 1849 publication, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, became a seminal work for the architectural preservation movement. It shaped William Morris and his “Anti-Scrape” movement for the preservation of ancient buildings in the late nineteenth century.

Introducing the *Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan*, Broadbent stated:

> It is a depressing reflection on the survival of Australia’s built heritage and, more so, on the preoccupations of the building conservation movement that rarely are buildings – particularly houses and their contents – promoted for keeping without change. “Conservation” of buildings has come to mean, in almost every case, change. The perceived heritage significance of places are thought to be obscured by additions which must be removed, or alterations, which must be altered once again. The idea that it is the conservationist’s role not only to preserve but to ‘right’ buildings that have in some way been ‘wronged’ is widespread. The distinctions between the roles of preservation, interpretation and aesthetics become confused, and of this confusion is bred the attitude that replaced or reconstructed fabric assumes the heritage significance of the decayed and destroyed fabric.\(^{134}\)

The imprint of Ruskin’s work was strong, who exhorted in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*:

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\(^{133}\) Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘Director’s Report, Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (29 June, 1982)’, *HHT Minutes (April-October 1982)*, 18.

\(^{134}\) Broadbent, *Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan*, Section 1.1.
Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end. You may make a model of a building as you may of a corpse, and your model may have the shell of the old walls within it as your cast might have the skeleton, with what advantage I neither see nor care; but the old building is destroyed, and that more totally and mercilessly than if it had sunk into a heap of dust, or melted into a mass of clay; more has been gleaned out of desolated Nineveh then ever will be our of re-built Milan. But, it is said, there may come a necessity for restoration! Granted. Look the necessity full in the face, and understand it on its own terms. It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place. 

Both Broadbent and Watts were reacting against the ‘wholesale restoration programme’ at Elizabeth Farm and the similar restoration approach adopted for the Summerhouse and Stables at Rouse Hill Estate.

As with Elizabeth Farm, the Public Works Department also assisted the Department of Environment and Planning with the conservation of Rouse Hill House. Beginning in October 1978, it initially supervised minor, but urgent repair works. From October 1981, the Government Architect’s Branch of the Public Works Department began documenting and implementing a conservation program, which included most of the structures on the property.

Again, empirical documentation was paramount and an extensive range of studies were undertaken of the house, gardens, and outbuildings. All the buildings were surveyed, which included measured drawings and a structural report. A photogrammetric survey was also completed for all the structures on the site, as well as archaeological investigations of areas where works were proposed. Most importantly, an inventory was made of the house contents.

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Structurally unsound ancillary buildings (such as the Slaughter House, Woolshed and Cart Shed) were stabilised with support frames. The more aesthetic buildings, like the Summerhouse and the Stables were given more attention (Figure 6.21). The Summerhouse was completely restored, and the entire roof of the Stables, including the structural timbers, plumbing, trusses, ventilator and iron sheeting, was replaced. Due to the issues arising from the dual ownership of the household contents and family occupancy, the conservation of the main house from 1979 to 1984 was limited to stabilising the exterior such the iron roofs, gutters, downpipes and external joinery.

![Figure 6.21](image)

*Figure 6.21 The restored stables and summerhouse by the Public Works Department (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).*

The protracted legal problems with settling the dispute between the government and the Hamiltons fortuitously averted the full-scale restoration of Rouse Hill House and allowed the Trust to trial a different museological approach that appeared ideologically counter to how Elizabeth Farm was conserved and interpreted. Unlike Elizabeth Farm, with its meticulously reproduced Macarthur furniture and modern soft furnishings, and where nothing had any intrinsic heritage importance, everything at Rouse Hill Estate was to be conserved equally and without any hierarchical assessment of significance. Georgian colonial furniture, modern plastic

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Ibid., 3-5.
flowers and broken television sets were to be all treated in the same manner “without ‘taste’ or judgment” because they were the physical evidence of the changing tastes and fortunes of a family (Figure 6.22). 139

According to Broadbent:

Rouse Hill’s importance lies primarily in its survival and continuity: that it is both a ‘time capsule’ and a continuous record of family occupancy. 140

The likening of Rouse Hill House to a ‘time capsule’, ‘diary’ or ‘archive’ formed the basis of Broadbent’s conservation policy. Presenting his report to the Trustees, he explained that:

If the significance of Rouse Hill is established as its being a document or archive of a family’s occupancy, the way towards forming a policy for conserving the place is made considerably easier. The cultural significance of the place requires no recovery, thus reducing the amount of research essential for the primary task of conservation, and reducing physical intervention of an irreversible nature in the place. 141

A simple policy of ‘preservation’ was proposed, where the buildings, furnishings and finishes were maintained at the point when the property was resumed in 1978. This approach assumed that:

It is agreed that the primary significance of the place are a record of family occupancy (an ‘archive’) and equally as a ‘time capsule’ of the late nineteenth century taste, a simple policy of preservation is determined, restoration and recreation being inapplicable and to be resisted. 142

139 Broadbent, "Rouse Hill and Elizabeth Farm, New South Wales," 180.
140 Broadbent, Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan, 19.
142 Broadbent, Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan, 26.
Figure 6.22
The interior, including the Sitting Room (above) and School Room (below) were conserved to include all the objects and furniture over the past 140 years (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).
Figure 6.23
Rouse Hill House was conserved 'as found' by the Historic Houses Trust. This meant conserving the peeling paint and deteriorated joinery and timberwork (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).
The restoration or reconstruction of the buildings, gardens or objects was not permitted because this would inevitably destroy the history of family occupancy as tangibly expressed through the alterations, additions, damage or repairs to the property. This meant preserving all ‘its faults as well as its merits’ and accepting that all the physical fabric accumulated up to this point possessed intrinsic heritage significance (Figure 6.23).\footnote{148}

This did not, however, preclude the requirement of physical intervention. Exceptions permitted the replacement of decayed elements that compromised the structural stability of a building, such as a collapsing roof caused by a decayed verandah post or a damaged roof allowing weather to penetrate into the interior and causing further damage. Broadbent insisted, however, that such changes were to be ‘accurately, consistently and fully recorded’.\footnote{149} Intervention was only permissible to prolong the life of the overall building or object.

Again, Broadbent drew guidance from Ruskin, who cautioned:

Watch an old building with an anxious care; guard it as best you may, and at any cost from every influence of dilapidation. Count its stones as you would jewels of a crown; set watches about it as if at the gates if a besieged city; bind together with iron where it loosens; stay it with timber where it declines; do not care about the unsightliness of the aid; better a crutch than a lost limb; and do this tenderly, and reverently, and continually, and many a generation will still be born and pass away beneath its shadow.\footnote{150}

Summarising his approach, Broadbent explained:

In summary, my attitude towards Rouse Hill is that its continued existence must be ensured (including its complete collection), that it is rich enough largely as it is, that it tells enough stories – and tells them eloquently – largely as it is, that there is no need, and we should guard against trying, to recreate a mythical golden past, a time when all was in harmony, to guard against making new what is important – or poignant – for being old, to concern ourselves with perfecting what is imperfect but exquisitely

\footnote{148} Ibid., 26, 33. \footnote{149} Ibid., 27. \footnote{150} Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, 186. Also quoted by Broadbent, Rouse Hill House Conservation Plan, 35.
precious. Rouse Hill is Rouse Hill. It should not be reduced to a capriccio of the aesthetic or historical prejudices of curators, architects, historians or archaeologists. It is scrappy and tatty, but it is genuine, and has fascinated these cognoscenti for the last thirty years. Why should they change it, under the dubious guide of condescension to the public? The public want to see what is real also.\textsuperscript{151}

For a property with a ‘leave it as found’ approach, conserving Rouse Hill Estate and opening it to the public proved to be a protracted process. The Trust spent the period up to 1996 cataloguing, recording and undertaking essential conservation works. It then commenced a three-stage plan to gradually increase visitor access and construct a separate interpretation centre, before officially opening Rouse Hill Estate in 2000.\textsuperscript{152} As a guide to its political importance also, this was brought forward to 1999 at the insistence of the Premier.

In 1988, Broadbent moved to another HHT project and his replacement, Michael Bogle, oversaw most of the conservation and maintenance program. The philosophical proposition was simple, but its implementation proved more difficult, with Watts describing it as a ‘conservation nightmare’.\textsuperscript{153} Bogle explained how:

\begin{quote}
It’s much harder to do that than to renovate. You need to be much more inventive to figure out how to keep it from falling down.\textsuperscript{154}
\end{quote}

Watts contrasted the project to other conservation projects where ‘somebody gets $2 million dollars to do a conservation in one hit’. At Rouse Hill House:

\begin{quote}
We do it slowly and gently, patching up as we go along, like owners do. Otherwise the project ends up unseized.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}


\textsuperscript{154} Helen Greenwood, "Get Thee to a Mansion ..." (Domain) \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 24 October 1996, 8.

\end{footnotes}
The scale of the project was unprecedented. In addition to the main house and its contents, it also included twenty farm and garden structures and their contents, the garden and paddocks, farm machinery, abandoned cars, rubbish heaps and other miscellaneous objects located around the property (Figure 6.24).

Despite a single conservation philosophy, the degree of permissible intervention in order to maintain the different buildings and objects proved to be more complex. Physical intervention was allowed only for the purpose of prolonging the life of the fabric, but the exercise demonstrated the fine line between conservation and interpretation.

The question pre-empting all actions was, "Is this work essential for the continued life of the place?" Replacement of decayed fabric was permissible only in order to maintain the longevity of the structure as a whole. For example, when the timber fences in the paddocks were collapsing, the decayed post and rails were replaced with a similar traditional adze-worked hardwood and the decayed post wired to the replacement post (Figure 6.25). When the actual post was missing, its replacement with a timber reconstruction was not allowed. Instead, a non-traditional material, such as a concrete fence post, was used instead. The overriding principle was historical transparency and the Trust recorded any changes it made or new materials introduced. Such changes were also made visible through the choice of material or form, so that it could be easily 'interpreted' as a new element (Figure 6.26).

Not all were in agreement with the Trust's approach, especially the family. In a letter to Peter Watts, Gerald Terry commented on the ceilings in the house and how:

> After 11 years of Government ownership these are a disgrace. If they are left like this they will become a public insult to all Richard Rouse’s descendants. Now that the roof has been repaired the ceilings must be restored without delay.  

157 Ibid., 12-14.
Figure 6.24
The conserve ‘as found’ policy adopted at Rouse Hill included the dilapidated outbuildings and numerous abandoned vehicles (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).
Figure 6.25
New material, such as this timber fence rail, are stamp dated so that they are easily distinguishable from the original fabric (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

Figure 6.26
Repairs were made visible, such as the refixing of these weatherboards with distinguishable new nails and washers (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).
ELIZABETH FARM AND ROUSE HILL ESTATE

On the maintenance of the house, Mr. Terry wrote:

It annoys me greatly to see so many things deteriorating for lack of normal maintenance. Woodwork, such as the shutters, trellis work, and chairs and benches on the verandah need paint to protect them from the elements. Iron roofs need painting too. All this must be attended to without delay.\textsuperscript{161}

Caroline Rouse Thornton, Gerald Terry’s daughter, was pleased that the estate remained intact, but wished that the buildings were restored to ‘their former glory’ and how:

Some parts of the estate look like they will be blown away with a puff of wind.\textsuperscript{164}

It was a radical departure from traditional house museum practices and the Trust recognised the need to explain its approach to both heritage professionals and the general public. Elizabeth Farm was also based on a new interpretative method, but the resulting beautiful settings ensured a more ready acceptance. This was not the case at Rouse Hill Estate, and the museum became more than an ‘unedited, cumulative archive of Australian life’.\textsuperscript{165} It also became one of the first museums where the explanation of conservation philosophies and practices was an integral part of its interpretation.

Explaining the Significance of a ‘Scrappy and Tatty’ House Museum

The basis of transforming Rouse Hill Estate into a house museum was also a major constraint in providing visitor access. Safeguarding the volume of ephemera in the house and the fragility of the building fabric was incompatible with high volumes of visitors and the inevitable wear-and-tear that would entail. It was ironic that despite resuming the property for the ‘public’s interest’, most of the interiors in the main house were not publicly accessible. The reasons for this management decision became part of the museum’s interpretation.

\textsuperscript{161} “Letter from Mr. G.G. Terry to Peter Watts, Director, Historic Houses Trust, dated 25 May, 1989’, Minutes of Meeting No. 92 (19 June, 1989), HHT Minutes (April – June 1989), 40-41.

\textsuperscript{164} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘The House on the Hill’ (Orientation Video), 1999.

\textsuperscript{165} Carlir, Rouse Hill House Museum Plan, 3.
In developing an interpretation strategy for Rouse Hill Estate, the Trust wanted 'to raise public awareness of Rouse Hill house' and 'its cultural significance', but it also aimed 'to engender respect for the Trust's preservationist policy for the property'. The need to balance the fragility of the property with visitor access meant that the story of the Rouse family became secondary to the story of Rouse Hill as a house museum and its conservation philosophy.

This was reflected in the four main messages provided to visitors, which included:

- The significance of the Rouse Hill House estate;
- The rarity of Rouse Hill House as a resource;
- The conservation policy; [and]
- How responsible behaviour by visitors can assist the conservation of the property.

Like the conservation program, the Trust also introduced a long-term interpretation program in 1995, which aimed to gradually increase the visitor numbers in three stages for a full opening in 2000.

The Trust was still concentrating on the conservation program in 1995, and Stage 1 was limited visitor access to target audiences that included the local community, and those involved in planning the nearby North-West Sector residential development. The main part of the interpretation program, including the acquisition of the adjacent Rouse Hill school site and its development into an interpretation centre, was earmarked for Stage 2 from 1996 to 1999.

For a house that was conserved 'as found' and without any interpretational intervention, the interpretation centre was considered a vital part of operating the estate as a museum. It was intended as the first point of call for visitors, who would be introduced to the history of the Rouse family, the conservation issues and also the ground rules for visiting the historic site. The Trust included ‘test’ panels of wallpaper, fabric and timber. Half of the panel was displayed under Perspex, and visitors were encouraged to touch the other half. The purpose of this interpretative

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166 Ibid., 41.
167 Ibid., 48.
168 Ibid., 49-50.
device was to demonstrate the impact of visitors on a historic building and to discourage similar behaviour in the main house (Figure 6.27).\textsuperscript{169} A similar device was placed at the entrance of the Interpretation Centre to demonstrate the impact of foot traffic over different floor surfaces (Figure 6.28).

In the main house, access was restricted to the entrance and rear hallways on the ground floor. Perspex was placed around the termite-damaged doorframes and pens were created at the entrance of each room leading from this passageway. Visitors were not allowed upstairs due to the termite damaged floorboards, and also the 'personal' nature of the belongings in the bedrooms.

\textbf{Figure 6.27}

Test panels at the Interpretation Centre, demonstrating the effects of visitors on objects and materials (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2005).

\begin{footnote}
\end{footnote}
The Trust also wanted to trial different public programs. This included ‘Behind Closed Doors’ which provided a restricted tour of the house to determine the balance between conservation and visitation numbers. Open-air programs were also developed to enable a greater number of people to visit the site while minimising damage to the main house. In 1996, the public program ‘Gardenesque’ was held on the grounds of Rouse Hill Estate, marking the first public opening of the property. Visitor focus was deliberately diverted away from the main house to the exterior areas of the garden, farm buildings and paddocks and this became a key strategy in minimising visitor numbers in the house.

In 1998, the plans for the opening of Rouse Hill Estate were brought forward unexpectedly. In conjunction with the budget announcement for the arts in June that year, Premier Bob Carr committed an additional $1.164 million to the HHT. Continued funding of $591,000 was also allocated to Rouse Hill House, and as part of the Government’s Western Sydney arts initiatives, the Premier announced that
the property would be opened by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{170} This decision caught Peter Watts by surprise.\textsuperscript{171} Nevertheless, its inclusion as part of the government’s arts policy meant an increased public profile for the property, and hence more funding.

In preparation, a special meeting of the Trustees was held at Rouse Hill House on 13 July 1998 to endorse the draft \textit{Museum Plan}.\textsuperscript{172} A copy was also sent to the Premier for approval and a special working party was formed to realise the plan. An additional $845,000 of capital funding was provided to develop visitor facilities.\textsuperscript{173} The acquisition of the Rouse Hill Public School site was dependant upon the construction of a new school at the nearby Mile End Road. Faced with an impending deadline for opening the museum, the Trust leased a portion of the adjacent Rouse Hill Regional Park from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to enable the construction of a temporary interpretation centre and car park for visitors.

In the midst of opening Rouse Hill House, the last family occupant, Gerald Terry died in February 1999.\textsuperscript{174} Due to deteriorating health, Gerald moved into the Anglican Retirement Home at Castle Hill in 1993. It was uncanny that Gerald’s death coincided with the opening of Rouse Hill House to the public. The history of family occupancy had indeed ended.

Premier Bob Carr officially opened Rouse Hill Estate on 30 May 1999. Highlighting the importance of the museum as part of his Western Sydney Arts Initiative, he also ensured the future security of the property by addressing three planning issues that affected its curtilage. This included the deviation of Windsor Road away from Rouse Hill House, the transfer of Rouse Hill Public School to become the new visitor centre for the museum, and extending the surrounding

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{174} Caroline Thornton, "Gerald Terry", (Business Section) \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 18 February 1999, 27.
\end{itemize}
Rouse Hill Regional Park to the ridgeline to the West of Rouse Hill to maintain the historic rural vistas. 175

The public response to the opening was strong. The house initially opened two days a week, and access to the house was provided only through guided tours. On its first Sunday opening, all the tours were fully booked with 190 people visiting Rouse Hill House. Forty-one other visitors missed out. For a property that received 602 visitors in the previous year, it was a promising start. It also highlighted the constraints of such a purist conservation approach and the difficulties in balancing museum visitation with the fragility of the buildings and objects.

Professionally, Rouse Hill House pushed the conventional boundaries of both heritage and museum practices. It also served as a case study for demonstrating new methods in timber conservation. In 1999, the Heritage Office sponsored a professional workshop where Alan Croker, the architect responsible for conserving the estate's buildings, outlined the different techniques used to conserve the timber buildings in accordance with the non-interventionist and minimalist philosophy. 176

The novelty of Rouse Hill House as a 'time capsule' also captured the media's attention. In an extensive photographic spread in Australian Country Style, Sue Stubbs described how 'Walking through Rouse Hill House is like reading someone else's diary'. 177 The heritage columnist for the Sydney Morning Herald, Geraldine O'Brien, praised the HHT for the historical accuracy of its properties with a story titled 'Some Memories we can Trust'. 178 For Helen Greenwood, the preserved nineteenth century interiors and buildings tapped into her 'fantasies of country manors and genteel manners'. 179 It was the voyeuristic experience of seeing a family's house that was 'real' and not recreated, which was irresistibly appealing.


176 The Roads and Traffic Authority informed the Historic Houses Trust in May 2001 that the diversion of Windsor Road near Rouse Hill will occur before 2006 (HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 214 (21 May 2001), in HHT Minutes (May – Aug. 2001), 5).

177 Allan Croker, An Approach to Timber Repairs in Heritage Structures (Sydney: NSW Heritage Office, 1999).


Greenwood, "Get Thee to a Mansion . . ." 8.
SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The Trust’s earlier re-interpretations of Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House were a transitional stage in the house museum movement. Curators rejected the generic period room setting but still relied on period furniture and reconstructed interiors to interpret the past. They had yet to develop a new approach that fully realised the aims of social history and material culture studies. For Broadbent, it required an understanding of the difference between conservation and interpretation and the delineation between what was ‘real’ or ‘fake’. Reiterating Broadbent, it was ‘two sides of the same coin’.

This philosophy was realised at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill, with each representing the extremities of the conservation-interpretation spectrum. Elizabeth Farm was interpreted with fake, but historically documented, furniture and furnishings, while Rouse Hill was conserved as found, ‘warts and all’. Both promoted objects as part of the historical record that could ‘speak for themselves’. With these two properties, the HHT broke through the conventional moulds of house museum settings and established itself as the leader in the house museum and heritage field.

The Trust’s involvement at Rouse Hill also followed quickly after Elizabeth Farm. Even though Rouse Hill was not opened until 1999, the two properties formed the philosophical bookends for the range of properties that the HHT actively sought during this period, including Rose Seidler House, Meroogal and Susannah Place. All these properties were valued for their intact building evidence of previous occupants, with Rose Seidler House and Meroogal including a complete household collection. These houses also broadened the Trust’s portfolio beyond its colonial ‘great men, great houses’, providing it with a more representative range of museums that addressed domestic and working-class histories, and twentieth century design.

The acquisition of Rose Seidler House and Meroogal resulted in an amendment to the Historic Houses Act in 1986. It became apparent that the Trust’s role extended beyond managing government owned historic houses and the legislative amendment allowed the Trust to acquire and manage properties that were not owned by the State government. The HHT was now actively defining the State’s heritage.
Underlying all these museums was the notion of historical transparency, and the favourable response to both Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill House reflected a general appreciation of Broadbent’s philosophical approach. Audiences were interested in understanding the processes of historical research, conservation and interpretation. The inclusion of visitors in the development of later house museums and an acknowledgement of different historical interpretations were central features of the Trust’s next generation of museums that included Susannah Place, Hyde Park Barracks and the Museum of Sydney.
Figure 7.1  Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place (Photographs by Anna Wong, 2007).
7

LAYER UPON LAYER:
ARCHAEOLOGY, HERITAGE AND PUBLIC HISTORY

_Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place_

INTRODUCTION

The rise of social history and material culture studies in the 1970s and ‘80s legitimised the ‘material’ world as a valid source of evidence. As such, house museums (and heritage sites generally) were promoted as a record of the past. This was further reinforced by statutory agencies like the Heritage Office in New South Wales, whose heritage management guidelines were based on the premise that ‘Heritage is evidence of our history’.¹

Yet if only a portion of the cultural environment was conserved as heritage, whose history was represented? As Graeme Davison observed, ‘heritage is, above all, a political concept’, and the differences between the intended aim of heritage conservation, and its representation of historical reality has provided a fertile subject for social and cultural historians.² Intended or otherwise, heritage was a form of public history and subject to cultural bias.

In Australia, questions regarding the historical validity of heritage seemed incongruous to the general tide of unprecedented public and government support for museums and conservation, and the seemingly irreproachable status of heritage professionals. Despite such popularity, the opening of Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place in the early 1990s indicated that arguments regarding the political

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dimensions of conservation were impacting on museum and heritage practices. These arguments influenced the range of historic buildings assumed by the Trust and also the manner in which they were conserved and interpreted.

This chapter examines how the Historic Houses Trust addressed claims of cultural and historical bias by acquiring a more historically representative range of house museums and historic sites that extended beyond the ‘great man – great house’ form. Furthermore, unlike its previous house museums that were restored to a particular period (with the exception of Rouse Hill Estate), the Trust attempted to interpret the entire history of Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place. It also sought to instruct the public on its philosophical approach through the displays and exhibits.

Linking both museums was the use of historical archaeological principles as an empirical basis for conservation decisions, and also as a method of representing their historical and physical development in displays. This seemingly odd combination of house museum curatorship and archaeology reflected broader trends in the heritage field. During the 1970s, historical archaeology became synonymous with the ‘conscience of heritage management’. For the HHT, the basis of its archaeological focus was twofold. It was intended to demonstrate intellectual transparency by literally showing the layers of physical evidence that guided conservation decisions and, second, such archaeological inspired displays were intended to educate visitors on interpretative methodologies so that they too could ‘read’ material evidence from the past.

HERITAGE AND HOUSE MUSEUMS AS PUBLIC HISTORY

Recognising the political dimensions of heritage conservation and house museums challenged the assumption that they were objective or neutral entities, but it did not diminish their educative role in promoting particular historical versions of the past. This sparked discussions about whose history was told through the range of buildings conserved as ‘heritage’. Based on the assumption that museums (and heritage places in general) constituted an important and highly accessible form of public history, Australian and international scholars including Chris McConville, Graeme Davison, Marilyn Lake, Linda Young, Elizabeth Cromley, and David
Lowenthal, analysed how the process of classifying particular buildings as cultural heritage, influenced public perceptions and understandings the past.3

As an early example of such studies, Elizabeth Cromley examined the public history dimension of zoning laws and the creation of historic preservation districts.4 Using the preservation district of Brooklyn Heights in New York, she demonstrated the tendency for heritage practices to concentrate on the architectural components of the cultural environment. By limiting the preservation of Brooklyn Heights to examples of refined architectural styles and periods, the reading of the extant historic buildings produced a homogenous and static sense of the past, where everyone supposedly experienced a high standard of living and resided in comfortable dwellings.

Brooklyn Heights was then compared to the adjacent district of Two Bridges. These two areas shared similar histories, with the exception that unlike Brooklyn Heights, Two Bridges was not designated a preservation district. Consequently, this area retained a mixture of residential, commercial and manufacturing areas dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It also included a range of dwelling types from different socio-economic groups and architectural styles. For Cromley, Two Bridges provided a more dynamic story of the city, because it was possible to see its historical and physical development, and how different work and residential areas inter-related and functioned.

Cromley’s study demonstrated how the preservation movement produced two forms of public histories. First, in conserving particular parts of the built environment, it defined what was ‘significant’ by identifying certain buildings and areas as more

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4 Cromley, "Public History and the Historic Preservation District."
important that the rest. Secondly, architectural preservation provided a record of the past. As Cromley surmised:

preserved buildings can and will tell public stories about who made them, who used them, what kind of life they were erected to support, and what lives, if any, are lived in them today. Even if this kind of storytelling is not the intended aim of preservation efforts, preserved buildings cannot but help make stories visible.5

Following a similar approach, Linda Young extended the concept of heritage as public history to frame her survey of Australian house museums with the following questions:

Whose history is presented in house museums? What are the implications for the presentation of Australian history? What are the purposes of house museums?6

Reviewing 199 Australian house museums, Young found that the majority were grand homes dating to the early colonial period, located in country towns, and occupied by wealthy families.7 Combined with the re-creation of historically inaccurate period rooms, most house museums were found to present a conservative Anglo-Australian history, steeped in romanticised and mythical ideals of middle-class domesticity and the landed gentry. For Young, house museums over-represented particular areas of Australian history, whilst excluding others. She recommended a more conscious selection process to ensure a balanced representation of the past that included houses from the twentieth century, urban areas, and Aboriginal and non-Anglo-Australian cultures.8

At the heart of Cromley and Young’s work was the notion of historical transparency. Such an argument still presupposed that political and cultural bias could be avoided through a more conscious process of conservation, collection and interpretation. In Australia, empirically-based heritage professionals extended the work of James Deetz and promoted historical archaeology as an ‘antidote’ to historical and cultural bias, and to substantiate the empirical aims of heritage practices.

5 Ibid., 30.
6 Young, "House Museums in Australia", 167.
7 Ibid. 168-170.
8 Ibid. 183.
This archaeological approach stemmed from the methodologies developed through the conservation of Port Arthur in Tasmania in the 1970s. The main focus of this project was recording and documentation of all material evidence, regardless of age as a basis for conservation and interpretative decisions. As one of the primary convict sites in Australia, it was also a means of gathering evidence left by those who left little or no written records. Twenty years on, its influence was still strong as it shaped museum practices at Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST HISTORICAL BIAS

As discussed in Chapter 6, aesthetically inspired architectural restorations in Australia were challenged by empirically trained archaeologists, historians and architects in the 1970s. For Anne Bickford, such practices were not openly transparent and she remarked at the time:

I know of no restoration project in Australia where original parts of the structure have been left exposed, so that one can see what the original paint colours, and structural details looked like.\(^9\)

In 2004, Tracy Ireland reflected on the *Burra Charter* (1979) and its implementation at the Port Arthur Conservation and Development Project (PACDP) from 1979 to 1986. This project had a profound impact on heritage practices in Australia, and Ireland examined how historical archaeology was used as 'an antidote to the ideological manipulations of the heritage industry, and in particular the work of restoration architects'\(^10\).

Historical archaeology was perceived by some as the 'conscience of heritage management', using its focus on material evidence, respect for authenticity and prudent scientific reasoning as a corrective to less rigorous architectural restoration.\(^11\)

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\(^11\) Ibid. 28.
At Port Arthur, the Conservation and Development Project team concentrated on creating a system of recording and documenting all changes made to the site, resulting in the *Archaeological Procedures Manual*. Published in 1987, it was the first methodological manual for historical archaeology in Australia. The climate of the heritage movement at this time favoured such empirical emphasis on documenting archaeological and building fabric, and was supported by Article 4 of the *Burra Charter* which stated:

Study of a place by any intervention in the fabric or by archaeological excavation should be undertaken where necessary to provide the data essential for decisions on the conservation of the place and/or to secure evidence about to be lost or made inaccessible through necessary conservation action.

The imprint of the Port Arthur Project on the development of historical archaeology in Australia, and its use in heritage conservation was strong. It overshadowed and sidelined the archaeological aim of historical research through the interpretation of objects and its potential to examine the histories of social and cultural groups who were silent or absent from written records. Instead, archaeology became synonymous with empirical recording and documentation.

For archaeologists like Tim Murray and Jim Allen, the limited application of historical archaeology meant that it had become so intertwined with the conservation ethic, that archaeological methodologies were developed to enable conservation, rather than to further its research potential. Graham Connah highlighted the need for historical archaeologists to problem-orient their research in 1983, and labelled the limited aims of archaeological study, which focused on cataloguing artefacts, as ‘stamp-collecting’. For Connah, the collection and classification of archaeological data did not increase the overall understanding of Australian history. For archaeology to remain relevant and not ‘dead’:

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these things must tell us something, they must help us understand — and they must help us understand something of significance. We must all become efficient collectors of stamps, but we must also all endeavour to use those stamps to increase our understanding (and the understanding of society as a whole) of the history of Australia.\(^{16}\)

Historical archaeologists have since broadened their focus to interpreting the archaeological record, including Grace Karskens and Wendy Thorp’s study of The Rocks, Mary Casey’s archaeological study of the Conservatorium of Music site (formerly Governor Macquarie’s stables), and Tim Murray’s interpretation of Melbourne’s Little Lon.\(^{17}\)

Yet, the conservation and interpretation of Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place in the 1990s revealed the long-lasting impact of the conservation of Port Arthur and its application of historical archaeology as the ‘conscience of heritage management’. For each museum, historical archaeological was used to demonstrate the empirical basis of conservation decisions, and to provide a more democratic and inclusive approach to the interpretation of the site’s history.

**DISPLAYING ‘THE CONSCIENCE OF HERITAGE MANAGEMENT’ AT HYDE PARK BARRACKS**

Under the HHT, the Hyde Park Barracks Museum was one of the first cultural institutions to exhibit the processes of historical interpretation. Using archaeological methods and principles, the concepts of archaeological stratigraphy, cataloguing and documentation formed the backbone to the conservation and interpretation of the site. It also inspired the design and content of the museum displays.

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\(^{16}\) Murray and Allen, "Theory and Development of Historical Archaeology in Australia", 21.

The transfer of Hyde Park Barracks to the HHT in 1989 was testament to the unpredictable and ever changing perceptions of heritage. As a historic site, the Barracks has been both revered and condemned for its convict and colonial associations. Governor Macquarie instructed the convict architect, Francis Greenway, to design Hyde Park Barracks to accommodate male convicts under government assignment (Figure 7.2).

**Figure 7.2**
(Left) Francis Howard Greenway, self-portrait (ML SLNSW); and (Right) Lachlan Macquarie, c 1819 (ML SLNSW - MIN 236).

**Figure 7.3**
Convict Barrack N.S.Wales, 1819-1820 by Joseph Lycett (ML SLNSW – PX*D 41)
Completed in 1819, the Barracks was an imposing Palladian-inspired Georgian three-storey brick building. It was surrounded by a stone perimeter wall, which included domed pavilions at each corner and two-storey ranges for the Superintendent’s Residence, kitchen, and convict mess (Figure 7.3).

At the time of its construction, the architectural grandeur of the complex attracted much criticism from the British government, who deemed it inappropriate for a fledgling penal colony and especially as a building for convicts (Figure 7.4). Hyde Park Barracks, along with other public buildings commissioned by Macquarie, including the Government Stables (now known as the Conservatorium of Music, the Supreme Court and St. James Church), were all cited as examples of the Governor’s exorbitant spending in Commissioner Bigge’s inquiry into the colonial administration (Figure 7.5 and 7.6). It marked the downfall of Macquarie, who was unceremoniously recalled to Britain in 1821.

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Figure 7.4
'*A Government Jail Gang, Sydney, N.S.Wales,'* by Augustus Earle, 1830 (NLA). Hyde Park Barracks is seen in the background. Earle caricature of the convicts typified the belief that they were unruly and primitive.

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Figure 7.5
'Prisoners' Barracks, Hyde Park' by Robert Russell, 1836 (NLA). The portico of St James Church can be seen in the foreground.

Figure 7.6
'St Jame's [sic] Church, Supreme Court House', 1836 by Robert Russell (NLA). Both these buildings were also designed by Francis Greenway. The domed cell block of Hyde Park Barracks is visible on the right.
Figure 7.7
The longevity of the Barracks was more enduring. Over forty groups used and occupied the buildings from 1819 to 1975, at times concurrently. To facilitate its interpretation, the HHT summarised this into three main phases: convict barracks; female immigration depot and asylum; and legal courts and offices. When the transportation system ended in the 1840s, the Barracks was used to house and process newly arrived female immigrants from 1848 to 1886 (Figure 7.7). Most of these women came from Ireland as a consequence of the Irish Famine. During this period, an asylum for destitute women was also established on the top floor. From the 1880s, the complex was used to house the District Court and as legal offices (Figure 7.8).

Despite its continuous use, the Barracks was earmarked for demolition in various redevelopment schemes for most of the twentieth century. Following the bubonic plague in Sydney in 1900, the Royal Commission of 1909 recommended 'improvement' schemes designed to modernise Sydney. All this included the widening of Macquarie Street to create a boulevard extending from Circular Quay to St. Mary's Cathedral. As part of this beautification proposal, Queen's Square was to be remodelled to include a new legal court complex and the extension of King Street to the Domain. This required the demolition of Hyde Park Barracks (as well as the Mint and Supreme Court) (Figure 7.9).

Similar demolition threats were made in subsequent government plans to redevelop Macquarie Street. In the 1930s, the Macquarie Street Replanning Committee proposed to demolish Parliament House, Sydney Hospital, the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks. Responding to calls by G. H. Abbott (the President of the Royal Australian Historical Society) to convert the Barracks into a museum, the government declared that the building was in such poor condition that 'it cannot be preserved.' Following World War II, the McKell State government and the Sydney City Council resurrected plans to remodel Macquarie Street. Again the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks were to be demolished 'to make way for modern structures'.

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20 Ibid., xlvii.
Figure 7.8
By the 1960s, the courtyard of Hyde Park Barracks was crowded with ad-hoc additions and new buildings for the law courts and civil offices (Sydney City Council, Sydney Reference Collection).

Figure 7.9
View of Hyde Park Barracks and the Registrar General’s Building. The dome of the Supreme Court and St. James’ steeple are in the foreground. Under proposals to redevelop Queen’s Square, all of the Greenway buildings would have been demolished (ML SLNSW – Home and Away – 34735).
When plans to relocate the District Courts from the Barracks were made in 1964, the future use of the site was again questioned. In the wake of the green bans in the early 1970s and increasing public interest in heritage conservation, the government decided to conserve both the Barracks and the adjacent Mint building in 1975. Although a use had yet to be determined, the Public Works Department was instructed to restore the buildings. It took another four years before the Government decided to transfer both sites to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) to be used as museums of the State’s history.

Restoring a Georgian Ideal

The restoration program from 1975 to 1984 by the Public Works Department and proposed conversion into a museum under the MAAS epitomised the prevalent aesthetically driven conservation philosophies at the time. The actual history of Hyde Park Barracks, particularly the period after the 1820s, was not considered important. As a consequence, the complex was restored to appear like Greeneway’s original Georgian design. This involved the complete removal of any buildings or additions constructed after the convict period, which by the mid-1970s, included a mass of building additions and makeshift structures stemming from the numerous users that occupied the site since 1819 (Figure 7.10). Over a century of physical evidence was removed (Figure 7.11).

Figure 7.10
Hyde Park Barracks, March 1976, at the start of the restoration program by the Public Works Department (ML SLNSW – GPO2-47498).

The decision to establish a museum at the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks under the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences was issued in a media statement by the Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works, Mr. J. Ferguson on June 12, 1980.
Figure 7.11
Ariel view of Hyde Park Barracks and The Mint, 1985. This view shows the extent of demolition undertaken as part of the restoration program (MAAS).
As with Elizabeth Farm, the separate process of restoring the Barrack’s Georgian exterior and the adaptation of its interiors into a museum was not considered unusual (Figure 7.12). Stepping into the project in 1979, the primary concern for the MAAS was the conversion of the building’s interior into an object-based social history museum. Following guidelines established by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), this included installing the ‘correct’ display lighting, environmental controls (to regulate temperature, humidity and air filtration), an elevator and fire protection. In addition to establishing the exhibitions spaces, proposed visitor services included office space, storage, a classroom, landscaping, public toilets, a shop and a restaurant.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Figure 7.12}

\textit{Hyde Park Barracks in 1984, restored to its original Georgian form. All the additions after 1820 were removed. (ML SLNSW – GPO 4-34972).}

The year 1979 also marked the adoption of the \textit{Burra Charter} by Australia ICOMOS. The New South Wales \textit{Heritage Act}, and its empirically based systems having been introduced two year earlier. As advocated by the conservation project at Port Arthur, historic buildings were no longer perceived as merely aesthetic

objects but rather as historical evidence. Working on the archaeological excavations at Hyde Park Barracks and the Mint in 1980-81, Wendy Thorp recommended to the Heritage Council that:

In broad terms the guiding principle behind [the conservation recommendations] is the belief that a building as it stands at the time of its final vacation by occupants is an integral whole, a result of a long process of growth combining social, historic, aesthetic, economic and architectural developments.25

The idea of using the Hyde Park Barracks as a ‘display case’ also prompted objections from the National Trust of Australia (NSW), which declared:

The NSW Government has embarked on an extended project in setting up a Museum to display and interpret the heritage of this State, but the Mint Building and the Barracks Building and Compound are not simply display cases for this Museum. They are its principal objects. They are not redundant building to be recycled, but historic remains of the utmost importance, to be conserved and conscientiously preserved and interpreted for the public benefit. This is not being achieved.26

While still believing that the most important phase of the Barracks related to its convict occupation and Georgian styling, the empirical ideals espoused through social history and the use of ‘objects’ as historical evidence began to have an impact on mainstream heritage practices.

The MAAS did not change its stance, however, with its curator, Margaret Betteridge, providing a counter-argument that:

Whilst there may be an argument for preserving some buildings as lifeless monuments with a minimum of interpretation, i.e. the building itself becomes the museum, it is considered that the sympathetic conversion of the Royal Mint and Hyde Park Barracks to museums of decorative arts and social history respectively will ensure a continuing vitality for both buildings and will help to provide the means by which they may be conserved.27

26 National Trust of Australia (NSW), Historic Buildings Committee, Report of Special Meeting, 10 June 1980 (National Trust Archives).
27 Betteridge, The Royal Mint and Hyde Park Barracks Museum Project (for Inclusion in the Archaeological Report, 12.)
Although the use of the Barracks as a gallery was retained, the MAAS and the Public Works Department were required by the new Heritage Council of New South Wales to alter their plans to minimise the impact of modern museum services and facilities on the building’s fabric. The MAAS also fulfilled the ‘important requirement to retain the Hyde Park Barracks as an exhibit in its own right’ by restoring and interpreting the top floor to the 1820s. One room was reconstructed as a convict dormitory with hammocks and lime washed walls where visitors were invited to lie in a hammock and ‘experience life as a convict’ (Figure 7.13).28

In 1984, the MAAS opened Hyde Park Barracks as ‘the only museum of social history in Australia’ that displayed ‘nearly two hundred years of changing social life in New South Wales’.29 The thematic exhibits on immigration, public celebrations, the history of Sydney’s Royal Easter Show, and the history of Sydney’s suburbs and houses, demonstrated the inclusion of social history aims and subjects. It signified a new approach to history museums in Australia.

This was overshadowed by the increasing heritage status of Hyde Park Barracks as Australians embraced their convict past, especially within the celebratory context of the Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. Its use as a gallery seemed incompatible with its cultural importance and an exhibition on plastic bags in 1989 attracted much criticism. After viewing this exhibition, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the new Minister for the Arts, Peter Collins, was unhappy with the MAAS’s ‘poor management, lack of direction and financial irregularities’.30 It foreshadowed a major re-structure of the State’s cultural institutions by the recently elected Greiner Coalition government.

29 Ibid., 1.
Figure 7.13
Reconstructed hammock room at Hyde Park Barracks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
A New Government and a New Direction for the Historic Houses Trust

Leading up to 1988, the HHT's portfolio had grown from Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, to include Elizabeth Farm, Rouse House Estate, Rose Seidler House and Meroogal. It was also working towards acquiring Susannah Place. The landslide victory by Greiner's Coalition State Government in March 1988 marked a new direction for the HHT, which included the transfer to it of the Hyde Park Barracks and the Justice and Police Museum. The Trust was also charged with the task of developing a new museum on the site of First Government House. It was a period of major change as the Trust expanded its administrative and property portfolio to include public buildings. The HHT was no longer concerned only with house museums, and accompanying this change was legislative amendments to its charter in 1989, and the adoption and experimentation of different curatorial methods.31

Under the Greiner government, the Trust was moved from the Department of Environment and Planning, back to the Office of the Minister for the Arts under Peter Collins.32 In the same year, Collins initiated a review of the major cultural institutions and museums in New South Wales, which culminated with the Policy for the Development of the Museums and Historic Sites in 1989.33 The review included the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Australian Museum, the Historic Houses Trust, the State Library of New South Wales, the First Government House site, and the Justice and Police Museum.

This State review came on the heels of the Federal Review of Commonwealth Involvement in the Development of Museums and Similar Collecting and Exhibition Institutions in 1986-1988.34 More commonly known as the 'Museums Review', it was undertaken by the Hawke Federal Government over a decade after the Pigott

32 The other institutions transferred to the Office of the Minister for the Arts included the Australian Museum; the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences; Archives Authority; NSW Film Commission; Opera House and the Australian Gallery of NSW. Historic Houses Trust of NSW, HHT Minutes, Feb. – April 1988, Meeting No. 81, Item 16, 38.
Report on Museums and National Collection, and the Hope Report on the National Estate.\textsuperscript{35} Despite the dismissal of the Whitlam Government, there was a general endorsement of the findings from these Inquiries, with certain recommendations being implemented by the following Fraser government. While neither the Pigott nor Hope Report included funding requirements necessary for implementing its recommendations, the result was increased Commonwealth involvement and hence financial expenditure in these areas. From 1975 to 1988, Commonwealth annual heritage expenditure increased three-fold from $14,254,000 to $46,494,000.\textsuperscript{36}

The premise of the Federal Museums Review was centred entirely on economics and foreshadowed budgetary reductions. In assessing the functions of museums and galleries, and the role of the Commonwealth in supporting such institutions, the Government wanted to minimise overlapping collections, roles and administration, and hence funding between cultural institutions. It included a comparative survey of national museums and collecting institutions to determine ‘resource utilisation’ and ‘heritage output’, operation costs, recurrent funding and options for reducing the Commonwealth’s financial commitment. Noting that the increasing level of government support was unsustainable, the Committee recommended that:

\begin{quote}
the national collecting institutions are to take a more entrepreneurial approach to their activities and to this end revenue targets and performance indicators are to be developed for all institutions.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Despite its economic focus, one of the most important findings from the Museums Review was the acceptance that governments had a social responsibility in supporting museums and heritage conservation. It also recommended the need for more clearly defined museum policies.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[37] Ibid., 12.
\end{footnotes}
In New South Wales, the review by the Ministry of the Arts made similar conclusions about the State’s cultural institutions. It, too, noted that despite the capital expenditure of over $105 million on new museum buildings between 1984 and 1988 by the previous government, there was a lack of long-term planning or consideration of on-going needs for State museums.\textsuperscript{38} Hinting at budget cuts, the NSW government also identified the need for:

Stronger and more self-reliant Government institutions with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{39}

Reflecting Peter Collin’s lack of confidence in the MAAS following the plastic bag exhibition, Peter Watts was advised in October 1988 that the Minister was considering transferring The Mint, Hyde Park Barracks and The Observatory to the Trust.\textsuperscript{40} Watts thought ‘these buildings inappropriate for ownership by the Trust’.\textsuperscript{41} Following further discussions with the Board however, it was resolved that the Trust would prepare a ‘positive’ report to the Minister that outlined its perceived role as managers of these properties, their possible uses and interpretation.\textsuperscript{42} Answering to a new government, a ‘positive’ response to Ministerial proposals by the HHT was also politically astute and mindful of the prevailing mood.

In his report to the Minister, Watts referred to the Trust’s ‘selective approach’ to acquiring properties, and advised that the Mint and the Observatory ‘was beyond the scope of its expertise and interests and would be better managed by others’.\textsuperscript{43} He added, however, that the Trust ‘welcome[d] the opportunity to develop and interpret the Hyde Park Barracks’, but on the condition that:

the building must be a museum of itself, directly related to its uses during its chequered history. Therefore if the Trust were to assume responsibility for the Barracks it would want to develop a different approach to the existing interpretation and presentation. This would not

\textsuperscript{38} Ministry for the Arts (NSW), "Policy for the Development of Museums and Historic Sites", 2-3.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 8.
\textsuperscript{40} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, \textit{HHT Minutes, Sept.–Dec. 1988}, Meeting 85, Item 13A, 4.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. 35.
require alternation to the existing building fabric but would rely on areas of the building being left to speak for themselves.\textsuperscript{44}

As part of the review, Peter Collins announced on 4 September 1989, the transfer of not only the Hyde Park Barracks, but also the First Government House site and the Justice and Police Museum to the HHT, and that:

The Trust will focus on the early history of the barracks – the people who occupied the building, the times in which they lived – and will marry this important colonial building with the Trust’s other new responsibilities - The First Government House Site and the Justice and Police Museum.\textsuperscript{45}

This was formalised in the Government’s \textit{Policy for the Development of Museums and Historic Sites in New South Wales}, which was released in the following month.\textsuperscript{46} One of the key initiatives was the establishment of the Ministry of the Arts to include all State-funded cultural and collecting institutions under a single co-ordinating umbrella.

For the HHT, the museum review and the resulting policy was a recognition of its strong record as a heritage and house museum manager, demonstrated by the growth of its property portfolio from two to nine since its establishment. The Government, however, considered the HHT’s charter to be poorly defined, and its function of managing house museums too restrictive. As such, the role of the Trust was broadened to include ‘both house museums and historic sites and buildings’, and as ‘an interpreter of their museological and heritage significance, and a provider of exhibitions’.\textsuperscript{47} These changes were officiated with amendments to the \textit{Historic Houses Act} in 1989. The transfer of Hyde Park Barracks from the MAAS was certain.

Echoing the Trust’s earlier recommendation, the Ministry also declared a new interpretative approach for the Barracks, noting that:

\begin{itemize}
\item Ibid. 33, 35.
\item Minister for the Arts (NSW), "Hyde Park Barracks to Go to the Historic Houses Trust", \textit{Press Release}, 4 September 1989.
\item Ministry for the Arts (NSW), "Policy for the Development of Museums and Historic Sites". Ibid., 4, 6.
\end{itemize}
The Barracks is a significant architectural and social icon – perhaps the most important in New South Wales – conforms closely to the Trust’s already established acquisition policy. The building should properly be regarded as a museum in itself, directly related to its historical uses, rather than as a venue for other museum exhibits. The Barracks is the ideal location for a serious and scholarly treatment of convict history and colonial immigration, and will be transferred to the Trust’s administration.\(^{48}\)

The transfer of the three city properties sparked the second wave of rapid change for the HHT as it grappled with the impending concurrent acquisition and development of three museums, one of which required the construction of a new building. Peter Watts anticipated that:

> the greatest difficulty was the project management of the three inner city museums, each of which would be in development phases over the next few years [of which] the Trust had had little experience in this area.\(^ {49}\)

Despite such challenges, Hyde Park Barracks and the First Government House site, in conjunction with Susannah Place, provided the Trust with the opportunity to explore alternative conservation and interpretation approaches to its other traditional house museums.\(^ {50}\)

**Creating ‘A Museum in Itself’**

Reiterating its position on Hyde Park Barracks, the Trust stated that:

> any museum in the building must be more respectful to the site than at present, and tell the story of the building and the people and circumstances associated with it.\(^ {51}\)

The philosophical approach to implementing this aim was largely attributed to Peter Emmett, who was appointed Senior Curator (Public Buildings) in February 1990. Emmett was also involved with the creation of Susannah Place Museum and

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 27.


\(^{50}\) The development of the First Government House site into the Museum of Sydney is examined in Chapter 8.

directed the development of the Museum of Sydney. As a group, these three museums were the third generation of house museums produced by the HHT. Like James Broadbent, Emmett pushed the boundaries of historic house and museum practices, although his work received mixed responses.

In his ‘statement of philosophy of approach and intention’ for Hyde Park Barracks, Emmett explained that:

The overriding principle governing the Historic Houses Trust management of the Hyde Park Barracks is the preservation, recovery and the interpretation of its cultural significance to the national estate and the people of NSW.52

Emmett also noted that while acknowledging earlier work of MAAS:

the Trust will bring a different philosophy to the place based on a more critical focus on the place itself, its social uses and related historical themes. This focus will simultaneously concentrate attention on the intimate details of building and historical users as visible artefact and open windows on a broader perspective and imagination of related themes of Australian history.53

The terminology was explicit - 'cultural significance', 'national estate', and the building as the 'artefact' reflected the growing influence of standardised professional heritage practices. Reference was made to the Burra Charter and the requirement for 'a more critical assessment of existing building elements and their relationship to use and interpretation'.54 Under the supervision of Clive Lucas, one of the first tasks was a survey of building elements and fabric to:

help define physical history and significance and conservation and design guidelines for spaces, surfaces, openings, fixtures, finishes and features.55

Historical research was also a key component in documenting the Barracks' history, its uses and related historical themes. The combined historical and physical

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 90.
55 Ibid.
analysis was synthesised in the *Museum Plan* in 1990, which outlined the cultural significance of the site, and how it was to be conserved, interpreted and managed by the Trust.\(^{56}\)

The Trust determined that the Hyde Park Barracks was 'arguably the most significant secular building surviving from the second phase of Australian colonial development'.\(^{57}\) As with the MAAS, the appreciation of its aesthetic and architectural qualities continued, with the complex considered as:

major evidence of Governor Macquarie's vision for Sydney and one of the finest works of the accomplished colonial architect, Francis Greenway. The remaining early fabric provides rare evidence of the character of the building practice, architectural design and urban planning in early 19\(^{th}\) century Sydney. It has survived, despite the imperative of adaptation for a myriad of uses, to retain its status as a landmark within the history precinct of Macquarie Street and Queens Square.\(^{58}\)

Unlike the MAAS, the Trust believed that its 'primary significance' stemmed from its construction and use as a convict barracks and 'its unique evidence of the convict period of Australian history, particularly its demonstration of the accommodation and living conditions of male convicts in NSW 1819-1848'. Furthermore, the Trust recognised the history of its other occupants and the:

Remnants of its uses from the 1840s in building fabric and archaeological deposits, particularly as accommodation for female immigrants (1848-1887), district courts and government offices (1887-1975) and adopted museum (1980-1990) provide evidence of the changing attitudes and functions of government, community opinions and conservation practice.\(^{59}\)

The MAAS had interpreted the convict history, but for Emmett, the use and presentation of the Barracks under the MAAS was confusing because the external restoration and the reasons for conserving the site, was inconsistent with its use as a gallery.\(^{60}\) Instead, Emmett recommended:

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 46.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Emmett, "Hyde Park Barracks - Position Statement," 91.
a more considered and creative approach to the separation and/or integration of intact
building or adapted/introduced displays to enhance the story of the place . . . All exhibitions,
displays and signage should enhance and complement the building fabric, its history and
uses.  

The overriding aim for the Trust, was to conserve and interpret the 'primary cultural
significance of HPB'; 62 and the key to connecting the conservation and
interpretation of the site was historical archaeology. Archaeological excavations
undertaken in 1980-81 resulted in the collection of over 85,000 artefacts. One of
the most surprising finds was the underfloor material in the main building that
included thousands of rats' nests and artifacts (Figure 7.14). The most prized
discovery was a convict shirt, but most of the objects dated to the period when the
Barracks was used as a female immigration depot and asylum. The archaeological
collection became a primary focus in developing the museum exhibits, but the use
of historical archaeology extended beyond the display of archaeological objects and
was applied to the study and display of the building as an 'artefact'.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 7.14 One of many rat's nest found in the underfloor cavity at Hyde Park Barracks (HHT).

As 'the conscience of heritage management', the Trust's adherence to
archaeological principles at the Barracks signified a rejection of the romanticised
restoration by MAAS and the Public Works Department. Historical archaeology

61 Ibid.
also provided an interpretative framework that considered the physical relationship between the buildings, its objects, and their changing use and meaning over time. It was a means of interpreting the Barracks as an ‘artefact’ and as a tangible link with the past, where:

 Thousands of ordinary men and women passed through... convicts, immigrants, clients, jurors and judges all left their mark in one way or another - artisan builder, Public Works painter, a pen dropped between floorboards, an apron stolen by rats.63

Historical archaeology also inspired the presentation of the interiors, and the form and content of the exhibits. The history of the Barracks, its occupants, and its physical changes, were represented stratigraphically. Each level of the museum represented a different historical period. Artefacts were arranged within stratigraphic units, layers of painted finishes and building fabric were left exposed as evidence of building archaeology, and to also demonstrate historical transparency and authenticity in the conservation process.

Despite this innovative development in museum interpretation, the empirical preoccupation with revealing the building archaeology of the Barracks limited the Trust’s application of archaeological principles to a functional understanding of material culture. The research potential of the building and its archaeological collection, in conjunction with documentary evidence, was not yet fully realised.

Exhibiting the Curator’s Eye: Archaeological Conservation vs Interpretation

‘Layers of use’, ‘layers of history’, ‘layers of evidence’ – these were recurrent themes at Hyde Park Barracks. They were expressed through the different conservation treatment of each level of the main building, the occupational period that they represented, the exposure of physical fabric and painted surfaces, and in the arrangement of objects in displays (particularly those in the Orientation Room, the Archaeology Room and the reconstructed Convict Hammock Rooms).

Each floor was interpreted to represent a particular conservation and interpretation approach. The ground floor, with its contemporary finishes and materials,
represented the modern museum period; the painted scheme on the first floor was
reinstated to the law court period; and the second floor interpreted the convict
period, including replica hammocks in two of the rooms. The Trust described the
movement from the ground floor to the upper levels as ‘the museum journey’, with
visitors travelling through time (and historical methodologies).

The historical and methodological themes of the museum were summarised in the
‘Orientation Room’ (Figure 7.15). It was the first room viewed by visitors, and was
intended to present the ‘basic aims, character and uses of HPB’ through a display of
objects, and the buildings elements and internal finishes in the room.64 By directing
the focus to the Barracks itself, the building and objects were exhibited as evidence
of the historical and physical development of the site.

Both the building fabric and individual objects were displayed in stratagraphic
arrangements. The walls of the Orientation Room were painted black, except in
areas where different layers of painted finishes and wall surfaces were exposed
(Figure 7.16). In one corner, part of the wall was taken back to the original
unrendered and unpainted sandstock brickwork. The removal of plaster in another
area revealed where two new door openings were created and later infilled. In a
similar manner, part of the brickwork to the fireplace was exposed, with the
remaining sections of the lintel and hearth outlined in white paint.

The Orientation Room also included a central display case, with objects
representing the history of the Barracks. Over fifty groups occupied the site, but the
Trust simplified this history into three periods – convict barracks; female
immigration depot and asylum; and law courts and government offices.
Demonstrating the ‘layering of history’, objects were arranged into three
stratagraphic layers (Figure 7.17).

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64 Ibid., 54.
Figure 7.15
Orientation room, Hyde Park Barracks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Figure 7.16
A wall in the Orientation Room showing the 'layers' of use and evidence (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
Figure 7.17
The history of Hyde Park Barracks is displayed stratigraphically from its use as a convict barracks, female immigration depot, and law courts and offices (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Figure 7.18
Displays in the Orientation Room included convict tools, including a stone grinding wheel with the 'BO' Board of Ordnance marking (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Figure 7.19
Forks, knives and sewing implements signified the female immigration depot period of Hyde Park Barracks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
The bottom layer represented the 'convict barracks' phase, which spanned from 1819 to 1848, and included a convict work shirt, a cat-o'-nine tails, shackles and a stone grinding wheel with a Board of Ordinance 'BO' and arrow marking (Figure 7.18). The 'Immigration Depot' phase from 1848 to 1886 was represented in the centre of the display, by forks, knives, sewing pins and needles, and a cloth bonnet (Figure 7.19). At the top of the display was a barrister's wig, a typewriter, inkwells and pink legal ribbon, signifying the period of the 'law courts and government offices'.

Apart from identifying the three main phases on the glass of the central display case, the room did not include any signage. This emphasised the belief that objects spoke for themselves, and that the building too was an artefact. In developing the museum, the Trust accepted that a complete and definitive story could never be told through the surviving evidence. The display of selective areas along the walls in the Orientation Room signified the fortuitous survival of physical evidence, the gaps and consequently the incomplete story of the past. The museum was designed to educate visitors about the process of historical research and analysis because:

The gap between the reconstructed world from the 'recorded culture' and the 'lived culture' of the past is left to the imagination of the visitor.  

Despite encouraging visitors to 'experience' the physical evidence as a means of 'imagining' the past, the use and presentation of archaeological and building evidence in the 'Archaeology Room' and in the reconstructed convict dormitories was limited to functional and descriptive interpretations.

Part of the archaeological collection was displayed in the 'Archaeology Room', which was located on the first floor. According to the text panels, this room was 'dedicated to the permanent storage, display and interpretation of the rich archaeology collection excavated from the site and retrieved from the floor boards'. Archaeological methods were explained through the definition of technical terms, such as 'location', 'type' and 'use'. Archaeological practices were displayed through a reconstructed section of an excavation trench, complete with marked out grids, trowels, sieves and recording equipment (Figure 7.20). A cross-section of an

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65 Ibid., 41.
underfloor area was also included to show the thousands of artefacts that were hidden among the rats' nests discovered inside the Barracks.

The process of artefact analysis was displayed through an arrangement of objects or 'specimens' according to pre-determined 'type series'. Clay pipes, sandstock bricks, glass bottles and bones were grouped according to their functional classification and material 'type' (Figure 7.21). The display explained how:

The typology of things is a process of classification by a hierarchy of unique characteristics: functions, material, manufacture, colour... Each thing is given a name, order and place in a series of similar types of things. But type series makes all things equal or less common or important to the people who used them. About 80% of the type series is displayed here, the rest is stored below.66

The display text explained the limited interpretative value of classifying items within such categories. Functional and descriptive attributes do not reveal the relative importance of objects to the people who owned and used them, or why they were used. While noting the limitations of such artefact analysis, the Trust did not provide an alternative interpretation or understanding of the objects. In analysing the objects, the interpretation was limited to:

Use
Who, what, where, when, why were these things used by the people at Hyde Park Barracks before they went underground or under floorboards? Once they have been recovered, cleaned, sorted, stored and studied, we can begin to ask and answer these questions about the lifestyle of the past.

When things are seen in the context of social use, they become part of human experience: food and fancies, games and gadgets, work and worship.67

The Trust posed, but did not answer, questions about the social uses and meanings of the archaeological collection.

66 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Display Panel in the 'Archaeology Room', Hyde Park Barracks Museum.
Figure 7.20
Display in the 'Archaeology Room' showing the process and techniques of archaeological excavation.
(Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007)

Figure 7.21
A sample of the many artefacts excavated at Hyde Park Barracks. They were displayed according to their material to demonstrate the practice of classification.
(Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007)
The purpose of the ‘Archaeology Room’ was to demonstrate the methodologies used to interpret the story of the Barracks. Yet the archaeological display conformed to traditional museum methods whereby objects were placed in glass cases for passive observation. The emphasis on classifying items according to material and functional categories reinforced the deterministic aspects of nineteenth century museums that Hyde Park Barracks, as a social history museum, was designed to challenge.

Instead, archaeology was confined to a technical role in validating conservation decisions. The reconstruction of the convict dormitories on the upper level to the year 1819 was based on a combination of ‘building archaeology’ and documentary evidence. The ceilings were removed to reveal the timber roof beams, and the ironbark floors were left exposed. All the walls were taken back to the original brickwork and whitewashed (Figure 7.22 and 7.23).

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**Figure 7.22**
The upper level of the Hyde Park Barracks was stripped back to display the convict period. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

**Figure 7.23**
During the restoration of the building, 'spy holes' were uncovered. They were used by the overseers to observe the convicts at night. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

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In furnishing the dormitories as a convict barracks, a fragment of hammock fabric from the underfloor collection, and information obtained from naval technical journals were used to identify the material, style and construction of the hammocks. The location of the hammock rails and posts were determined from markings on the original floorboards.

Although the reconstruction process demonstrated the integrated use of different historical and physical evidence, the potential of material culture was still limited by functional and descriptive questions. What were the hammocks made from? How were they supported? Where were the support posts and rails located?

As a museum, Hyde Park Barracks demonstrated the different ways that material culture can be interpreted and presented, ranging from traditional arrangements in glass cases, to reconstructed interiors. The Trust sought to provide ‘a story of HPB and its people and their relationship to broader issues in Australian history [through] the holistic interpretation of the museum artefact’. Yet the interpretation of the Barracks through its physical fabric, the archaeological collection and documentary evidence, was limited to understanding its function, form and chronological history.

The ideological aims of the museum were incongruous with the messages communicated in the museum displays, which focused on building and material evidence. Nevertheless, Hyde Park Barracks was an innovative museum in its aim to present the entire history of the site, rather than interpreting a particular period as with previous house museums, and its presentation of the processes of conservation and interpretation. The curatorial methods developed at the Barracks were central when the Trust assumed management of Susannah Place.

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69 Ibid., 54.
SUSANNAH PLACE: A ‘MUSEUM IN THE MAKING’

The museological aim of engaging the public with historical and interpretative methodologies was taken to a new level at Susannah Place (Figure 7.24). For the first time, a house museum was opened while it was being conserved and transformed into a museum – a process previously undertaken behind closed doors. Turning the row of nineteenth century terrace houses into a museum also challenged the ‘great man-great house’ basis of most traditional house museums. Despite its convict use, even Hyde Park Barracks was associated with two notable male figures, namely the revered Governor Macquarie and the architecturally gifted Francis Greenway.

Figure 7.24
Susannah Place, The Rocks (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Susannah Place was neither architecturally important, nor connected to a well-known family or individual. Instead, its value lay in its representativeness and potential as an ‘artefact’ to reveal the social and cultural history of the working classes in Sydney since 1844. Its location in The Rocks and reprieve from demolition in the twentieth century was also testament to changing public attitudes towards the urban working-class environment. Yet the application of
archaeological principles in the conversion of Susannah Place into a museum overshadowed the rich oral history associated with the site, and restricted its full potential to interpreting its history within the broader context of The Rocks and working-class culture.

From condemnation to conservation

Located on Gloucester Street, Susannah Place comprised four terrace houses (No. 58-64). The end house (No. 64) also included a corner store, which fronted onto a side lane. Built by Irish immigrants, Edward and Mary Riley, in 1844, they proudly memorialised their property with a plaque on the façade:

Susannah Place
Anno Domini
1844

Accompanying the Rileys was Susannah Sterne, their nineteen-year old niece, after whom the terraces were named.

The two-storey houses were constructed in brick, with two rooms on each level. There was also a basement kitchen, which was accessed from the rear yard. Compared to the many ‘one-up, one-down’ terraces that branded The Rocks as a pestilent slum, Susannah Place was relatively well constructed. Each house included ventilation and internal fire isolation barriers, as well as their exclusive external laundry and privy. The latter was a luxury in The Rocks where one privy was often shared between several households. Compared with other domestic buildings of the period, Susannah Place was serviced relatively early, being connected to the running water in 1855 and sewerage in 1858.

The Rileys lived in No. 62, and leased the other houses for £26 per annum. The end terrace with the corner shop was leased for £28. Compared with other rents listed in the ‘Sydney Council Rate Assessment Books’, the Historic Houses Trust noted that this was not cheap accommodation and reflected the above average standard of Susannah Place.70 This was also reflected by the range of tenants who occupied the

houses, who were mostly skilled labourers and artisans associated with the waterfront industry of The Rocks. From the *Sands Directories*, the Trust gathered a picture of the various tenants that included a painter, compositor, shipwright, baker, policeman and boarding-house keeper.\(^{71}\)

Edward Riley died in 1853 and Susannah Place passed to his wife. Mary continued to live here until her death in 1874. She left two houses (No. 62 and 64) to Susannah Stern’s daughter, Mary Ann Finnigan (nee Hensley). The other two houses (No. 58 and 60) were bequeathed to the Church of England. The Finnegans ran the corner shop from 1876 to 1877, before moving to Granville. It was around this time that enclosed verandahs were added to No. 62 and 64 to accommodate a new kitchen that was previously located in the basement. The shingle roofs were also replaced with corrugated iron to meet new fire regulations. Following the Finnigan’s departure, all the houses were leased until the final tenants, the Marshalls, vacated No. 62 in 1990, ending 146 years of tenancy.

Figure 7.25
*Gibbs Lane, leading up to Gloucester Street, The Rocks, 1901. The back of the corner store (No. 64) of Susannah Place is marked by the sign 'CHEAP CASH GROCER' (M1 SLNSW – GPO 2-52629).*

The survival of Susannah Place into the twenty-first century was a remarkable story in itself. When the Sydney Harbour Trust resumed Susannah Place in 1901, along with the surrounding area after the Bubonic Plague, it was one of the few rows of houses to escape demolition (Figure 7.25). Demolition at the time included the buildings opposite Susannah Place, such as the Whalers’ Arms, whose footings

\(^{71}\) Kylie Winkworth, *Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place* (Unpublished report for Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1990), 5.
were excavated during the Cumberland Street archaeological investigations in 1994 (Figure 7.26). Susannah Place was spared due to its solid construction and services that ensured its survival into the twentieth century.

![Figure 7.26](image)
*The Whalers Arms, Gloucester Street, The Rocks, 1901. Located opposite Susannah Place, the pub and the adjacent houses were demolished as part of the slum clearance program following the Bubonic Plague. (ML SLNSW – SPF 190)*

Since its resumption, Susannah Place has remained under government administration, albeit by different authorities including the Sydney Harbour Trust (1901-1936), Maritimes Services Board (1936-1968), Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) and more recently, the Sydney Cove Authority (1988-1990), and is currently administered by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority. Despite being spared in 1901, its future was never assured in the twentieth century. The process of transforming Susannah Place into a museum involved more than the recognition of working-class history. Like Hyde Park Barracks, it was a product of changing heritage, conservation and historical methodologies.

Susannah Place was under the greatest threat during the 1970s (Figure 7.27). As discussed in Chapter 4, the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) was
established following Sir John Overall’s recommendations in his 1967 report, *Observations of the Redevelopment of the Western Side of Sydney Cove Rocks Area.* The purpose of the SCRA was to oversee the redevelopment of The Rocks. Without consulting the local community, it proposed widespread demolition to allow construction of new commercial skyscrapers. Angered by the lack of consultation and the possible displacement of many residents, locals formed ‘The Rocks Resident Action Group’ (RAG) in 1970. The organisation gained the support of the Builders’ Labourers’ Federation, which placed the first green ban on a working-class area in New South Wales.

![Circular Quay Skyline from Gloucester Street, The Rocks, January 1965. Susannah Place is shown against the growing city skyline. The AMP Building and the Cahill Expressway are visible to the left. (Photograph by the Australian Photographic Agency, ML SLNSW – ON173.]

Such political action halted the redevelopment of The Rocks, but did little to change the attitude of the SCRA. Structural reports of Susannah Place in 1974 and 1977 found it to be ‘beyond economic repair’ and the SCRA recommended the houses be demolished. The recommendations were not implemented, but the SCRA ceased maintaining Susannah Place in the hope of demolition through neglect. It was during the 1970s and ‘80s that the houses fell into disrepair, and the role of the

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Marshalls in assuming the role of ‘caretakers’ was paramount in the ongoing care of the buildings.

The 1980s marked a turning point for The Rocks. Recognising the tourist potential of Sydney’s birthplace, the SCRA began ‘restoring’ many of the historic shopfronts and public buildings, especially along George Street. It signified a change in attitude, even if the cultural value of The Rocks was defined by its aesthetic merits and economic potential. In 1982, the Authority re-assessed Susannah Place and in a complete turnaround, noted that ‘the buildings are attractive in appearance, are in reasonably good condition and would be easily restored’. The SCRA’s makeover was completed in 1988, the year of Australia’s Bicentenary, when ‘Redevelopment’ was dropped from the SCRA’s title and the agency was renamed the ‘Sydney Cove Authority’ (SCA).

This change also reflected a broadening interest in Australian social and cultural history. The National Trust, which supported the SCRA redevelopment proposals in the 1970s, listed Susannah Place on its Register in 1983, noting that:

This building is a typical building of an “inner” suburb from the 1840s, the Rocks being the only area in Sydney that can claim an established high density of population at this time. The nature of the housing and the presence of the corner grocery shop are products of a low-income, high density situation, combining with the Susannah Place Stairs adjacent and the buildings on either side as an almost intact period streetscape. The shop premises are of particular interest, being a retail grocery in use for much of its history, and little altered from its original construction. The conservation of this building should be at least as important as the preservation of the residential premises of the period, and particularly in the Rocks area, fast losing its less grand and less charming vernacular building to the pressures of the expanding city adjacent.

Despite the stereotypical inference of The Rocks being a ‘low-income’ and ‘less charming’ area, it did signal a changing perception of the area by middle-class Australians, and not just by unions, academics and locals.

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74 Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, Building Data Sheets (BDS) (Sydney: Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority), CS/19.

The involvement of the HHT also coincided with this tide of changing attitude. At the inaugural meeting of the Historic Houses Trustees in July 1980, the Minister of Public Works, Laurie John ‘Jack’ Ferguson, suggested that ‘it might be appropriate to consider the inclusion of a few humble dwellings, as well as those which reflect a grander life style’. The opportunity came in 1986, when the SCRA brought Susannah Place to the attention of the HHT. Peter Watts, along with several of the Trustees including Jack Ferguson, Peter Stanbury and Mr M. Sherman, inspected the terrace houses with Janet Thompson, the Director of SCRA, on 29 January 1986.

The property generated much interest amongst the Trustees, and Ferguson suggested the idea of a working-class house museum. The Trust commissioned Helen Proudfoot to undertake a historical study of Susannah Place, and assess its potential as a house museum. Proudfoot found that:

Susannah Place has the potential to become a very special house museum. The houses speak to us of people, not of decoration. They speak of ways of life, and domestic settings.

The building itself- in its bare state, is surprisingly evocative, even in disrepair and disarray as it is now... The relationship of the rooms to each other and to the service yard are in themselves demonstration of a past way of life, and the three levels serve to separate and emphasise their different functions. The building could provide an opportunity to depart from the stereotyped versions of Rocks history.

Like Annie Bickford and her interpretation of Calthorpes’ House, the work by Cary Carson and American studies in material culture also influenced Proudfoot, who noted in her report that a recent lecture by Dr Cary Carson:

reinforced the opinion I had formed about Susannah Place. He talked about “the new Social History” and how artefacts can be used to acquaint the public with the ideas that animate it. He remarked on the social historians’ new-found interest in ordinary people, which then ratified the display of “ordinary” rather than costly or precious objects – i.e. of objects that reflect the tasks, activities, and rituals of ordinary life. He also talked about the complex web

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77 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, ‘HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 60 (10 March 1986)’, *HHT Minutes (Feb. – March 1986)*, 3.
79 Ibid., 38.
of relationships that could exist in and around a building, linking it to the society as a whole, and how demonstrations of these past relationships could be used to illuminate the fragile social contract of modern life which has evolved from these previous interactions.

All this made me think how suitable Susannah Place could be for demonstrating these ideas.80

Nearly twenty years after its peak, the ‘new social history’ was outdated and was replaced by a new generation of cultural history. The preoccupation by Australian curators with social history subjects and methodologies reflected the lag between the development of historical scholarship and its adoption in museum practices.

Nevertheless, the Trustees agreed that Susannah Place ‘would make an ideal acquisition for the Trust’ and approached the Premier in June 1986.81 With his approval, the HHT and the SCA formed a partnership, with the SCA maintaining ownership and managing the conservation of the building, and the Trust overseeing the interpretation and management of the museum. This arrangement was formalised in 1992.

Exhibiting the Working-Class: ‘The final and inevitable act of middle-class intervention’? 82

Most of the HHT’s properties were noted for their architectural qualities or associations with famous figures, even if it did attempt to provide a more balanced interpretation by presenting the history of their ‘minor’ players like the servants, women and children. At Susannah Place it was the ‘ordinary’ person who occupied centre stage and it was an ideal vehicle to broaden the State’s heritage (as represented by the Trust’s portfolio), as well as establishing a museum that specifically addressed social history methodologies and subjects. The notion of cultural history remained absent in its development.

Ann Toy, who previously worked at Vaucluse House, was appointed the new curator at Susannah Place in January 1989. She surmised:

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80 Ibid., Preface.
82 Quoted from Winkworth, Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place, 23.
Susannah Place will have a very significant role to play within the Trust, as it will be our only example of a working-class house— for the 19th and 20th century. As such it will provide a fascinating contrast to our other properties and will give the Trust an opportunity to explore and interpret the social history of the working class in The Rocks from 1844-1990.83

Yet, despite its embrace of social history and sincere efforts to provide a more balanced representation of the State’s history, the HHT was unsure as to how Susannah Place should be interpreted. This uncertainty was reflected by the numerous reports addressing historiographical and ethical issues relating to the interpretation of working-class history at Susannah Place.84

The Trust had secured Susannah Place, but ‘Where to from here?’ This being the title of a seminar organised by Ann Toy as one of her initial tasks as curator.85 The purpose of this seminar was to determine a philosophical approach for the conservation and interpretation of the site. The question also summed up the historiographic and museological dilemmas facing the HHT as it sought to pioneer a new house museum form and grapple with its own assumptions and bias. Despite the influence of social history on heritage and house museum practices, a working-class house museum was a novel concept in Australia and overseas, even in the 1980s and ‘90s.

Examining some of the historiographical issues, Peter Emmett observed how:

The study of working class life is bedevilled by professional demarcations that reveal more about the values and competition of academic and museum professionals than about their subjects.86

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83 Ann Toy, Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street, the Rocks: Report on a Range of Proposals for the Conservation, Interpretation and Management Options for This Property (Unpublished report for Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1990), 19.
84 Peter Emmett, "They Didn't Have Any Locks on Their Doors Like You Have to Have Now" : Susannah Place - the Rocks: A Working Class Neighbourhood. A Discussion/Position Paper (Unpublished report Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1989); Moore, Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street the Rocks NSW Australia: Conservation Analysis and Guidelines; Proudfoot, Susannah Place, 58 - 64 Gloucester Street, Sydney; Toy, Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street, the Rocks: Report on a Range of Proposals for the Conservation. Interpretation and Management Options for This Property; Winkworth, Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place.
85 The seminar was attended by Peter Watts, Sue Hunt, James Broadbent, Peter Emmett, Ann Toy and Jacqui Goddard (from Robert Moore Architects).
86 Emmett, "They Didn't Have Any Locks on Their Doors Like You Have to Have Now" : Susannah Place - the Rocks: A Working Class Neighbourhood. A Discussion/Position Paper, 42.
One of the primary concerns was how to represent the former residents at Susannah Place and the ‘working-class’ overall, as reflected in Lesley Walker’s discussion, “Should Working Class be in Quotation Marks?” According to Walker:

The middle class discomfort with even the term ‘working class’ surfaced quickly in the discussion about interpretation – could we refer to Susannah Place’s tenants as working class? In using the term were we being classist? Elitist? Dismissive? Derogatory?

Such concerns reflected the previous bias by heritage professionals in managing ‘high culture’ and how the Trust grappled with understanding the history of working-class people. In the late nineteenth century, the phrase used was ‘working classes’, because their contemporaries recognised the distinction between unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers. Walker’s remark also reflected the Trust’s prevalent middle-class perception that the label ‘working class’ was offensive, although local residents proudly identified themselves as working-class during the green bans of the 1970s.

Emmett realised the potentially limited effect of balancing history by merely adding a working-class property into the house museum mix. He noted how:

‘Social history’ broadens the field by tracing customs and tales of everyday life but swamps the individual in huge generalisations about the ‘good ol’ days’ of ‘childrearing and churchgoing, crinolines and corsets’. It adopts a strange anti-intellectual, anti-elite, anti-aesthetic stance that exposes an inverted snobbery of connoisseurship.

Influenced by the labour histories of the 1970s, Emmett believed that:

Our historical aim is, of course, the totality of human experience and relationships in real men and women and real contexts – the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular time and

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88 Ibid., 354.


90 Emmett, "They Didn’t Have Any Locks on Their Doors Like You Have to Have Now": Susannah Place - the Rocks: A Working Class Neighbourhood. A Discussion/Position Paper, 42.
place... we must see working class people in the context of horizontal relationships, not solely in terms of vertical contrasts of rich and poor, 'gented' [sic] and 'jaded', 'us' and 'them'.

Emmett's contextual approach placed Susannah Place within a social and cultural matrix. It located the terraces within a spatial spectrum extending from Sydney as a city, to The Rocks, the neighbourhood, the individual houses, their rooms and the individual. These in turn were linked to social practices of the community and between individuals, which in turn were expressed through the cultural environment. Emmett also emphasised the need to avoid sentimentality and stereotypes, or popular and professional expectations that Susannah Place was significant because they were rare or unique, noting that:

We are dealing with the common, mundane, cheap, anonymous, used and loved... Working class attitudes and objects have their own aesthetics. It is not a negative of middle class values.

This was a counterpoint to the predominant opinions on Susannah Place that assessed its importance based on its rarity and longevity, such as its own 'Statement of Significance', in which:

Susannah Place's importance lies primarily in its survival and continuity of occupation since 1844 as a row of working class houses, as an artefact of history and its evidence of families lives, taste and circumstances over the past 145 years.

It is a rare surviving example of an intact simple working class terrace which has undergone few alterations despite major changes to the social infrastructure of the area.

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91 Ibid. Emmett noted how he was heavily influenced by his university education in labour history during the 1970s and early 1980s (Interview with Peter Emmett, 16 October, 2003). For example, see Herbert George Gutman, Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1976); Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920, Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History. (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

92 Emmett, "They Didn't Have Any Locks on Their Doors Like You Have to Have Now": Susannah Place - the Rocks: A Working Class Neighbourhood. A Discussion/Position Paper, 41.

93 Ibid., 43.

94 Moore, Susannah Place 38-64 Gloucester Street the Rocks NSW Australia: Conservation Analysis and Guidelines, 30.
Yet, the very act of transforming Susannah Place into a precious and rare ‘artefact’ was effectively ending the working-class connection that the HHT and government sought to preserve. Also, while acknowledging that heritage values are fluid, it was ironic that Susannah Place was preserved as a vestige of working-class culture – an aspect of Sydney’s past that the government had repeatedly attempted to obliterate for most of the twentieth century. As Kylie Winkworth cautioned:

There is a danger that the transformation of Susannah Place into a house museum may be seen as the final and inevitable act of middle class intervention in the lives of working class people in The Rocks.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{Figure 7.28}
The Back-to-Backs museum was conserved as one of the last surviving examples of the thousands of Victorian working-class houses in Birmingham that were built back to back around a courtyard as a means of providing housing to a rapidly growing industrial population. Four houses were recreated to represent particular periods from the 1840s to the 1970s (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2004).

\textsuperscript{95} Winkworth, Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place, 23.
Such considerations were also precipitated by the paucity of other working-class house museums. Working-class history had been addressed by museums like the Powerhouse, but Vienna Cottage was the only working-class house museum in Sydney at the time. In America, the ‘Lower East Side Tenement Museum’ in New York was also in its developmental stage in the late 1980s, and in England, the first ‘working-class’ house museum, Birmingham Back-to-Backs, opened in 2004 (Figure 7.28).96

Vienna Cottage and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Located in Hunter’s Hill and managed by the National Trust, Vienna Cottage was built in the 1870s for a shoemaker, John Jacob Hellman, and his family. The stone house consisted of four rooms, with a separate kitchen and laundry building at the back. It remained in family ownership until the National Trust purchased the property in 1984.

Rather than presenting the property as a period house museum, the National Trust conserved it ‘as found’ and wanted to interpret the home to the 1870s. Like Rouse Hill House, this was an innovative conservation approach at the time, but because Vienna Cottage had been tenanted since 1926, none of the original furnishings remained and very little historical documentation about the site existed. For its interpretation, the Trust relied on panel displays, photographs and a furnished model of the house as it may have appeared in the 1870s.

As such the main house served more as a gallery displaying historical information than a house museum. The exception to this was the interpretation of the weatherboard addition, which was furnished with the personal belongings of a former tenant, George Anderson. Its recreation as a living room and makeshift kitchen, including smells of cooking oil and grease, provided an evocative insight of Anderson’s bachelor lifestyle. It provided an important lesson for Ann Toy, who  

96 I was fortunate to visit Birmingham Back-to-Backs in 2004, several months before its official opening due to Susanna Smith (National Trust curator) good will and very good connections.
realised that Susannah Place faced similar interpretative difficulties if conserved ‘as found’ and without a furniture collection.  

As an urban working-class house museum, the ‘Lower East Side Tenement Museum’ possessed greater similarities to Susannah Place. When Toy visited New York in 1989, the ‘Museum’ was a fledgling non-profit organisation that had been established five years earlier. At the time, it was leasing the storefront of a five-storey tenement at 97 Orchard Street, a building that it hoped to purchase through a $3 million fund raising campaign. Its ultimate aim was to restore the apartments ‘to reflect the community’s multi-ethnic history of German, Irish, Italian, Eastern European and Chinese immigrants, as well as formerly enslaved African-Americans’.  

Its founder, Ruth J. Abram, was a social, civil rights and feminist activist who wanted to develop a tenement museum that nurtured ‘a greater appreciation of groups often ethnically, economically and religiously divided’ and challenged arguments:

that strong ethnic and religious identities interfere with assimilation and must be abandoned, as well as those who believe Old World ties are essential to survival.

For Abram:

The tenement building allows us to enter that debate. Behind every door is a family with a different religion, a different language, each unique. But in the hallways, stoops and street, all those people are together pursuing the American dream... For a nation of immigrants, there is no single site more historically significant than the tenement.

Working with curator, Anita Jacobson, the two spent several years scouring the Lower East Side for a tenement suitable for a museum, before realising that most of the nineteenth century tenements had either been demolished or renovated. While looking for an office space in January 1988, however, they came across a vacant

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97 Toy, Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street, the Rocks: Report on a Range of Proposals for the Conservation, Interpretation and Management Options for This Property, 8.
99 Ibid., 9.
100 Ruth J. Abram quoted in Ibid., 8, 9.
shopfront space of a five-storey tenement at 97 Orchard Street and inadvertently found the perfect building for their museum (Figure 7.29).

Figure 7.29
97 Orchard Street, constructed in 1863 and vacated in 1935, the building was transformed into the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. (photograph by Benjamin Epps, 2001; Lower East Side Tenement Museum).

It was constructed in 1863 before city laws governing building construction were introduced. As such, the twenty apartments were cramped, and originally lacked central heating, electricity and indoor plumbing. From 1867, New York City began introducing legislation to improve tenement conditions. For 97 Orchard Street, the new building codes meant the installation of gas lines, running water and internal flush toilets. Requirements for increased ventilation and light resulted in windows being cut into walls between rooms. When further building laws were passed during the Depression, the owner, the Helpern family who purchased the building in 1918, decided to evict every occupant instead of investing further capital into the property. The building requirements did not apply to the commercial areas, so the
four shopfronts continued to be leased, while the remainder of the building became vacant from 1935.

When news of the museum project spread through the neighbourhood, former residents and their descendants emerged with information and objects. It was an unexpected windfall for the Tenement Museum, whose initial plan was to recreate the apartment interiors using fictional composites of the immigrant families who previously lived there. Instead, the Museum was able to restore four apartments based upon the stories and objects from actual residents. This included the German-Jewish Gumpertz family, who lived in the building during the 1870s economic depression; the Levines - Russian Jewish immigrants who resided there in the 1890s; the Rogarshevaskys, a Jewish family from Lithuania who lived in the building from the 1910s to 1935 (Figure 7.30 and 7.31); and the Baldizzi family, who arrived from Sicily in 1924 and lived at No. 97 Orchard Street until they too were evicted in 1935. Most of the families were connected with the Lower East Side’s garment industry, which still exists today but is now associated with the Chinese community.

The Museum also created a ‘living history’ apartment based on the Sephardic-Jewish Confino family from Kastoria, a region that was once part of the Ottoman Empire and now part of Greece. This apartment was furnished to c.1916 with period objects and the family’s story told through a costumed interpreter playing the teenage Victoria Confino. The interpretation of this apartment was geared towards families and children, and allowed visitors to touch the items, as well as trying on the period clothing and playing music on the wind-up Victrola.

To allow visitors to experience what the apartments were like when the building was vacated, the Museum also included an unrestored apartment in its 1935 state. As a comparison, it illustrated the conservation and interpretative approaches adopted for each of the other apartments and also highlighted the changes made to the original building following health reform campaigns during the nineteenth century for improved housing standards.

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101 Ibid., 12.
Figure 7.30
The Rogarshevsky family standing outside 97 Orchard Street, c. 1915 (Lower East Side Tenement Museum)

Figure 7.31
The Rogarshevsky family's apartment prior to (left) and after restoration (below). The interiors were recreated using oral history testimonies and objects donated by the family (Lower East Side Tenement Museum)
The next family to be interpreted or ‘move in’ will be Joseph and Bridget Moore, an Irish Catholic waiter and his wife, who lived in the building in 1869. This was the period just after the Civil War, during which New York was rocked by the violent Draft Riots in July 1863. Most of the rioters were Irish. For a city and country with such a strong history of Irish immigration, this will be the first permanent exhibit of Irish working-class life at a National Historic Site.

When Ann Toy visited the Museum in 1989, it was still raising funds to acquire the tenement. As such, the main interpretative program included ‘The Tenement’s Permanent Exhibit’ that explored the six households in their historical context. Without a historic building, the Museum focused on public programs that explored the different waves of immigrants through walking tours of the area, an approach that impressed Toy. This included the dramatised ‘Peddler’s Pack Walking Tour’ that traced the major cultural institutions of the Jewish community such as the Daily Forward Building, Educational Alliance and the Rabbi Jacob Yeshiva (the ‘Harvard’ of the Yeshivas). Other tours included ‘Pathway to Freedom’, which examined the nineteenth century African-American community of lower Manhattan, and ‘The Streets Where We Lived’, a multi-ethnic historic tour that examined both historical and contemporary changes on the Lower East Side, Chinatown and Little Italy.

When the Lower East Tenement Museum opened the recreated apartments to the public in October 1994, it continued a thematic approach for its tours of 97 Orchard Street. In 2005, these included ‘Piecing It Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry’. This tour explored the development of the garment industry through the Levine family, who operated a garment shop from their apartment, and the Rogarshesky family, whose father, Abraham, worked as a presser in a garment factory until he died of tuberculosis in 1918.

‘Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times’ explored how families survived through economic hardship and the networks of support available at the time. For

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102 Ibid., 21.
103 Toy, Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street, the Rocks: Report on a Range of Proposals for the Conservation, Interpretation and Management Options for This Property, 18, 100-104.
the German-Jewish Gumpertz family, the ‘disappearance’ of their father Julius
Gumpertz in 1874 in the midst of an economic depression, meant that their mother,
Natalie, turned the front room into a dressmaking shop as means of earning an
income, and enabled her to remain home to care for four young children. The
Baldizzi family also faced financial uncertainty during the Depression in the 1930s,
and this tour examined the development of social welfare in the United States, and
illustrated the options families had in the past compared to welfare programs
available today.

A Working-Class House Museum or a Museum of Conservation Philosophies?

For the Historic Houses Trust, the experience gained from its previous properties
and the examples provided by Australian and overseas working-class house
museums, resulted in a sophisticated museum at Susannah Place. It combined the
empirical aims of Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House and the primacy of
material evidence as espoused through Rouse Hill House and Elizabeth Farm, while
integrating the interpretative process as part of the museum presentation as provided
at Hyde Park Barracks. Once again, the Historic Houses Trust was entering new
museological territory and it embraced the challenge of pioneering a new house
museum model.

Initial interpretative options ranged from maintaining the ‘working-class’
occupancy of Susannah Place by reletting all the terraces and limiting interpretation
to the building exteriors and the streetscape, to leasing two of the houses and
establishing a teaching and site resource centre in the former shop terrace (No. 64)
and a house museum interpreting a c.1850 interior in No. 60.105 In 1989, however,
the last tenants, Mr and Mrs Marshall indicated that they were vacating No. 62,
thereby ending the continuous history of occupation at Susannah Place.

In light of this development, Ann Toy presented another option, which involved
turning the entire site into a house museum that interpreted its history while
demonstrating the conservation and interpretation spectrum relative to the intactness
of each house. This included the recreation of No. 64 as a c.1915 corner shop,
conserving No. 60 and partially furnishing it as an 1848-50 residence, and

105 Winkworth, Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place.
maintaining No. 58 ‘as found’ for teaching conservation methodologies. House No. 62 was also to be maintained as found and used as a caretaker’s residence.

Assessing these options, Kylie Winkworth considered Toy’s concept as ‘the most flexible and responsive proposal that provide[d] for the long-term conservation of the entire terrace’.¹⁰⁶ She also considered the different interpretative approaches for each house to be sympathetic to ‘the particular strengths and qualities of each space’ and offered ‘the widest range of approaches and points of interest’.¹⁰⁷ Another advantage of this proposal was that it could be implemented in stages.

Figure 7.32
Peter Watts at Susannah Place during conservation works, c.1991 (HHT).

In September 1990, the Historic Houses Trust and the Sydney Cove Authority adopted Ann Toy’s proposal and developed the idea of presenting Susannah Place as a “Museum in the Making”. The plan consisted of two phases, which allowed immediate access to the property. In the first stage, the houses were to be opened with minimal interpretation for an “as is” preview while they were being conserved (Figure 7.32). This allowed the public to observe the museum-making process, a

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 32.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
stage that usually occurred without public input or access. It also provided an opportunity to gauge public reaction, while allowing a longer period for developing Susannah Place into a house museum in the second stage.\textsuperscript{108}

Trustees at the Historic Houses Trust praised the idea as ‘novel’ and ‘achievable [at a] low cost to the Trust’.\textsuperscript{109} It also ‘promoted a working relationship on cultural tourism sites with Sydney Cove Authority’ and the partnership between the two agencies was formalised in February 1992. The project team consisted of James Broadbent, Elizabeth Wright, Joy Hughes, Ann Toy, and the newly appointed Education Manager, Lesley Walker.

The first stage of the ‘Museum in the Making’ began in September 1992, and public tours showing the conservation and interpretative process commenced the following February. As with the Trust’s other properties, the conceptualisation of Susannah Place as an ‘artefact’ was a recurrent theme throughout the museum. This was communicated on two levels. First, it was assumed that as an artefact, Susannah Place and its visible layers of evidence from different periods could ‘demonstrate its own history and its adaptation to the changing needs of its occupants over time’ and enable this history to be told ‘accurately’.\textsuperscript{110} Second, the notion of Susannah Place as an artefact was used to illustrate different methods of conserving and interpreting material culture. The dual interpretative purposes of the Museum were sophisticated, but at times, counteracted each other.

These messages were presented concurrently throughout the museum tour, which included three houses – No. 58, 60 and 64. Beginning in No. 58, visitors entered a dark and dilapidated house - a sharp contrast to the brightly restored corner store where they had purchased their tickets. The purpose of this house was to introduce the conservation philosophy and historical themes of the museum.

Beginning with a video, the history of Susannah Place was presented within the context of major changes in The Rocks. Beginning with European settlement, the


\textsuperscript{110} Toy, \textit{Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street, the Rocks: Report on a Range of Proposals for the Conservation, Interpretation and Management Options for This Property}, 9.
documentary video charted the development of the waterfront trade and its related industries during the nineteenth century, the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in 1900, the resumption of The Rocks in 1901, and the Green Bans in the 1970s. The interspersed interviews with former Susannah Place residents provided personal insights to how the urban environment, population and living standards changed in the twentieth century. It also revealed a once thriving community that declined in conjunction with the disappearing shipping industry and city 'improvement' schemes.

The main historical themes from the video were the economic and social diversity of The Rocks, and the closely-knit community. It also challenged the popular perception of the pestilential slum by demonstrating how Susannah Place did not fit within such stereotypes. With its solid construction, sanitary facilities and survival following the 1901 resumption, Susannah Place was representative but not typical of the range of working-class houses and families in the area. Above all, Susannah Place was portrayed as a survivor, especially in the twentieth century when clashes between locals and developers climaxed with the formation of the Residents Action Group and the green bans.

Despite challenging historical stereotypes of The Rocks, it was apparent from the unrestored interiors of No. 58 that the Trust did not intend to present a romanticised image of working-class history. In conserving Susannah Place, the philosophical influence of Rouse Hill House was strong. As with all the Trust's properties, an archaeological investigation of the building structure, layers of paint, wallpaper and decorative finishes was undertaken, but there was no attempt to restore the interiors back to original pristine form or to a particular period. Evidence from all periods of the site's history was considered equally significant and, apart from works to stabilise the structures, Susannah Place was conserved 'as found'.

Unlike the other terraces, No. 58 was not furnished and the interpretative focus was firmly on the building fabric. The last residents were Ernie Anderson and his family, who left in 1975. The subsequent neglect by the SCRA meant that water penetration from faulty guttering caused damage to the ceilings, plastering, paint and wallpaper finishes (Figure 7.33). Nevertheless, No. 58 was in the best condition compared to the other terraces and used as a 'study model' to:
Stimulate public discussion, provide evidence/teaching resources for the public and specialist groups, to gain an understanding of the principles and processes of preservation, conservation, restoration and interpretation of building fabric, interior spaces, decorative finishes and domestic technology.\textsuperscript{111}

\textbf{Figure 7.33}
No. 58 was left 'as found' to demonstrate the physical state of the terraces when they were converted into a museum (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003).

The Trust also wanted to interpret the more recent history of Susannah Place. As Robert Moore noted:

The present deterioration of the property is a result of the neglect in the 1970s and 80s and is not an indicator of squalor or poor construction...[and] has little relevance to the lives of the residents from 1844 to the early 1970s. The last 15 years however is a most significant time for the Rocks and should not be underestimated in the history and analysis of Susannah Place.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Moore, \textit{Susannah Place 58-64 Gloucester Street the Rocks NSW Australia: Conservation Analysis and Guidelines}, 26.
The decision to use No. 58 as a ‘study model’ was further confirmed when oral history interviews revealed that it was occupied by four generations of the Anderson/Gallagher family from 1918 to 1973. This explained the relative intactness of the internal finishes that dated from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s.

Only the two ground floor rooms were accessible. Two text panels in the back room explained the importance of Susannah Place as ‘architectural artefacts’ and as ‘social documents interpreting the way of life of working-class people from 1844 until 1990’. They also outlined the aim of the museum to present visitors with a range of ideas about building conservation and working-class history, and the reason for conserving the houses and their interiors in their ‘as found’ state because:

The evidence of its use and its adaptation to the changing needs of its occupants provides a unique record of its own history. Layers of paint finishes, wallpapers, floor coverings and a diverse range of household fittings and amenities such as gaslight brackets, electric light fittings and fuel stoves, laundry coppers, external bathrooms and water closets have survived. They tell us much about the lives and tastes of the people who lived here and about the changes in domestic services and technology.

No. 58 did not initially include any interpretative aids and was only opened to specialist groups. In April 1997 however, ‘swing tags’ were placed on the walls of the ground floor rooms because of the ‘need to make the rooms more easily spoken about by the guides and volunteers and [to] encourage increase use of this important area of the site’. The labels were attached to different features around the rooms, and included information about the sequence of wallpapers, dates of particular architectural features, method of construction, conservation issues and the possible uses of the numerous nails found on the walls (Figure 7.34 and 3.35). Some examples included:

Wallpaper
Wallpapers could cover the accumulation of building flaws as well as revive a room with pattern, tone and colour.

A Brief Spell?
This sequence of 6 wallpapers represents a short period of room decoration, most likely between 1900 and the 1930s. This layer of green paint which went over it was added in the 1940s.

Common and Colourful
A green distemper is still visible here. This was a common 19th century paint made from water, pigment and glue sizing. Some visitors may remember the pale tints of Calcimine.

British Made
Many goods of British manufacture appeared in the home of colonial Sydney.

1844
This door surround and moulding has survived from the original construction of Susannah Place.

Low Status
The back door has less prestige than the front door. This is obvious in its rough-and-ready construction.

Plaster Problems
Once plaster sets to a solid finish it doesn't like moisture or movement. There are several generations of plaster repairs in Susannah Place.

Plastic Paint
Too many coats of paint have smothered this brick wall. Entrapped moisture had led to the swelling of the many underlying wallpapers.

Mystery
What ornament or clocks would have required two nail supports placed like this? [Visitors wrote on the label: 'A clock'; 'A mirror'; and 'A sword in scabbard. There are 4 nails in this wall. 3 in a triangular formation'.]
Figure 7.34
Swing Tags were placed in No. 58 in 1997 to assist in the interpretation of Susannah Place (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003).

Figure 7.35
The information provided by the swing tags was generally about the form and function of the built fabric (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2003).
Following the assumption that the house was 'a record of four generations of one family', what insight did visitors gain about the Anderson family?

In a similar approach to Hyde Park Barracks, this structuralist reading of material evidence promoted a functional and descriptive reading of a dusty dilapidated building that provided only limited insight into the lives of the Anderson family. The subsequent inclusion of the 'swing tags' suggested that despite earlier assumptions, objects could not speak for themselves. Even with these descriptive additions, very little was added to the overall understanding of working-class culture and history.

The prevailing belief that objects could 'speak for themselves' also overshadowed the value of the oral histories provided by former residents that differentiated Susannah Place from other house museums in Sydney. Disagreeing with the material focus of the museum, Lesley Walker wrote at the time of the museum's opening in 1993:

*This is a wonderful opportunity for making a museum based on issues, on oral, social and community history and on 20th Century people.*

Initially, No. 60 was recreated to the 1840s (Figure 7.36). Historical documents indicated that Francis Cunningham and his family were the first tenants, but little else was known about how they lived, used or furnished the house. As such, the Trust used mid-nineteenth century household inventories from bankruptcy papers to determine the 'typical' furnishings of the period. 'Props' were used to indicate the use and spatial arrangement of an 1840s parlour, which was 'pretty' but 'lacked the presence of people'.

It was an unusual approach for the Trust, which opposed the use of period rooms in house museums and also in light of the available oral history accounts. As Walker questioned:

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114 Walker, "Should Working Class Be in Quotation Marks? The Public Face of Susannah Place, the Rocks, Sydney", 355.

115 Ibid.
Is it better to see this 19th Century parlour, conjectural as it is... which encourage visitors to read the room from a traditional decorative arts context, ... or is it more meaningful to hear voices from the more recent past talking about how this room was?

Mrs Sarantides lived in No. 60 in the 1930s and '40s. Speaking to the Trust, her grandson described how the front room:

... was a very, very seldom used room... I always recall this room as being dark... I think this is the first time I've actually sat here and had a conversation with anyone... when I used to come here and help Grandmother on odd times I used to come in here and sweep it out... the curtains were drawn... in fact I was even a bit scared coming into this room because it was dark... there was a table... with four or five chairs around it and a picture of my uncle Emmanuel over the mantelpiece... I can always recall the smell of kerosene... I couldn't get out of the room fast enough – it was too unused.¹¹⁶

The contrast between a furnished room based on conjecture and one based on personal stories was made apparent through the interpretation of house No. 64. Jim ‘Dutchy’ Young’s family lived in and operated the corner store from c.1902 to the 1920s. The archaeological survey of the building uncovered markings where the former shop shelves and fittings were located, but it was Jim Young’s oral history that provided a detailed history of his family and the neighbourhood, as well as a description of the business, the range of goods sold, and the interior decorations and furnishings of the shop and home. It enabled the Trust to fully restore the corner store, filled with the smells and colours of goods like Sunlight Soap and boiled sweets (Figure 7.37).

Figure 7.37
The corner store at No. 58 was recreated to c.1910 using Jim Young’s oral history. His family lived at Susannah Place from 1902 to the 1920s (Photography by Anna Wong, 2007).
Figure 7.38 The recreated back room at No. 58, Susannah Place using John Young's oral history (Anna Wong, 2003)

The family lived in the remainder of the house, which included a piano, dining table and icebox in the back room (Figure 7.38). The three children in the family initially shared a bedroom, which included a single bed, a three-quarter iron bed, and a chest of drawers:

...then in later years my sister and mother occupied the front room as she got bigger and my father came to sleep in the back room with my brother and I.\(^{117}\)

As Ann Toy observed:

Without this detailed knowledge about his family's history and lifestyle...we would not be able to propose a re-creation of the c.1914 interiors off this house which realistically reflects his family's history.\(^{118}\)

\(^{117}\) James 'Dutchy' Young, 1990, quoted in Walker, "Should Working Class Be in Quotation Marks? The Public Face of Susannah Place, the Rocks, Sydney., 356.

For Walker, the oral history evidence required ‘a major rethink’ of No. 58 and No. 60 and also the Trust’s empirically based conservation and interpretative philosophies:

It was at this point that two diametrically opposed views surfaced. ‘The building is the primary artefact’ viewpoint wanted to emphasise the architectural, building fabric, conservation practices at the property and wished to keep one of the four houses as an archive, available only to special tertiary groups on specialised tours. The opposing view saw the social, community and oral history as the strengths of Susannah Place; wished to interpret the properties through ideas, words and lives of the people who lived there with a particular emphasis on the 20th Century.

In reference to the predominant philosophical approach adopted by the Historic Houses Trust, Walker also remarked how:

One view expressed by a senior curator was that what is most significant about Susannah Place is that the building fabric has survived from 1844, not that it has one of the richest collections of the 20th Century working class people’s memories and the physical context for those memories. He asserted that the social, oral and community history was not dependant on the context or the survival of the buildings themselves. . . . I on the other hand, would argue that people’s memories are as integral to the building as the fabric and vital in any interpretation of the place.\textsuperscript{119}

House No. 60 was subsequently re-interpreted to include the 1930s kitchen of Mrs Sarantides with kitchen cupboards made from packing cases and plywood for the sink bench. Excerpts from Kay and George Adeley’s oral history were also incorporated as part of a soundscape. The 1840s front parlour remained however, creating a disjointed interpretation of the house that jumped from one century to the next.

Susannah Place was formally opened on 18 February 1993 with a street party involving former residents, locals from The Rocks, as well as conservation practitioners and educators.\textsuperscript{120} ‘Museum in the Making’ was an ambitious project that aimed to communicate multiple historical and methodological messages. In a

\textsuperscript{119} Walker, “Should Working Class Be in Quotation Marks? The Public Face of Susannah Place, the Rocks, Sydney”, 355-356.

\textsuperscript{120} Helen Temple, ‘Properties Report’, HHT Minutes (Feb. – April 1993), HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 129 (8 March, 1993), Item No. 8.
sense, the property was too small to accommodate so many ideas. At Susannah Place, there were only four houses, with one used as a caretaker’s residence. Using No. 58 as a ‘study model’ meant that only two houses were available for interpreting 146 years of history.

By comparison, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum included twenty apartments, which allowed the flexibility to present several family stories from different periods of the site’s history. It also meant that it was able to showcase its interpretative approaches, including leaving one apartment ‘as found’, without infringing on the main aim of telling the stories of American immigrants and their working-class experiences. The museum also included an impressive range of thematic tours that related the interiors and material culture to the wider nineteenth and twentieth century history and streetscape of New York City.

At Susannah Place, the overriding focus on conserving the built fabric and the displays that demonstrated the empirical process of conservation also sidelined the opportunities provided by the rich oral history. In her examination of the museum, Charlotte Smith concluded that:

... its emphasis on scientifically justified conservation practice as theorised by the Burra Charter, is so dominant at Susannah Place Museum that the residents struggle to be heard.\textsuperscript{121}

Grace Karskens commended the museum’s distinction between history and heritage, but noted the disparity between the historical themes raised in the video, and how these were examined through the interpretation of the building evidence:

What, for example, do papered walls, carefully chosen paint colours, flushing toilets and neatly swept backyards suggest about living conditions and the taste for respectability among the nineteenth century working-classes? ... Susannah Place suggests a far more complex scenario of shifting cultural values, or merging and mingling people who, I suspect refuse to stay in boxes historians create for them.\textsuperscript{122}


Through her involvement with the excavation of the Cumberland Street site in The Rocks, and subsequent study of the area, Karskens found that despite being known as the ‘birthplace of a nation’, The Rocks’ history had received surprisingly little attention from historians.\textsuperscript{123} The Cumberland Street excavations developed a research program using both archaeological and historical practices, thereby demonstrating how an integrated approach provided a more intimate understanding of people’s experiences. The ‘working-class’ was not historically static or uniform, and Karskens found that it was through material evidence that the transition from old ‘pre-industrial’ cultural practices to a more industrial and consumer-based culture, could be observed.\textsuperscript{124}

As Winkworth suggested, ‘it may be that the present models of the house museum are not appropriate or adequate’ for a working-class house museum.\textsuperscript{125} At Rouse Hill House and Meroogal, the ‘as found’ approach was appropriate because of the intact furnishings. It was possible to observe the layers of domestic history. This was not the case at Susannah Place. As the recreation of No. 64 demonstrated however, each of the houses could have provided the context for the rich array of memories of former occupants. Broadbent’s philosophical influence on Ann Toy’s approach at Susannah Place was strong, but as Des Griffin pointed out:

\begin{quote}
It will be no use preserving the objects if even in the future they do not tell us anything about what it means to live here, or used to mean.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Susannah Place may be an ‘artefact’, but sometimes intangible evidence is equally, if not more important.

\textsuperscript{121} Karskens, \textit{The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney}, xiii.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{125} Winkworth, \textit{Options Paper for the Interpretation of Susannah Place}, 23.
\textsuperscript{126} Des Griffin, “Some Thoughts on Museums Futures”, \textit{Artlink}, vol. 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 7-8.
HYDE PARK BARRACKS AND SUSANNAH PLACE

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Returning to Anne Bickford’s comments in 1977 that there was:

no restoration project in Australia where original parts of the structure have been left exposed, so that one can see what the original paint colours, and structural details looked like.\textsuperscript{127}

Bickford would be pleased that the adoption of archaeological methodologies into house museum practices resulted in museums like Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place. Both literally displayed the layers of evidence uncovered through building archaeology, and demonstrated the ‘objective’ investigative process that guided conservation decisions. The influence of the Port Arthur Conservation Project on heritage practices also meant that evidence from all phases was considered equally important, although this was adhered to more rigorously at Susannah Place than at Hyde Park Barracks.

As the ‘conscience of heritage management’, historical archaeology provided the Historic Houses Trust with the means to demonstrate its objectivity by displaying the investigative methodologies. Heritage may be a form of public history and subject to cultural and historical bias, but the Trust maintained its stance that objects could ‘speak’ for themselves and the past could be understood through empirical study. The effect was the conceptualisation of Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place as ‘artefacts’, but this interpretation was limited to mainly their form and function, yet limiting the full potential of archaeological research.

Nevertheless, both museums were and remain innovative house museums that are recognised internationally. Developed within a similar timeframe as the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, staff from this museum visited Susannah Place for insight and guidance, as did the English National Trust when setting up Birmingham-Back-to-Backs.\textsuperscript{128} Reflecting social historical aims to conserve heritage places that were more historically and socially representative, both Susannah Place and the Hyde Park Barracks were conserved for their association with social groups, rather than a specific famous individual. It was also the first time that attempts were made to

\textsuperscript{127} Anne Bickford quoted in Mulvaney, "Musing Amidst the Ruins..." 6.
\textsuperscript{128} Alda Scholfield (Susannah Place). per.comm., 17 February 2007.
interpret the entire history of a historical site, rather than the conventional method of restoring and interpreting a building to a particular period.

The preoccupation with demonstrating intellectual transparency, however, was indicative of the growing body of museum and heritage studies critiquing the assumed objective ‘master narrative’ provided by museums. In a sense, the Barracks and Susannah Place were a transition between the ‘old’ and ‘new guard’, between the ideological differences of James Broadbent who believed in a singular historical methodology based on empirical ‘number crunching’ research, and Peter Emmett, who viewed history as ‘the constant engagement with methodologies of how you recover the past rather than the expertise of someone’.129 At Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place, the inclusion of historical and interpretative methodologies still assumed that heritage and curatorial professionals provided the ‘right’ way of interpreting material evidence of the past. It was just a matter of teaching the public the curator’s point of view. The development of the Museum of Sydney was to reverse the relationship between curators, museums and their audiences by promoting the idea of multiple meanings and values to the past and the material record.

129 Peter Emmett described the differences between his museological approach to James Broadbent as the ‘old’ and ‘new guard’. Interview with Dr. Peter Emmett, 13 October 2003.
Figure 8.1
Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House. HHT held a ‘Made in Italy’ day as part of its ‘Italiani di Sydney’ exhibition in 2003 (Photograph by Anna Wong).
‘MYTH MAKING’ AND THE POSTMODERN MUSEUM

Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House

INTRODUCTION

[House museums] are rigorous exercises in historical research into a particular place at a particular time, recorded in a three dimensional way. Within the boundaries of their four walls they show a ‘slice’ approach to history, and as such must be impassionate and objective.¹

Can house museums be ‘impassionate’ and ‘objective’ places? Adhering to the empirical ideals of social history and the Burra Charter, heritage and museum professionals in the 1970s and ‘80s assumed that it was possible. Coupled with material culture studies, the interpretation of Elizabeth Farm and the conservation of Rouse Hill House exemplified the belief that objects possessed an intrinsic truth that could be objectively observed. This assumption continued with the transformation of Hyde Park Barracks and Susannah Place into museums in the 1990s. At these properties, the Historic Houses Trust used archaeological methodologies as a measure against historical and cultural bias. These sites were presented as ‘artefacts’ and the exhibits were a literal display of the building evidence upon which conservation decisions were based.

Yet the Museum of Sydney, the latest of the Trust’s museums, was completely contrary to the empirical stance that typified the Historic Houses Trust since its inception. Opening in 1995, the ‘Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House’ (otherwise known as MoS) was unlike any of the Trust’s other

properties. The most obvious difference was the absence of a historic house or building. The first Government House that was built by Governor Phillip in 1788 was demolished in 1845, and the new museum was a modern building partly sited over the archaeological remains.

The differences extended beyond the façade. Rather than a series of static displays of objects and labels interpreting the history of the former Government House and its governors, the museum consisted of a disparate collection of artistically and theatrically inspired exhibits and multimedia displays that did not appear to relate to an overriding story or narrative. Instead, a range of ‘black’ and ‘white’ voices were literally heard throughout the museum, providing different Aboriginal and European versions of Sydney’s past. Furthermore, objects played a secondary role with most of the exhibits not including objects. And unlike other museums, there was a noticeable absence of labels.

Where was the empirical evidence, and the didactic labels instructing visitors on how to ‘read’ the artefacts and interpret the past? It seemed MoS was the antithesis of both what a traditional museum constituted, and the empirical ideals previously espoused by the Historic Houses Trust. The Trust’s radical break from conventional museum objectives and methods marked a generational and philosophical change within the organisation, and the heritage and museum movements generally.

This chapter examines how the Trust developed MoS within the context of the ‘new museology’, which represented an emerging body of scholarship that questioned the underlying philosophies, aims, and political and social roles of the museum. The philosophical basis of MoS was also reflective of broader social and political changes. Against the political backdrop of Mabo and the Aboriginal movement for land rights, the Trust had the challenging task of interpreting the First Government House site. It was a politically and emotionally charged place. As the first seat of European power in New South Wales and Australia, it was both symbolic of the ‘birth of the nation’ and the ‘invasion’ of Aboriginal land. Creating a traditional museum that provided conventional and celebratory interpretations of European settlement and history was a political impossibility.

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Under the curatorial guidance of Peter Emmett, the Trust developed the first ‘postmodern’ museum in New South Wales. It was a stance against the notions of a ‘master narrative’ and the museum as a ‘storehouse of knowledge’. Emmett also challenged supposedly scientific systems of classification that categorised objects and people into a Eurocentric hierarchy, which in turn supported European dominance and colonisation, and had been used as a tool of cultural control. As such, the Trust redefined the museum as a ‘forum of debate’ by creating a ‘museum of interpretation’ and ‘historical issues, which facilitated the ‘community’s’ exploration of its own identity. It sought cultural and political neutrality by vocally rejecting the notion of a unified national history and acknowledging multiple perspectives and social significance as determined by community groups.

Despite the Trust’s revision of the roles and functions of the museum, was MoS the anti-museum, or was it, as suggested by Tracy Ireland, ‘an alternative myth production’?

The second part of this chapter examines how the Trust implemented its vision and its representation of non-European cultures, namely Aboriginal and ethnic cultures. An assessment of the Museum’s exhibits and public programs revealed that despite the Trust’s claim to accommodate multiple perspectives and values, it was actually promoting historically specific understandings of Aboriginality and ethnicity as reflected through government policies of Aboriginal reconciliation, multiculturalism and cultural diversity. This, in turn, was used to promote a particular vision of Australia’s identity. Despite its declared neutrality, the Trust continued to categorise and define cultural and social differences.

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THE AGE OF THE ‘NEW MUSEOLOGY’

The status of the museum as the irreproachable storehouse of knowledge and the bastion of universal truth crumbled in the mid-1980s. It was precipitated by the emergence of postmodernism and its consequent influence on museum studies in the 1990s. The work by theorists like François Lyotard, who argued that social ‘totality’, stability and order were maintained through the construction of ‘grand’ or ‘master narratives’, and Michel Foucault’s study of power and its maintenance through various social and cultural mechanisms, prompted questions regarding the museum’s traditional role as the ‘storehouse of knowledge’. Were museums really places of objective truth and knowledge?

Peter Vergo labelled this body of museum studies as the ‘new museology’, which moved beyond the study of museum methodologies to questioning:

the underlying philosophy, the various ways in which they have, in the course of time, been established and developed, their avowed or unspoken aims and policies, their educative or political or social role.

Studies, including Robert Lumley’s The Museum Time Machine, Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine’s Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, and Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion, were representative of a new generation of museum studies that re-conceptualised the museum as a cultural entity, whose role and influence changed in relation to its social, economic and political context. Such studies examined how museum exhibits provided particular constructions of history, as well as specific understandings of gender, race and class.

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In addition to analysing museums as cultural products, scholars of the ‘new museology’ also examined the use of museums as a tool of cultural governance to promote social and political agendas. As Charles Saumarez Smith observed, “there is a larger issue at stake, which is the question of authority and who makes such decisions and on what criteria”. This body of scholars, including Tony Bennett, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, David Blackbourn and Tony Eley, and Lisanne Gibson, were heavily influenced by Michel Foucault’s concept of the ‘disciplinary society’.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault found that Jeremy Bentham’s panoptical prison system symbolised the model of modern disciplinary power. Based on reform rather than punishment, the modern prison used three levels of control; hierarchical observation, normalising behaviour and examination. These elements formed the basis of Foucault’s concept of the ‘disciplinary’ society and the modern prison served as a model for other social and cultural institutions such as factories, hospitals and schools.

Examining the British context, Bennett found that in the mid-nineteenth century:

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culture – in so far as it referred to the habits, morals and beliefs of the subordinate classes – was targeted as an object of government.\textsuperscript{12}

The middle-class developed the public museum as a useful means of shaping public behaviour, particularly those of the working class. During this period, social reformers like Henry Cole advocated public access to museums based on perceived social benefits and lobbied to:

Open all museums of Science and Art after the hours of Divine service; let the working man get his refreshment there in company with his wife and children rather than leave him to booze away from them in the Public house and Gin Palace. The Museum will certainly lead him to wisdom and gentleness, and to Heaven, whilst the latter will lead him to brutality and perdition.\textsuperscript{13}

For Bennett, the public museum reinforced the existing social hierarchy by allowing working-class people into a middle-class space that was associated with strict codes of behaviour and ideas.\textsuperscript{14}

Such ideas of cultural governance were also extended to colonised states by European powers. As Ludmilla Jordanova observed:

In the history of Western societies there have been two closely related processes through which mastery has been pursued – the development of the natural sciences and medicine and of colonial expansion respectively.\textsuperscript{15}

Natural history museums played a vital role in the classification and ordering of materials and specimens that were collected during European expeditions to Asia, Africa and the Pacific. These storehouses of knowledge aided colonial expansion as European nations vied for new markets and resources. Museums also served to justify the belief of European racial supremacy as Darwin’s evolutionary theory was applied to different cultures and races. As scholars like Donna Haraway, Susan Sheets-Pyenson, and Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach argued, interests of racial domination and state interests were promoted and justified through anthropological,

\textsuperscript{12} Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics}, 19.

\textsuperscript{13} Henry Cole (1884) quoted in Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 22-23.

\textsuperscript{15} Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective of Museums," in Peter Vergo, (ed.), \textit{The New Museology}, 32.
medical and natural science museums. This was reflected in museum displays, with the artefacts and human remains of colonised populations classified and displayed as ‘trophies’ within the natural sciences. They were expressions of control, ownership and domination.17

While acknowledging this middle-class ideological premise of the public museum, recent studies have challenged the uni-linear model of cultural producer-cultural product-cultural consumer that implied museum visitors were passive observers or participants.18 As one of the most cited references in museum studies, James Clifford’s concept of museums as ‘contact zones’ provided an useful model for studying the negotiated meanings, forms, significance and roles of the museum.19 Clifford adopted this term from Mary Louise Pratt’s Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation (1992).20 Pratt defined a ‘contact zone’ as:

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict.21

For Pratt, the term ‘contact’ recognised:

The interactive, improvised dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] consequence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.22

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19 Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century:
21 Ibid., 6.
22 Ibid., 7.
By framing the museum within this concept of ‘contact zones’, Clifford’s perception of the museum structure ‘as a collection’, became:

an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull. The organizing structure of the museum-as-collection functions like Pratt’s frontier, where a center and a periphery are assumed; the center point of gathering, the periphery an area of discovery.\(^{23}\)

Andrea Witcomb applied Clifford’s concept of the museum as ‘contact zones’ in her study of power relations between communities and museums in Australia, like the National Maritime Museum and the Museum of Sydney.\(^{24}\) She found Clifford’s reading of museums as a useful alternative to Bennett’s more governmentalist position on museums. Clifford acknowledged the unequal power relations between museums and their audiences (especially in the context of colonised people), but also recognised that the production of meaning in museums did not occur in a unidirectional process. By emphasising a cross-cultural experience, Witcomb was able to frame museums and communities (and their audiences) in a two-way relationship. The important elements of Clifford’s approach, and its application by Witcomb in her study of community relations, highlighted how museums were not static institutions at the centre of power. Instead, museums were presented as unstable entities that were continuously negotiating their position in changing colonial and post-colonial cultural relations.

Clifford’s model typified the generational shift within the ‘new museology’ that broadened the ideological basis of museums beyond the realm of their curators or advocates. A similar approach was adopted by Handler and Gable’s study of how social history influenced the interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg, and the active process in developing particular interpretative messages. In viewing the museum as a ‘social arena’, the combination of the museum’s past and present politics, as expressed through the organisation, staff and visitors, were of greater impact in shaping museum practices than new social historical scholarship despite official adoption by the organisation. An interpretation based on a mimetic realism, marketing and business concerns, visitor expectations and a lack of communication

\(^{23}\) Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.

\(^{24}\) Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum.
between curators / researchers and guides were factors which combined to weaken the critical potential of social history.25

Such ‘new museology’ heralded a new phase in museum practices. Museums were no longer perceived to provide an objective and universal understanding of the world. The pedagogical status of curators also changed, with their views reconsidered as one of many possible interpretations that were influenced by various interests and biases. As Charles Saumarez Smith noted, museums represented ‘a set of complex decisions about a number of alternative methods of representation’ and:

that visitors bring a multiplicity of different attitudes and expectations and experiences to the reading of an artefact . . . that curators equally have a particular and personal representation of historical and aesthetic significance . . . Intellectual ideas have moved away from a belief in a single overriding theoretical system towards a more conscious sense of the role of the reader or the spectator in interpretation.26

This approach can be extended beyond the study of museums and community relations to the house museum category. As a ‘contact zone’, house museums are not only negotiating meaning (and power) with their audiences, but also with the government, the academy, the museum profession, and, specific to this genre, the cultural heritage profession.

Coupled with the re-interpretation of heritage conservation as a form of public history (as discussed in Chapter 7), such ideological repositioning had enormous ramifications for the museum and heritage movements from the late 1980s. One of the fundamental changes was the recognition of ‘social significance’, as determined by non-professional communities and where:

Professional groups that evaluate aspects of the cultural significance of places do so as a ‘community’ with shared interests and values.27

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Heritage and museum professionals were categorised as one of many ‘communities’ whose view was neither more nor less valid than other groups.

The ‘new museology’ and the recognition of ‘social significance’ required a new role for curators and museums, and their relation with the public. Social history had resulted in the introduction of new historical categories and social subjects in museum exhibits and heritage conservation, but did not alter the authoritative relation between researchers and their contemporary subjects. Museums were now expected to accommodate and facilitate different cultural and social perspectives.

Against the backdrop of post-colonialism and the Mabo decision in Australia, this initially meant representing indigenous perspectives and providing Aboriginal communities with the opportunities of interpreting their own cultures and histories in cultural institutions and the heritage management system. Such initiatives served as a model for broadening access and participation to ethnic communities from the mid-1990s, when the Federal government transformed the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ into a cultural policy and an attribute of national identity.

**FROM THE FIRST GOVERNMENT HOUSE SITE TO THE ‘MUSEUM OF SYDNEY’**

Amidst such ideological and social change, the development of the ‘Museum of Sydney’ was, as Peter Watts described, ‘an extraordinary difficult exercise’.

Located on the site of First Government House, it became a politically charged symbol that represented both the ‘birth of a nation’ and the ‘invasion’ of Aboriginal land. What started as a two-week salvage archaeological program in 1982, became the focus of political, professional and public debate for the following decade. This level of attention was remarkable considering the general disinterest of its historical associations for much of the 177 years since the house was demolished in 1845.

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28 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
Three months after landing at Sydney Cove and having lived in a prefabricated canvas house that was ‘neither wind nor weather proof’, Governor Phillip laid the foundation stone of the Government House on 15 May 1788 (Figure 8.2): ²⁹

His Excellency
Arthur Phillip Esq.
Governor in Chief
and Captain General
in and over the Territory of
New South Wales, &c, &c, &c
landed in this Cove,
with the first Settlers of this Country,
the 24th Day of January; 1788,
and on the 15th Day of May,
in the same Year, being the 28th
of the Reign of His present Majesty
George the Third,
the first of these stones were laid. ³⁰

Figure 8.2
Foundation Plate to Government House, laid by Governor Arthur Phillip in May 1788. It is currently displayed at the Museum of Sydney.

²⁹ Governor Arthur Phillip quoted in Helen Proudfoot et al., *Australia’s First Government House* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin in conjunction with the Department of Planning, 1991).
³⁰ The foundation plate of First Government House is currently displayed at the Museum of Sydney.
It was a neat rectangular two-storey brick Georgian-styled house, with four rooms on the ground floor and five rooms above. As a sign of permanence for the new colony, Phillip was obviously proud of his house and declared that it was 'so well built that I presume it will stand for a great many years'.

Phillip's house accommodated the next eight governors, with Governor Hunter, Macquarie and Darling extending and altering the simple cottage into a sprawling residence (Figure 8.3). In 1831, however, Governor Bourke insisted that:

A New House must be built, as this, which I now inhabit, is extremely inconvenient, subject to bad smells, old and irreparable.

Construction of the present Gothic Revival style Government House commenced in 1837. Its completion in 1845 marked the end of the first Government House, which was demolished in the same year to make way for the town's expansion into the western portion of the Government Domain (Figure 8.4). The eastern portion of the demolished house was covered by the extension of Phillip Street, which ran down to the recently completed Circular Quay; and Bridge Street, which was extended up to Macquarie Street to the gates of the new Government House. The remainder of the site became an ad-hoc dump for the next decade.

In 1857, the block was earmarked for the city's town hall. Due to the centre of town shifting southward along George Street, the proposal was abandoned the following year. As a result, the government subdivided the site and began selling the allotments from 1862. This included the lots currently occupied by the five terraces along Phillip Street, built in 1867-68, and the Young Street terraces that were completed in 1874. The main portion of the site remained undeveloped and occupied by various temporary sheds and timber buildings until the twentieth century.

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33 Proudfoot et al., Australia's First Government House, 146.
Figure 8.3
"Governor's House at Sydney, Port Jackson, 1791" from William Bradley - drawings from the First Fleet journal titled 'A Voyage to New South Wales', December 1786 - May 1792, compiled after 1802 (ML).

Figure 8.4
View of old Government House - Sydney - N.S.W. as it appeared when vacated by Sir George Gipps in 1845, painted by G. E. Peacock. The camels are two of the three purchased by Governor Gipps in 1842 as an experiment for introducing them to the colony (ML 658).
The city around the site continued to grow. In 1878, the Colonial Secretary’s Building was constructed on the opposite block, and the Lands Department building was finished three years later (Figure 8.5). The first Government House became a distant memory until 1899, when a workman excavating a trench for new telegraph and telephone services along the southern footpath of Bridge Street, uncovered a copper plate. It was the foundation plate that Phillip had laid on 15 March 1788.

This discovery sparked localised interest, and generated discussions about whether this was indeed the site of the first government house, or as others believed, No. 84 Pitt Street was the government house. The Royal Australian Historical Society believed that the copper plate was from Phillip’s house and placed a commemorative plaque on a sandstone plinth on the site in 1917. Apart from this, very little attention was paid to the site. As Helen Proudfoot noted:

The full significance of the discovery and of the building it came from was not really appreciated in 1899... It was regarded more as a curiosity than as a significant relic from a highly symbolic building.

*Figure 8.5*
View of the former Government House site, the Colonial Secretary’s Building, and the terraces on Young Street in 1906. The building behind the hoarding is McGlade’s Cottage (ML SLNSW – SPF).

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34 Sydney Morning Herald, 13, 15, 16 March, 1899.
35 Proudfoot et al., *Australia’s First Government House*, 145.
Apart from the Phillip and Young Street terraces, most of the site remained vacant until 1912, when a two-storey corrugated iron building was erected for government offices. Known as the ‘Tin Shed’, this ‘temporary’ accommodation remained for fifty-six years. After its demolition in 1968, the site was again vacant and used as a car park until 1982.

Rediscovering the First Government House

In light of the building boom after World War II, it seems almost inconceivable that a high-rise building was not constructed on the site. The now demolished 38-storey State Office Block was built directly opposite on Phillip and Bent Street in 1967. In 1982, the government invited proposals for the development of the Government House site. With its winning 38-storey office design, the overseas company Hong Kong Land Corporation was awarded a 99-year lease.

The history of the site and the potential for archaeological remains were not major considerations in the redevelopment proposal. No one had thought about the first Government House site for decades. With only a commemorative plaque marking the site, an archaeological investigation was probably viewed as a formality required under the Heritage Act to ensure that nothing from the former Government House remained – if indeed it was the site of the first Government House at all.

In February 1983, the New South Wales government commissioned Anne Bickford and Helen Proudfoot to undertake a historical study and a two-week archaeological program (Figure 8.6).  

Five days into the excavations, Bickford uncovered sandstone footings. It was the rear wall of the first Government House. A plethora of artefacts was also uncovered including clay pipes, roof tiles, wine and beer bottles, window glass, ceramics, bones and bricks that dated to the early colonial period. The stratigraphy of the site was disturbed, but this initial excavation indicated that despite its demolition and the subsequent use of the site, the foundations of the First Government House had survived.

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37 Proudfoot et al., *Australia's First Government House*, 7.
Bickford and Proudfoot noted how "the nature of the investigation took on a new importance":

It was no longer merely a probing inquiry to confirm that no relics would be destroyed in the site's development. The discovery of the foundations meant that the site still held tangible remains of the first years of European settlement. There was no other site that contained such early evidence, none that focused so precisely upon the beginnings of white settlement in Australia.\(^{38}\)

From the government's perspective, the archaeological program was not undertaken for historical research purposes but to establish the extent of the remains and "to determine whether the remains should or could co-exist on the site with a major commercial office building".\(^{39}\) It also reflected the limited understanding and application of historical archaeology at the time.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 7-8.

The public response, however, was notably different to that in 1899 when Phillip’s foundation plate was uncovered. Interest grew as further footings, including the rooms where the Government Gazette was first printed, were uncovered during Stage II of the excavations in June-December 1983 and Stage III in January-June 1984. It sparked public meetings calling for the conservation of the site, including a public rally by the Bloodsworth Association near the site on 14 August 1983. This led to the formation of the ‘Friends of First Government House’, which brought together members of various interest groups, including the National Trust, The Women’s Pioneer Society, the Fellowship of First Fleeters, the 1788-1820 Association, and academics like John Mulvaney. The Friends campaigned extensively and attracted much media attention. It was largely their efforts that ensured the preservation of the site (Figure 8.7).

Figure 8.7
Mrs Nell Samson, her husband Eric and another member of the Friends of First Government House Site speaking to Anne Bickford about the excavation. (Photograph by Lindy Kerr in Department of Planning, Australia’s First Government House, 1991).


41 James Bloodworth was a convict on the First Fleet, who is believed to have built the first Government House.
Public pressure was mounting. In September 1983, the Sydney City Council refused the development application for the high-rise proposal, which allowed Hong Kong Land Corporation to exit from its contractual lease on 13 October 1983. It also provided Premier Wran the opportunity to provide a more publicly favourable solution to the site (Figure 8.8). On the same day, he announced that a national competition would be held for a development design ‘to ensure the conservation and protection of the 1788 remains while still allowing development’, the announcement being made to address growing public concerns. It would take several more years for the future management of the site to be resolved. In the interim, Stage III of the archaeological program finished in January 1985, and the remains were covered with shade cloth and backfilled with sand. The site was then resealed with bitumen.

Figure 8.8
Premier Neville Wran visiting the First Government House archaeological site in August 1983 (Photograph by Lindy Kerr in Department of Planning, Australia’s First Government House. 1991).

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Recognising Aboriginal history and social significance in an empiricist world

In 1985, Premier Wran confirmed that the in-situ remains of First Government House were to be ‘conserved for its important historical associations’.

It was therefore surprising that the physical evidence played such an understated role in the Museum of Sydney. In her study of the First Government House excavations and its relation to Sydney’s urban planning, Hilary du Cros reflected how:

The Museum of Sydney in it current manifestation could not possibly have appeared in anyone’s vision of the site’s future back in the embattled days of 1983.

In the decade from 1983 (when Premier Wran announced that the site was to be conserved), to 1993 (when the Historic Houses Trust announced its vision of the ‘Museum of Sydney’), the cultural significance of the First Government House site evolved from being ‘the most tangible link with the foundation of white settlement’ to ‘a symbol of different perspectives on how we see ourselves as Australians today’. This dramatic transformation reflected one of the major changes in museum and heritage practices at this time – the recognition of ‘social’ significance as attributed by the non-professional communities as opposed to one solely determined by heritage practitioners.

Since its inception in the Burra Charter, the concept of ‘cultural significance’ included ‘social significance’. The empirical focus of heritage and museum practices at the time, however, overshadowed this element and under-represented community interests. Instead, heritage professionals interpreted social significance predominantly in terms of historical social groups (such as gender, race and ethnicity), or as paternalistic benefits for contemporary communities (such as educational value).

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45 du Cros, Much More Than Stones & Bones: Australian Archaeology in the Twentieth Century, 102.

When the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA) prepared the first ‘Statement of Significance’ for the first Government House site in 1983, it stated that:

The most important fact about the First Government House site is that it contains the remains of the administrative and social centre of the first permanent European occupation in Australia.47

Social significance was discussed in terms of how:

The remains have been in the past, are now, and will be in the future seen as a cultural and historical landmark and focus of sentiment for the Australian community and for individual groups within it.48

The ‘community’ included ‘persons of English, Irish and Scots descent, [and] First Fleeters’. It also included ‘Aboriginal people’, with the site being a ‘focal point for the invasion of their country’.49 This was the main reference to Aboriginal history in the document ‘as no physical evidence of usage [sic] of the site by Aboriginal people has been found’.50 Instead, the cultural significance of the First Government House site was assessed primarily on its empirical value in historical and scientific research “into aspects of Sydney’s 200 years of history” – “archaeology, history, architecture, soil science, building technology, manufacturing processes, environmental adaptation and taphonomic processes”.51

Written in accordance with the Burra Charter, the Statement of Significance was a product of its time. It reflected the overriding focus on the physical fabric, and also the separation of Australian history into prehistoric and historical periods – pre-1788 and post-1788 – black and white.

The separation of Aboriginal and European histories as distinct processes and categories was not unusual in the 1980s. Aboriginal culture was traditionally treated as an area of the natural sciences in museums and legislation, such as the National

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 6.
50 Ibid., 5.
51 Ibid., 8.
Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. It was only with the Piggott and Hope Inquiries in 1975 under the Whitlam government, that Aboriginal culture was recognised as part of Australia’s cultural heritage, but it remained a separate category to ‘white’ heritage. As Ireland noted, this ‘compartmentalisation’ of heritage served to minimalise tension arising from different perspective about the past.\textsuperscript{52}

This treatment of Australia’s past was carried through to the new Museum of Australia when it was created under the Museum of Australia Act in 1980. Its collection program followed three main themes that included ‘the history of Aboriginal man, the history of non-Aboriginal man and the interaction of man with his environment’.\textsuperscript{53} This ‘black’ and ‘white’ presentation of the past was reiterated in 1984, when the Museum of Australia’s charter was broadened to:

reflect the development of the Australian nation in all its cultural diversity. In particular it will create, through the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, a focus for the cultural aspirations of the Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{54}

This was also one of the earliest references to the representation of Australia’s ‘cultural diversity’ in a museum setting, although the term referred to Aboriginal and Anglo-Australians. The correlation between ‘cultural diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ had yet to emerge.

Social history and the use of sociological categories as historical subjects may have broadened the scope of historical study, but it did not alter the relationship between researchers and their contemporary subjects. As Dr Bill Jonas reported to the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) in 1987:

Aboriginal people are increasingly expressing resentment at their being the subject of archaeologists’ research, especially when they see this as taking away some of their knowledge and thus their control of their heritage... [Many] feel that the constant attention paid to sites of past significance, to the administration of Heritage Acts by archaeologists, denotes that Aboriginal culture was somehow frozen in time.

\textsuperscript{52} Ireland, “Excavating National Identity,” 91.
They argue that this is wrong and that the dynamic, living culture which exists today has evolved continuously from the past. It is part of this evolutionary process that many places gain their heritage value.\textsuperscript{55}

Jonas belonged to the Worimi people from the Karuah River area of New South Wales, and was a cultural geographer at the University of Newcastle. His report resulted in the introduction of face-to-face consultations with community groups, the employment of Aboriginal staff, and the development of the ‘Aboriginal Awareness Raising Strategy’. The success of the program led Professor Fay Gale, an AHC Commissioner, to suggest that all communities should be consulted about local values of proposed listings.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1992, the AHC engaged the heritage consultant, Chris Johnston, to explore the issues relating to local communities, social values and heritage management. It resulted in the seminal paper “What is Social Value?”, and strongly influenced the amendments to the Burra Charter in 1999.\textsuperscript{57} Johnston commented on the limitations and assumptions that were inherent in the heritage management system, and how practitioners had:

sought to be rigorous and scientific in our processes, seeking to make our judgments on a rational and objective basis, in the hope of achieving both community and political acceptance of our results.\textsuperscript{58}

She also noted how the oversight of ‘social’ significance in heritage management practices had excluded the community because:

Social value has tended to mean all those values expressed by the community which fall outside our current professional framework. To enable such places to be recognised and protected, social value needs to come into the mainstream of heritage assessment.\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{56} Truscott, "Contexts for Change: Paving the Way to the 1999 Burra Charter", 31.

\textsuperscript{57} Johnston, What Is Social Value?: A Discussion Paper.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 4.
For Johnston, 'social value' was 'about collective attachment to places that embody meanings important to a community':

These places are usually community owned or publicly accessible or in some other ways 'appropriated' into people's daily lives. Such meanings are in addition to other values, such as the evidence of valued aspects of history or beauty, and these meanings may not be obvious in the fabric of the place, and may not be apparent to the disinterested observer.60

Two important points arose from this statement. First, that cultural significance was not intrinsic to the physical fabric or place, and secondly, that social significance included intangible values and beliefs that were particular to different groups.

Johnston concluded that the values of the professional 'community' represented only one perspective of heritage, and that the significance assessment process was limited in its recognition of other cultural perspectives. Furthermore, 'the assessment and management of such places must closely involve, if not be led by, the community who use them, live close by, or regularly visit'.61

This recognition of multiple and community-based social values spurred federal, state and local governments to facilitate community-based heritage studies. The AHC produced a series of publications to assist local communities undertaking their own heritage identification and assessment, such as Tracking the Dragon: a guide for finding and assessing Chinese Australian heritage places by Michael Pearson.62 In New South Wales, the Heritage Office initiated the Ethnic Communities Program in 1997, and commissioned a range of thematic histories relating to various migrant groups.63 It also funded a series of community-based 'multicultural projects', including the Italian oral history project "Racconta la tua Storia!", 'Leichhardt Plaques Project', 'Italian Fruit Shops Project', 'Chinese Australian Cultural

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60 Ibid., 10.
61 Ibid., 19.
Heritage in New South Wales’ and ‘Golden Threads Companion: Chinese Movable Heritage Across Regional NSW’.

1788 and ‘...the Oldest Remnants of European Settlement’

The impact of professional and government initiatives to incorporate Aboriginal values and involvement in the interpretation of Australia’s past and its heritage were not immediately apparent at the site of the First Government House. In 1986, Conybeare Morrison & Partners prepared the Conservation Plan for First Government House in preparation for the launch of an international architectural competition for the site. The significance of the site remained linked with Australia’s European foundations:

The First Government House site is of symbolic significance because it contains the in-situ remains of Australia’s first permanent Government House. These remains, some dating back to 1788, are the oldest existing remnants of European settlement on this continent and our most tangible link with the founding of white settlement in Australia.\(^{64}\)

The overriding aim was the in-situ preservation of the archaeological evidence and that:

The site should be developed to enable visitors to understand its cultural significance through the interpretation of the in-situ remains.\(^{65}\)

The consultants recommended ‘a low rise infill development incorporating an Interpretation Centre’. This was to educate the public on the cultural significance of the site through a series of thematic displays that provided a chronological history of the house, its surroundings, the people who constructed, lived and visited, and the various uses of the First Government house as a residence, administrative centre and government printer. Again, Aboriginal history was relegated to a separate display titled ‘Prehistory – Sydney before 1788’. This display would interpret ‘Aboriginal people and their use of the land’, as well as ‘physiography and climate’ and ‘vegetation and fauna’.\(^{66}\)

\(^{64}\) Conybeare Morrison & Partners, Conservation Plan for First Government House, Draft Summary Statement of Significance.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 104.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 132-133.
Conybeare Morrison & Partners also identified the government agencies that could assume the future management of the site. This included the Historic Houses Trust, a choice that surprised Peter Watts. Nevertheless, the Trust advised that:

The development of the site should be very limited since the symbolism of the site was its chief significance.

Probably in reference to community suggestions that the First Government House should be rebuilt, the Trust also stated that:

A restored house would be inappropriate because it would detract from the real fragments.

The project did not progress further until August 1987, when Comrealty Pty Ltd purchased an interest in the site development. In partnership with the government developer, the State Superannuation Board, a deal was struck with the Department of Planning and the City Council to purchase extra airspace in the area furthest away from the archaeological remains. The result was the current 64-storey Governor Phillip and Macquarie Towers, and the sale of the air-space helped to fund the design and construction of the proposed museum.

The year of Australia’s Bicentennial marked a new government in New South Wales. Under Nick Greiner, the Liberal party swept into power in March 1988. Assuming management of the First Government House project, the new Minister for the Arts, Peter Collins, appointed the Historic Houses Trust as the administrators of the proposed museum in September 1988. As discussed in Chapter 7, this announcement followed Collins’ review of the State’s museums and historic buildings, which also resulted in the transfer of the Hyde Park Barracks and the Justice and Police Museum to the Trust.

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In December 1988, Wal Murray, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Public Works, launched the international architectural design competition. Declaring how ‘few nations can point with such exactness to their beginnings’, Murray reiterated how:

One of the Nation’s most significant historic sites is where the First Government house was built in 1788 . . . As such the site has outstanding cultural significance in the history of European settlement of Australia.\(^{73}\)

At this time, Peter Watts held similar views. When visiting Philadelphia in December 1989, Watts was particularly impressed by the city’s ‘Independence National Historic Park’, describing it as ‘certainly one of the most exciting, diverse and successful “museums” I have ever visited’.\(^{74}\) The city is often dubbed the ‘birthplace of the nation’ in America, and the ‘park’ covered forty-five acres of the city centre that included historic sites like the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution were both drafted. The park also included restored buildings, ‘old fashioned’ and ‘fresh and innovative’ museums, gardens and open spaces that interpreted the history of the city, when it was the national capital from 1790 to 1800.\(^{75}\)

For Watts, ‘the whole place [was] a laboratory of museology’, with direct parallels with Sydney.\(^{76}\)

Philadelphia tells its story powerfully and from many perspectives. But where do we tell ours? Where does the visitor to Sydney get an introductory lesson on the history of our city, and our nation, so that he is able to put the place into some historical context? Perhaps the present proposals to alter the responsibility for the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks museums, plus the museum to be constructed on the site of the First Government House and the new

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\(^{74}\) Letter from Peter Watts, Director, HHT, to Evan Williams, Secretary, Ministry for the Arts, 21 December 1988, in ‘HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 88 (13 Feb. 1989), HHT Minutes (Feb. – March 1989), 74.


Justice and Police Museums, provide an opportunity to evaluate the advantages of a more co-ordinated approach to a museum of Sydney’s and Australia’s early history.\(^7\)

The Independence National Historic Park also sparked ideas about how the First Government House site could be interpreted. Of particular interest was the Benjamin Franklin House. Demolished in 1812, the house once stood in a court off Market Street. The site was interpreted by the Philadelphian architect, Robert Venturi, as part of the 1976 bicentennial celebrations. He designed a museum for the vacant site consisting of five restored buildings (three of which were built by Franklin), a modern underground museum and “ghost structures of steel frames” to indicate the location and outline of Franklin’s former house and his adjoining print shop (Figure 8.9). Watts considered it a “masterful solution”, due to the combined effects of “the symbolism of the steel frames contrasting with the fragmentary archaeological remains and the literal information in the exhibits below ground”:

The Benjamin Franklin House and its associated museum reflect this richness with a diversity of symbols, carefully displayed archaeological remains and modern interpretative displays.\(^8\)

Watts saw the similarities between Benjamin Franklin House, the first Government House in Sydney, and the proposal to build a museum on the site of a demolished building. While not advocating a repeat of Venturi’s design, Watts was hopeful that:

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\(^7\) Peter Watts, “A Laboratory of Museology: Lessons for Sydney?”, in ‘HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 88 (13 Feb. 1989), HHT Minutes (Feb. – March 1989), 73.

If the winning design can match the creative leap by Venturi, with such a bold design and imaginative symbol, then the "museum" will be exciting indeed.\textsuperscript{79}

The Historic Houses Trust was not, however, part of the panel assessing the competition. When the architectural competition failed to produce a winning design, Peter Watts appealed to the Government Architect and the Department of Environment to allow the Historic Houses Trust to become involved in future architectural briefings.

Watts' vision for the site was incongruous with the competition's assessors. Despite the absence of a winning design, the assessors of the architectural competition had recommended that any future design of:

The Commemorative Facility should mediate between the low scale of the historic buildings and the very tall commercial structures. All new buildings should reinforce the forms of the streets by being built to the street alignment avoiding the inhospitable open spaces which have been so unsuccessful in so many of the large post-war building in the city. It is important to reinstate a consolidated urban block which will provide the cohesive quality which is characteristic of the best parts of the city.\textsuperscript{80}

It was a view that Peter Watts disagreed with, for he 'strongly favoured a "plaza" solution [and] not a building covering the entire site but leaving at least part of it open'.\textsuperscript{81} Watts was fortunate in the eventual selection of the Melbourne-based firm, Denton Marshall Cork, as the architects. As the project architect, Stephen Pearse agreed that:

[For] us, a building over the footings would assume an undue importance in itself. It would shift the emphasis from the site and the footings as reminders or symbols of our past to the footings as simply artefacts, with a museum unrelated to place.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} Peter Watts, "A Laboratory of Museology: Lessons for Sydney?", in 'HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 88 (13 Feb. 1989), HHT Minutes (Feb. – March 1989), 71.
\textsuperscript{80} Assessors Report quoted by Peter Watts, "First Government House Site", HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 91 (8 May, 1989), HHT Minutes (April – June 1989), 51.
\textsuperscript{81} Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 'Minutes of Meeting No. 22 (10 April 1989)', HHT Minutes (April – June 1989), 4.
As architects we believe that we should literally make concrete – give expression to – the values of the day, and in doing this, one should be aware of and sympathetic to the past.\(^{83}\)

We believe there is a need to maintain a sense of continuity with the past and we feel that this can be reflected and interpreted in a modern way without mimicking the architecture of the past. This, in a sense, revitalises and excites new opportunities whilst providing new buildings which are relevant to today’s society and which reflect today’s values.\(^{84}\)

The result was a modern architectural design that served to interpret the ‘layers of meaning’ of the site – a phrase that had become part of the Trust’s vernacular since its conservation of Rouse Hill House (Figure 8.10).\(^{85}\)

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**Figure 8.10**
Model of final design of First Government House Museum by Denton Corker Marshall (HHT).

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\(^{83}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{84}\) Ibid.

\(^{85}\) Ibid.
Inspired by the traditional use of statues and public squares for commemorative purposes, the architects designed ‘Governors Place’ – an open space that was paved to the footpath edge with stone, and included inlays marking the outline of the footings below ground along with a statue and flagstaffs. Small viewing windows were provided to allow the public to glimpse at sections of the archaeological remains:

The concept thus expressed the historic significance of the site by . . . creat[ing] a special symbolic and ceremonial space. This was the place where the early Governors had greeted visiting dignitaries to the colony and held important celebrations and public gatherings. Governor’s Place can again perform this civic role.86

Figure 8.11
Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Rather than encompassing the whole site, ‘the museum . . . was seen very much in function as a servant of the Place; it was not to be in itself the primary focus’.87 As such, the museum building was sited at the back of the site, within the footprint of the soaring Governor Macquarie Tower (Figure 8.11). The museum façade, rather

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86 Ibid., 82.
87 Ibid.
than the building, became the symbolic focus. Using sandstone to represent the historical development of Sydney, the façade progressed from rough boulders at the base, to sparrow-picked, dressed blocks and smooth-faced sawn cut pieces at the top, before merging with the steel and glass structure of the office tower (Figure 8.12). For Pearse, it was an abstract expression of the archaeological layers of the site, as well as representing the notion of ‘development’ from the past to the present. The use of sandstone was also sympathetic to the adjacent Victorian buildings, such as the Colonial Secretary’s Building and the Lands Department, without replicating their style or form.

While not as literal as the metal ghost frame of Benjamin Franklin’s house in Philadelphia, the markings on the paving to outline the floorplan, and the layering of sandstone surfaces on the museum façade provided a structural interpretation of the archaeological remains and Sydney’s past. Combined with the proposed statue and row of flagstaffs, the overriding architectural interpretation of the site was intrinsically linked to the physical remains of the Government House, and its symbolic reference to Australia’s colonial beginnings. As Emmett described:

> It’s a beautiful, classical, formal building, consistent with the Enlightenment aspirations of the European colonisers.\(^8\)

The Mabo decision in 1992 proved to be a pivotal point in the development of the Museum of Sydney. The Eurocentric perspectives that dominated the site’s interpretation for the past decade were no longer politically or socially viable. It became necessary to ‘subvert the DMC imperial grid’.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Ibid., 83.


\(^10\) Ibid.
Figure 8.12
The different façade surfaces of the Museum of Sydney were designed to represent the historical development of Sydney, from bedrock to dress stone to steel (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
Separating the Museum from the Archaeological Remains: Creating the ‘Museum of Sydney’

*Terra nullius* – land belonging to no one

In 1987, Henry Reynolds argued that the British Government used the legal theory of *terra nullius* to justify its claim of sovereignty of Australia. Reynolds was at the forefront of ‘frontier history’ that examined the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people that resulted in their widespread deaths and dispossession. Scholars like Geoffrey Blainey rejected the rise of this ‘black armband’ history as an overcorrection of traditional historical accounts, and Keith Windschuttle challenged the evidential basis of Aboriginal massacre as cited by Reynolds and Lyndall Ryan, but ‘frontier history’ influenced the High Court’s decision regarding Aboriginal land rights in the Mabo case in 1992.

After speaking at a conference about land rights in the Torres Straits in 1981, Koiko (Eddie) Mabo (with Dave Passi and James Rice) brought an action against the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth claiming ‘native title’ to the Murray Islands on 20 May 1982. After a decade of legal proceedings, the High Court of Australia handed down its decision in Mabo v Queensland (No. 2) on 3 June 1992. The Court finding that ‘native title’ survived where Aboriginal people had maintained traditional law and links with the land. It was a legal recognition of Australian occupation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their traditional laws and customs. The Court also held that:

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94 Papers and discussions from the conference were published in Erik Olbrei, (ed.), *Black Australians: The Prospects for Change* (Townsville, Qld.: Students Union James Cook University of North Queensland, 1982).
The common law of this country would perpetuate injustice if it were to continue to embrace the notion of terra nullius and persist in characterising the Indigenous inhabitants of the Australian colonies as people too low in the scale of social organization to be acknowledged as possessing rights and interests in land.\footnote{95}

The judgment resulted in new legislation and government policies. It also led to a cultural change in Australia. As Graeme Neate commented at the National Native Tribunal’s \textit{Native Title Forum 2001: Negotiating Country:}

There is widespread acceptance that native title exists – that it is part of the legal and social fabric of Australia. The issues are not whether native title should be recognised, or whether there should be wholesale extinguishment at the stroke of a legislator’s pen, but what are the best practical ways of dealing with a range of native title issues.\footnote{96}

The impact of the Mabo decision on the Historic Houses Trust’s re-assessment of the cultural significance of the First Government House site, and the resulting interpretative direction for the museum was profound. The notion that 1788 marked the beginning of Australia, with the First Government House remains a tangible link to this event, was based on the assumption of \textit{terra nullius}. Such an interpretation was unsustainable.

The architectural design of the museum building in 1990-91 was undertaken as a separate stage to the development of the internal museum exhibits. In August 1992, Peter Emmett was appointed the Senior Curator of the First Government House project. As noted in the previous chapter, Emmett joined the Trust in 1990 as a Senior Curator of Public Buildings. Despite this appointment, Emmett’s museological direction of the Museum of Sydney was not immediately assured and reflected Peter Watt’s own deliberations on how the museum should evolve. For Watts, ‘there were two broad directions we could take’:

One was, the direction that we did take. And the other was a more conservative view of the place. We had two people who had those views – James Broadbent was the more traditional approach and Peter Emmett who would have done something very different.\footnote{97}

\footnote{95} Justice Brennan of the High Court of Australia, ‘The Need for Recognition by the Crown of Native Title’, High Court Decision on Mabo v Queensland (No. 2) on 3 June 1992.
\footnote{97} Interview with Peter Watts. 18 December 2004.
In the months leading up to Emmett’s appointment, Watts met with both curators ‘every Friday afternoon for several hours, and we talked about the site . . . but never the twain shall meet’. In the end, he decided that the two differing views ‘ought to be able to be married, one ought to do the two’. Watts initially offered the project to Broadbent, having considered ways of incorporating a more contemporary approach. Broadbent declined the offer, believing that he did not possess the right skills. It was subsequently offered to Emmett, who accepted the project. It was also at this point that Watts realised that despite his aim of ‘marrying’ the two approaches, ‘it was going to go in one direction and not the other’. Nevertheless, Watts was comfortable with this realisation because of Emmett’s willingness to ‘engage in the whole idea of the museum in a different way, particularly with things like Aboriginal issues . . . he had a more expansive view of what the place could be’.

By the end of 1992, Watts and Emmett established the Trust’s ‘fundamental guidelines for significance, mission, conservation, collection, interpretation and design’ for the new museum. As a major departure from the Trust’s other museums, the overriding significance of the First Government House site was no longer attributed to its physical fabric or as a tangible link to the ‘birth of the nation’. Instead, the Trust believed that:

The most potent and provocative significance of First Government House site is as a symbol of British colonisation of Australia in 1788 and its subsequent role as the seat of British authority in the colony. To Australians in the 1990s this symbolism will mean different things to different people. Hence First Government house site becomes a symbol of different perspectives on how we see ourselves as Australians today.

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98 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
99 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
100 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
101 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
102 Interview with Peter Watts, 18 December 2004.
104 Ibid., 6. Peter Watts also noted that the archaeological remains were not available for interpretation because the archaeologists ‘insisted’ that they be covered, and that the inclusion of small viewing windows to reveal part of the footings ‘were hard fought for’ by the Trust (Peter Watts, per.comm., 2 February 2007).
Rather than the genesis of Australia, the year 1788 was re-interpreted as a turning point for both Aboriginal and European people.

The physical and ideological separation of the museum from the archaeological remains was reinforced in the *Museum Plan* in 1993, with the Trust stating:

> It is important not to confuse conservation of physical evidence with interpretation of a 'ghost house' and more so with its symbolism and emotional associations with people today. The modern museum and interpretative displays constructed on the concrete slab to preserve the physical evidence of FGH site are not conservation actions but means to interpret the meaning and symbolism of what the place was. The broader interpretative framework for the Museum of Sydney is not a denial of the significance of FGH site. On the contrary, it is based on the very significance of FGH as a place of great historical, symbolic and emotional association.\textsuperscript{105}

The disassociation between First Government House and the expansion of the museum concept from merely interpreting the physical remains was cemented with the naming of the new museum in 1993. For many years, it had been unofficially known as the ‘First Government House Museum’. In June 1993, Emmett wrote:

> The title of a cultural institution largely determines its public identity ... Now is a critical stage of the project to determine the official title ... A name and thematic focus on Sydney is not a denial of FGH site. On the contrary the role of FGH and its physical remains make it totally appropriate site for a museum of Sydney.\textsuperscript{106}

The public appeal of a museum that focused on ‘Sydney’ rather than the First Government House site was tested through market research, and the Trustees resolved that the museum be called ‘The MUSEUM OF SYDNEY on the site of first Government House’.\textsuperscript{107}


It was completely contrary to the previously accepted interpretation of the site and in particular, the views of the Friends of the First Government House who responded with the statement:

The foundations of Government House were laid in the same year as the foundation of the nation now known as the Commonwealth of Australia. They are the only known remains from 1788. The life of this building and its additions thus co-exists with the Convict Era of Australian history. As such it represents a tangible record of continuous occupation and development not only of the formation years of Australia but also of the broader concerns of colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth century. These tangible links, the very foundations of a nation, are unique.\footnote{Friends of FGH (1984) in Ireland, "Excavating National Identity," 100.}

Nevertheless, the Trust’s new ideological stance formalised its rejection of a celebratory and singular interpretation of the site, and in doing so, challenged the very concept of the ‘museum’. As Emmett recalled, ‘We wanted it to be quite the opposite’.\footnote{Interview with Peter Emmett, 16 October 2003.}

\textbf{Reinventing the Museum: From a Mausoleum to Public Forum}

For an organisation that was built upon empiricist methodologies and whose focus was house museums, the Museum of Sydney marked a complete philosophical and methodological change for the Trust. Creating a new cultural institution within the context of the ‘new museology’, Mabo, and Aboriginal reconciliation was a formidable task without precedent. As Watts described:

\textit{It is difficult to imagine a project with more difficulties than MOS has had – a museum without a collection; a museum requiring itself to define its own role; ... sensitive cultural issues; high expectations; many different and passionate constituencies to satisfy.}\footnote{Peter Watts, “Director’s Report”, HHT Minutes of Meeting No. 151 (10 April, 1995), \textit{HHT Minutes (March – June 1995)}.}

In developing a new museological model, the Trust created a museum that was more constructionist, revisionist and self-reflective than the traditional museums it sought to challenge.
On the eve of the Museum of Sydney’s opening in 1995, Emmett posed the contemplative question, “What is this place?:

It’s not an archaeology site; the conservation action was to preserve the site under concrete. It’s not a house museum; the house doesn’t exist. It’s not a museum of collections; we have a collection of archaeological artefacts that will be stored in a study centre but can never be the basis for complete interpretation of the place. So too we cannot sustain a museum dedicated to a chronology of events that affirm a nationalist mythology when such relevant issues from this time – native title, British inheritance, republicanism – are front page news.111

By refuting the assumption that museums provided an authoritative narrative of the world, and accepting the validity of multiple perspectives, Emmett redefined the role of the museum and curator:

As a modern museum it must be a museum of interpretation of historical issues and contexts using all manner of evidence. Interpretation is the primary basis, the modus operandi for the Museum, not a secondary role to collection and conservation.

A museum – this Museum . . . it’s about the relation between things and reflection on the meanings and murmurings of sites, inner and outer sites, the tangible and intangible. We can’t really talk meaningfully about “the site”, for it means different things to different people. There are many sites hovering here; different histories, journeys, stories that cross and groove and make this place we call Sydney . . . Site of ruin . . . Site of power . . . Site of contested ground . . . Site of acknowledgments . . . Site of reflections.112

For Emmett:

While the word ‘museum’ is there, it is the constant language about being like a forum, about being a place for debate, about constant change . . . so it was more to do with a temporary exhibition space and a forum for ideas. This was the critical orientation.113

As such the ‘new’ museum was not a ‘mausoleum’, but a ‘meeting place’:

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113 Interview with Peter Emmett, 16 October 2003.
A meeting place for conservations across time and place...to allow [people] a space to reflect, to relate in their own ways, to renegotiate meanings, to make their own classifications and collections, to dream about their place.\textsuperscript{114}

Central to the notion of MoS being ‘a forum for debate about Sydney’ was the notion of dialogue – not between visitors as such, but between visitors, the exhibits and history itself.\textsuperscript{115} As Emmett described, the museum was ‘a spatial composition, a sensory and sensual experience; a place to enter, senses and body alive. Its meanings are revealed through the physical experience of moving through it’.\textsuperscript{116}

As such the Trust developed the Museum of Sydney as an antidote to critiques represented by the ‘new museology’ – that the static and sequential didactic display of objects and text supported a linear narrative, which placed visitors as passive recipients and discouraged alternative perspectives and interpretations.

For the Trust, the key to countering such effects was to reverse the ideological and methodological elements of a traditional museum. This meant creating a museum around intangible ‘historical issues’ and ‘interpretations’ rather than a central collection. It rejected accepted systems of taxonomy that categorised and represented different cultures in relation to European values. Objects played a secondary role to the overriding historiographical aim of providing alternative cultural perspectives and countering the dominance of Eurocentric narratives. Furthermore, breaking away from the empirical approach of its other house museums, the Trust no longer assumed that objects spoke for themselves. As Jordanova noted:

It is important to recognise that although labels offer a context within which the item in question can be ‘read’, this context is limited, selective and manipulative, since it generally invites visitors to perceive in a particular way.\textsuperscript{117}

‘Limited, selective and manipulative’ labels were replaced with historical quotations. As a historical and curatorial consultant to MoS, Paul Carter described captions as ‘neutralising agents of the power of objects’ and quotations as ‘agents of

\textsuperscript{114} Emmett, "WYSIWYG on the Site of First Government House," 120.
\textsuperscript{115} Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales. Museum of Sydney on the Site of First Government House: Museum Plan, 12.
\textsuperscript{116} Emmett, "WYSIWYG on the Site of First Government House," 115.
\textsuperscript{117} Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective of Museums," 24.
imaginative liberation'. The Trust also developed new interpretative techniques through artistic and theatrically inspired multimedia installations and displays where "visitors can 'walk right into the exhibit' and thus play a part in producing its meaning". Spatial, visual and auditory elements were combined so that visitors would interact on a physical and sensory level with exhibits.

This historiographical and methodological thread that linked all the exhibits began in First Government House Place with the sculptural installation 'Edge of the Trees' (Figure 8.13). Designed by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence, this contemporary piece replaced the initial proposal of a row of flagstaffs (and was much to the disapproval of the Friends of the First Government House). It was inspired by Rhys Jones' alternative perspective of European exploration and colonisation where:

the discoverers struggling through the surf were met on the beach by other people looking at them from the edge of trees. This was the same landscape perceived by the newcomers as alien, hostile or having no coherent form, was to the indigenous people their home, familiar place, the inspiration of dreams.

The stand of sculptural tree trunks represented the 'edge of trees' from where Aboriginal people first observed the arrival of Europeans. The installation symbolised first encounter from both Aboriginal and European perspectives, and the use of different timber surfaces, stone and steel signified the ongoing process of contact and cultural exchange since 1788. Inlaid into the trunks were the cultural markings of Aboriginal presence - shell middens, ochre, ash and bone - symbolic of how Aboriginal culture was integrated with the environment (Figure 8.14). The Eora names of Aboriginal inhabitants and places were burnt into the trunks.

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118 Paul Carter, The Calling to Come (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1996).

119 Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum, 129.

120 Rhys Jones, "Ordering the Landscape," in Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson, (eds), Seeing the First Australians, (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 185.
Figure 8.13
'The Edge of Trees' sculpture (by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence) replaced the original idea of flagstaffs (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).

Figure 8.14
The trunks were inlaid the cultural markings of Aboriginal presence – shell middens, ochre, ash and bone – to represent of how Aboriginal culture was integrated with the environment. The metal plates represented the First Fleeters. (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
These were juxtaposed with metal plates that were nailed onto the trees and etched with the names of the First Fleeters, and represented the newcomers who attached themselves to the ancient land. Enveloping the trees was a soundscape of voices speaking the Eora language. The purpose of this installation was to allow visitors to experience the contact from both sides – for Europeans approaching the seemingly hostile and dark wilderness, and from the Aboriginal perspective of seeing foreigners arriving to their shore - to look at them from the ‘edge of the trees’.

The interpretation of 1788 as a turning point for both cultures continued inside the museum. The glass cubic entrance became a space of cross-cultural encounters. Based on the Diaries of William Dawes, the historian Paul Carter developed the auditory exhibit, The Calling to Come.121 Dawes was an Officer of the First Fleet with an interest in astronomy and linguistics. His diaries revealed his relationship with an Aboriginal woman, Patyegarang, and his efforts to both learn the Eora language and teach English. As a soundscape, Carter attempted to recreate Dawes’ and Patyegarang’s attempts to learn about each other’s culture through language. While highly evocative, the abstract nature of this exhibit assumed a high level of knowledge from visitors – an assumption prevalent throughout the museum.

The use of non-traditional interpretative methods as a means of communicating the Trust’s historiographical aims were more pronounced inside the museum. The SITES installation was designed to challenge conventional taxonomic hierarchies and the predominant method of analysing artefacts according to their form and function. Focusing on Sydney in the 1820s, archaeological objects were arranged geographically according to the sites from where they were excavated, such as the First Government House, The Rocks, Cockle Bay, the convict barracks, the brickfields and Parramatta.

Apart from providing a visual sense of the geography of colonial Sydney, SITES was also designed to represent the social environment of the colony and how Europeans interacted with their surroundings. Adopting Ian Hodder’s contextual approach to studying material culture, Jane Lydon explained:

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121 Carter, The Calling to Come.
The emphasis was to be on social themes amenable to interpretation through site comparisons. What could the evidence tell us about people – their food, drink, clothing, work, recreation – and in turn class, gender, age and race? ... The site of the governor's house may have immense significance in symbolic terms, but in isolation its archaeological potential to tell us about colonial Sydney is restricted to evidencing only the people who lived there, and their experience. Examining other sites can, by contrast and correspondence, reveal patterns which create a meaningful picture of colonial culture. Our focus was the power and purposes of the Governor’s house as centre of government, but this could only become evident through its consideration in context.\textsuperscript{122}

While promoting a contextual reading of material culture, the Trust was not advocating a particular interpretation. Representing different perspectives, filmed heads of ‘historical’ witnesses and modern interpreters were screened along the wall surrounding the display case. A convict, an Irish maidservant, an “exclusive” upper-class woman, a trader, a soldier, an Aboriginal woman, a historian, archaeologist, curator, Aboriginal lawyer and business each spoke in random pairs to ‘engage in dialogue, contesting each other’s points of view, or perhaps simply run parallel’.\textsuperscript{123}

At the heart of the SITES installation was a stance against interpreting the First Government House site in reference to only the archaeological remains, or the immediate history of its former colonial occupants. The significance of First Government House was relational to its historical and physical context. As Lydon observed, ‘from an archaeological point of view, no one site, however significant, can tell us very much about the past’.\textsuperscript{124}

The Trust’s attempts to demonstrate the notions of multiple perspectives and history as consisting of fragments of the past, were best represented in the Bond Store Tales.\textsuperscript{125} Again, text and objects were replaced with a three-dimensional experience of sounds, sights and space. Curated by Ross Gibson, a series of historical objects were reproduced into digital images and projected around the darkened exhibition

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{125} The Bond Tales is now located on Level 2 of the museum, in a modified and reduced form.
space. They served as a springboard for holographic 'historical' characters telling
different testimonials about colonial life (Figure 8.15). Gibson explained how:

The gallery is arrayed as a symbolic warehouse where objects that passed through Sydney
during the period 1788-1850 are assembled awaiting assessment of their value and payment
of their customs fees. It is a haunting-place where we might hear some of the stories
embedded in commodities that have touched peoples' past lives... visitors cause the
phantoms to arise from the objects. As people scrutinise a relic, their proximity triggers a
transformation and a ghost arises. Once they have been conjured by curiosity, these
phantoms are compelled to tell about the object.126

Figure 8.15
Ghostly images from the Bond Store tales at the Museum of Sydney (Photograph by Anna Wong,
2007).

The crisscrossing conversations of seemingly unrelated dialogue symbolised the
fragmentary nature of the historical record, the possible 'narratives' that attempted
to connect the cultural evidence, and how the creation of a 'master narrative' was
relational to time and space. As Gibson highlighted:

126 Ross Gibson, The Bond Store Tales (Glebe: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales,
Notice how we tell stories about places, events and things? A story rarely goes straight to its object. A story tells about its topic and thereby provides shifting vantage-points to prompt a listener’s imagination and interpretation. Narrative does not tell straight and true, the way we used to think history did. So, when a group of stories are breathed together about a city, we get a contentious bluster of postulations, a fresh convection of narratives that buffets up truths speculatively, shiftingly and endlessly.¹²⁷

Each testimonial provided a ‘micro-history, introduced at the entrance of the ‘Bond Store’ by a ‘slightly rum-blind’ marine (a comment about the supposed sanctity of history and knowledge). Inside, thirty-five objects were randomly displayed, and included items such as e a steel machete, dolls, a horse and pen and paper. The ‘story-tellers’ were equally diverse and represented the population that inhabited colonial Sydney at the time - an entrepreneur, a marine, an Aborigine, a tavern singer, a French woman, a young African woman and a Pacific Islander. Each had a different story about Sydney - a different perspective. But were the stories real? While based on historical research, the dialogue, like the holographic characters, were fictional. For visitors, this ambiguity was a call to question accepted historical accounts and interpretations of the past.

CULTURAL FACILITATOR OR ALTERNATIVE MYTH CREATOR?

As a museum that presented such radically different ideological concepts and exhibits, the Museum of Sydney inevitably attracted a wide range of opinions. For the Friends of the First Government House who considered the Trust’s interpretative direction as an abandonment of Australia’s British heritage, the response was predictably negative. They described the new museum as an ‘abstract nothingness’, ‘politically correct’ and Peter Emmett as ‘just a trendy leftie’.¹²⁸

On the other side, the academic and anthropologist, Julie Marcus considered the museum’s treatment of indigenous history as tokenistic and marginal.¹²⁹ The most widely held view of the new museum however, was what Guy Hansen described as

¹²⁷ Ibid.
a 'Fear of the Master-narrative'. Emmett's belief that, "We can't really talk meaningfully about "the site", for it means different things to different people", led to MoS being labelled a fence sitter. Linda Young praised how 'Originality and innovation are certainly virtues, and challenges to conventional wisdom constitute timely interventions in historiographical habits', but 'the abandonment of purposeful analysis of historical material . . . an irresponsible rhetoric of emptiness'.

As Andrea Witcomb noted, the wide range of responses was not symptomatic of a lack of curatorial direction. On the contrary, the use of modern art and multimedia installation, and the seemingly disjointed museum narrative was central to the Trust's reinvention of the museum. Without written explanations, the highly aesthetic interpretations of the objects and historical accounts demanded a high level of prior knowledge from its visitors. The question remained - did it achieve its philosophical aims of breaking down the nineteenth century practices of taxonomies and classifications that supported a unitary and linear view of the world - and in particular Eurocentric categories and representations of culture and race?

At the first public forum held at the Museum of Sydney, which focused on archaeology and interpretation in museums, Tracy Ireland discussed the connection between archaeological and heritage practices, and how the selective process of conservation and its associated research was used to perpetuate a pre-determined national narrative or 'myth'. Ireland praised the Trust and the opportunities provided at the Museum of Sydney in challenging such uniform perceptions of the past and the encouragement of multiple cultural perspectives. Nevertheless, she also highlighted the need for the Trust to acknowledge its role in 'alternative myth production'.

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131 Emmett, "WYSIWYG on the Site of First Government House."
133 Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, 163.
It was cautionary advice made in reference to the centralised heritage system since the 1970s, and the Keating government’s new cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, which promoted a socially inclusive national identity that incorporated urban and multicultural aspects of Australian history and society. Aboriginal culture and history was also recognised as an ‘essential element’ of Australian identity. For Ireland:

> Multiculturalism and reconciliation are meaningless if they simply mean importing new ideas into the dominant culture without changing the power relationship which perpetuates this dominance.\(^{135}\)

It was a call for the Trust to openly acknowledge and address its political and cultural influences.

Peter Emmett responded negatively to Ireland’s observations, and exclaimed:

> Tracy has explained to us the government’s *Creative Nation* policy. Does she intend this as some sort of blueprint for an imperial museum, like Phillip carrying the King’s instructions in his saltwater-stained pocket? To start the colonising project over again, with the hindsight of “History”? Surely we’re tired of national myths and stereotypes . . . This museum is not a staged diorama history.\(^{136}\)

For Emmett, whose curatorial vision was to challenge the concept of a master narrative of Australia’s past, the notion that the Museum of Sydney was producing an ‘alternative myth’ was inconceivable. This was the philosophical flaw in Emmett’s dream – the unwavering belief that the interpretative messages presented at Museum of Sydney were immune from external political and social influences, and that it provided equal opportunities for all individuals and groups to interpret their histories.

Yet, the representation of Aboriginal and ethnic groups revealed how the Trust was actively painting a particular social picture of Australian society. It both challenged and was influenced by broader political and social developments – namely the rise of the Aboriginal rights movements and the fight for native title, and the transformation of ‘multiculturalism’ from a social to a cultural policy. The

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Museum of Sydney was certainly a stance against conventional anglophilic interpretations of Australian history, but in doing so, it presented an alternative national identity and idealised 'community' — despite Emmett's rebuttals.

**Museums in the New Millennium: Cultural Policies and Displaying a New Australia Identity**

The philosophical aims of the Museum of Sydney were framed around universal statements of how the First Government House site was a 'symbol of different perspectives on how we see ourselves as Australians today', and how the Trust sought 'to explore ideas, issues, values and symbols relevant to the place and to Australians'.

Despite the blanket use of the universal term, 'Australians', the initial exhibits at the Museum of Sydney indicated a very particular understanding of who was included (and excluded) by this term. The Trust challenged dominant 'white' official historical interpretations of Australian history by using the 'voices' of those absent from the written record, namely Aborigines, convicts, female domestic servants and soldiers. It promoted an Australian identity that reversed the idea of Australia being created by 'great white men and great events', to an Australia that was created through the experiences and hardships of early settlers and convicts and the dispossession of Aboriginal people.

One of the fundamental assumptions made by the Trust was that the removal of labels and the use of non-traditional display installation would remove the overpowering influence of the curator, and hence the creation of a 'master narrative'. Although, as the studies by Stephanie Moser, Denis Cosgrove and Steven Daniels, Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, and M. Rudwick revealed, images, visual representations and other forms of non-verbal communication were integral to substantiating and rationalising 'scientific' arguments and theories, particular in the fields of archaeology and anthropology.

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For one of the Museum’s initial exhibits, the Trust commissioned Michael Riley, a Wiradjuri photographer and filmmaker, to curate a permanent video dedicated to the Aboriginal people of Sydney. Titled ‘Eora’, the installation consisted of three video screens displaying a series of changing images and footage representing different aspects of Aboriginal culture. This included traditional food practices (such as digging sticks, spears and collecting oysters), environmental management techniques (such as firestick farming), and artistic creations (such as rock art, ochre production and stencilled handprints) (Figure 8.16). These images of traditional Aboriginal practices were juxtaposed with scenic and tranquil images of the natural environment. When Aboriginal people were pictured within a contemporary urban environment, it was within the context of public protest and social unrest. The only exception was the footage of a ‘modern’ Aboriginal family sharing a meal of lobster inside a suburban home (but not with non-indigenous people) (Figure 8.17).

Created within the political context of the Mabo decision and the legal recognition of native title, ‘Eora’ highlighted the relationship between Aboriginal culture and the natural environment, and its continuity in modern society despite the effects of dispossession. The manner in which the images were linked implied that indigenous culture was distinct and separated from other Australians (and when they were placed together, it was expressed in terms of conflict and disharmony). While reinforcing the belief that indigenous Australians were and remain inherently connected to the natural environment, the visual separation of Aboriginal culture from mainstream Australia also implied (inadvertently or otherwise) that Aboriginal people were not active participants in Australian society.

Nevertheless, this installation demonstrated how the Trust promoted particular interpretations of cultural differences and histories despite its claim of neutrality. In combination with ‘Edge of the Trees’ and ‘The Calling to Come’, it also reflected the Trust’s vision of Australia’s identity – one which was defined by both ‘black’ and ‘white’ cultures.

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Figure 8.16
Images from the 'Eora' installation at the Museum of Sydney. The theme of cultural continuity and connection with the environment was the predominant theme (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
Figure 8.17
The 'Eora' installation at the Museum of Sydney did not depict Aborigines with non-indigenous people in modern setting (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
Yet, what about the contributions by migrants to Sydney and Australia in the twentieth century? Surely they were also part of the ‘story of Sydney’. The Trust’s re-construction of the Australian identity in reference to both ‘black’ and ‘white’ history reflected the politics of the 1980s and early 1990s, and also the cultural changes initiated by the Whitlam government through the Hope Inquiry that recognised Aboriginal culture as part of Australia’s heritage.

At the Sites conference at the Museum of Sydney in 1995, Dr Jana Vythrlik from the Powerhouse Museum discussed the role of Sydney’s historic sites for migrants in the process of ‘settling down and finding new identity’ and the meaning of the Government House site for migrants. Speaking about her own response to the site, and those from other migrants, Vythrlik found:

At the moment, as I see it, it doesn’t mean a lot. However, I’d like to suggest that it does have a strong yet undiscovered emotional charge capable of appealing to migrants.

The site and this Museum has the same share of responsibility as any other museum in Australia: not only to interpret the process of identity formation but to lead the process. If the voice of historic Sydney is much louder, has many different accents and colours, I am sure, the migrants will hear it and respond to it.

Prior to Prime Minister Keating’s 1994 cultural policy, Creative Nation, migrant experiences and histories (especially those from non-Anglo Saxon backgrounds) were not considered an integral part of Australia’s heritage or identity. Twenty years earlier in 1973, Whitlam’s Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, released his policy ‘A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future’ in which Australia was described as a ‘multi-cultural’ society:

in which equal opportunity is accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance.

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140 Ibid., 254.
Despite such rhetoric, multiculturalism initially had little association with 'cultural diversity' and related more with the management and integration of migrants. The Department of Immigration administered 'multiculturalism', such as funding English language courses through the Adult Migrant Education Program and migrant resource centres. While abandoning previous mono-cultural and assimilation policies, the initiatives under the Whitlam government were designed to integrate migrants rather than supporting the continuation of ethnic cultural practices or languages.

As noted earlier in this chapter, 'cultural diversity' in the 1970s and '80s referred to Aboriginal and English-speaking cultures. The extension of 'multiculturalism' from an immigration policy into a cultural characteristic remained in an embryonic form until the late 1980s. The histories of Australians from non-British backgrounds were interpreted in cultural institutions, but these were usually at specialist museums like the Chinese Museum in Melbourne and the Migration Museum in Adelaide. Non-English speaking cultures remained separate to mainstream historical discourses and major cultural establishments. One notable exception was the National Museum of Australia. In 1985, it commissioned Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki to supervise a national survey of material relating to migration to Australia, 'with special emphasis on migrants from countries other than Britain from the post-1945 period'.

Efforts to integrate multicultural content into major cultural institutions came from advocacy groups like the Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FEDCCA). This group was government funded and largely represented by immigrants. In addition to campaigning for more support services, the FECCA also produced policy papers in the areas of art and culture. In 1985, it called for changes to the acquisition policies of collecting institutions. This led to the organisation of the 'New Responsibilities: Documenting Multicultural Australia' conference by the Museums Association and Library Council of Victoria in 1988. The FECCA also

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called for a national cultural policy that reflected Australia’s multicultural population, stating that ‘it is time for action to match the rhetoric of multiculturalism within the Arts, Heritage and Cultural institutions of Australia and make the marginal accepted by the mainstream’.  

The opportunity to realise these aims came when John Keating ousted Bob Hawke as Prime Minister in 1991. Under Keating, multiculturalism was elevated to the forefront of Australian politics and cultural development. For Keating, the future of Australia’s political and economic development lay in its relations with South-East Asia, rather than as a British colonial outpost. This meant developing cultural and political links with Asian countries, and facilitating this process by promoting Australia as a multicultural and racially tolerant nation. Under Keating, the concept of multiculturalism changed from being a social to a cultural policy.

In 1994, on the eve of the Museum of Sydney’s opening, the Keating Government released Creative Nation. It was the first national cultural policy for Australia. Culture was defined as ‘the identity of the nation, communities and individuals’ and Australia’s identity was characterised as multicultural, urban and contemporary. It also formally acknowledged for the first time, that indigenous culture was an essential part of Australian identity. This document officially transformed ‘multiculturalism’ from solely an immigration policy to a cultural facet of Australia’s identity. Administratively, Creative Nation also outlined how national characteristics should be articulated and promoted through the arts, media and cultural institutions.

Creative Nation served as a template for Federal and State cultural policies. It provided the framework for the New South Wales Labor Party’s Cultural Development Policy that was launched as part of the electoral campaign in March.

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147 Department of Communications and the Arts, *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994).

148 Ibid., 5.

149 Ibid., 6.
1995. The Policy included principles relating to access and equity, cultural diversity and cultural tourism, and was officially adopted following Bob Carr’s victory in April. It was subsequently used as the guiding principles for other State cultural policies including the Government’s White Paper, Building on Our Cultural Heritage: Ethnic Affairs Action Plan 2000 (December 1996) and The arts and cultural diversity: Principles for multicultural arts support in New South Wales (August 1997).

The ‘ethnic’ and ‘multicultural’ focus of these subsequent cultural policies reflected the conceptual broadening of ‘cultural diversity’ to include not only indigenous and Anglo-Australians, but also Australians from different ethnic backgrounds. According to the State Government:

New South Wales is made up of many communities, each with its own story and identity. The Government believes that a vigorous cultural life is an integral part of the health of all communities in a culturally diverse society such as ours.

The Government will treat cultural diversity, as expressed in the arts, as one of the defining characteristics of a united modern Australia.

Despite the rhetoric of social inclusion and equitable access to resources, Creative Nation and subsequent Federal and State cultural policies were exercises in political and economic expediency. As the Keating Federal government explained:

[the] ultimate aim of this cultural policy is to increase the comfort and enjoyment of Australian life. It is to heighten experience and add to our security and well-being. In that it pursues similar ends to any social policy. By shoring up our heritage in new or expanded national institutions and adapting technology to its preservation and dissemination, by creating new avenues for artistic and intellectual growth and expression and by supporting our artists and writers, we enable ourselves to ride the wave of global change in a way that safeguards and promotes our national culture.

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152 Ibid., 2, 4.
153 Department of Communications and the Arts, Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy, 7.
Even Prime Minister John Howard, who once expressed his objection to the use of the term ‘multiculturalism’, was at pains to openly promote Australia as a tolerant nation in his keynote 2006 Australia Day address, stating:

When it comes to being an Australian there is no hierarchy of descent interviews.  

It was a measure to ameliorate the negative reports of the event in America, Europe and Asia. While condemning racism, Howard nevertheless placed ‘core Australian values’ above multiculturalism, noting that:

In Australia’s case, that dominant pattern comprises Judaeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture. Its democratic and egalitarian temper also bears the imprint of distinct Irish and non-conformist traditions.

Responding to new economic and social imperatives, the Federal government since the Keating administration officially accepted and supported cultural and ethnic differences, but only when expressed within prescribed categories and practices — and certainly not to the detriment of Australia’s British-based institutions. As noted in the Howard government’s policy:

Australian multiculturalism is a term which recognises and celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australian and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy.

A united and harmonious Australia, built on the foundation of our democracy, and developing its continually evolving nationhood by recognising, embracing, valuing and investing in its heritage and cultural diversity.

Since 1997, all New South Wales government agencies were required to include an ‘Ethnic Affairs Priority Statement’ in its annual report to Parliament outlining each

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155 Ibid.
156 National Multicultural Advisory Council, Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness (Executive Summary) (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999), 6, 7.
agency's strategy and programs in addressing the government's multicultural principles. A number of agencies, like the Historic Houses Trust were identified as 'key' agencies in communicating and implementing government cultural and social policies. In isolation, the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives in the initial exhibits at the Museum of Sydney appeared as a stance against conventional histories of Australia that omitted Aboriginal experiences, or, were biased towards European achievements. When considered in relation to the Museum's later exhibitions and how the Trust represented ethnic cultures and communities, the process of 'myth-making' and its role in creating a national identity became more apparent.

Social Inclusion, Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity: An Exercise of Modern Taxonomy?

Due to the Trust's focus on the period from 1788 to 1845, the inclusion of Aboriginal history and perspectives was at the forefront of the Museum's initial development. By contrast, ethnic and migrant history was not a major consideration in the development of MoS and did not feature as part of the Trust's initial 'story of Sydney'. In the wake of new government cultural policies and also a growing body of academic and professional literature calling for greater social inclusion and cultural representation in museums, the Trust revised the aim of MoS to 'represent and engage with Sydney's diverse communities, and to document and preserve different cultures'. Without a permanent collection, the Trust initially relied on temporary exhibitions and public programs to interpret the ethnic history and culture of Sydney.

Reflecting on her work as Head Curator at MoS, Sue Hunt commented how:

We decided that the Museum of Sydney, if it was true to its name, should have an ongoing liaison with Sydney communities, however you define that. And because we didn't have the scope or opportunity with the rest of the properties to do that in a huge way we decided we'd start with some of the public programmes.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{158} Interview with Sue Hunt, 28 August 2003.
Starting in 1997 with the program ‘Reclaiming the Past’, the range of programs and exhibitions that involved or represented different ethnic communities revealed the Trust’s own explorations on the meanings of ethnicity and how it should be interpreted in museums. On the one hand, the Trust developed innovative programs that allowed people from different ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to tell their own stories. On the other hand, the Trust held public programs or exhibited images that reinforced cultural stereotypes, or limited the experiences and history of ethnic communities to food and culture.

‘Reclaiming the Past’ consisted of a series of talks, discussions and video presentations that explored the different cultural and ethnic communities in Sydney. It involved members of the Polish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Cambodian communities, as well as researchers working with such groups in documenting family and migrant histories. It was one of the first public programs by a major museum that focused on the multicultural history and heritage of Sydney, and provided a forum for different cultural groups to showcase their work, projects and to tell their own histories. The strong emphasis on new media and non-traditional historical material (such as oral histories) reflected the interests of the program convener, Diana Giese, who was the oral historian for the National Library of Australia at the time and instrumental in establishing the Library’s collection of post-war Chinese-Australian oral histories.

The program was a sell-out success, much to the surprise of the Trust, according to Giese.\(^{159}\) It brought people from non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds to the museum – an audience group that did not usually visit major museums. It generated similar programs at other large museums, and spurred the Trust to engage Giese to develop a second multicultural program series, ‘Changing Sydney’. Rather than being held at MoS, this program consisted of tours to important cultural, spiritual and commercial sites of different ethnic groups, such as the Khmer Buddhist Temple at Bonnyrigg, Hindu Temple at Mobbs Hill, Jewish Synagogue in Sydney, the Gallipoli Mosque at Auburn and Italian shops, cafes and businesses in Haberfield (Figure 8.18).

\(^{159}\) Interview of Diana Giese, 29 August 2003.
Unlike 'Reclaiming the Past', this second series took visitors (who were predominantly Anglo-Australians) to ethnic communities and their cultural sites. It effectively reversed the relationship between museum and minority communities, with each ethnic community inviting visitors to their cultural space, and determining which aspects of their cultural heritage and history they wished to share. It also provided the opportunity for these communities to demonstrate how they were promoting cultural awareness through their own initiatives and programs.

For example, when naming 'Auburn Gallipoli Mosque' in 1999, the Turkish Islamic community explained how it wanted to emphasise the shared history between Turkey and Australia. Public tours provided access for non-Muslim members of the general public and also explained how the Muslim community collaborated with other religious groups in Sydney to increase public awareness of different religious beliefs and to promote religious and cultural tolerance. An outcome of such initiatives was the formation of the 'Affinity Intercultural Foundation' in 2001. The aim of the Foundation was to 'create[e] and sustain enduring affinity and relationships with people through inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and
understanding. Initially involving Muslim and Christian groups, the Foundation planned to extend its programs to include other religious groups.

As Hunt commented, ‘our strategy really was to provide a space for various groups to tell us stories’. Hunt’s interest in community engagement led to the exhibitions Encountering India: Colonial Photography 1850-1911 (1997), Goldie: New Zealand’s Old Master (1998) and the high profile Lure of the South Seas: The Voyages of Dumont d’Urville (2003). These exhibitions focused on different ethnic cultures and although curated around European collections, Hunt was keen to involve the Indian, Maori and Pacific Islander Communities.

The outcome was mixed. For example, the Goldie exhibition included photographs of deceased Maori people. The opportunity for the Maori community to perform private ceremonies to honour their ancestors in the gallery reflected the Trust’s cultural openness. Members of the Maori community were also present in the gallery to answer public questions and provide information for the duration of the exhibition. Similar cultural considerations were made for the exhibition Lure of the South Seas. In this instance, the Maori community was consulted regarding the handling of life masks of Maori people that were made during Dumont d’Urville’s voyage of the Pacific. A Maori community leader was involved in the installation and dismantling of the exhibition, including a traditional ceremony to honour the deceased people represented by the life masks.

The Trust, however, missed an opportunity to address the impact of European imperialism and colonialism on indigenous populations in the Pacific and its effect on contemporary Pacific Islander nations. The exhibition included the cultural artefacts and natural history objects collected by Dumont d’Urville on his three voyages to the South Pacific. A nineteenth century explorer, he is often viewed as the French equivalent of Captain Cook. Like Cook, he journeyed three times to the Southern Seas, reaching Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and Antarctica. His voyages between 1826 and 1840 represent the pinnacle of French maritime exploration, colonialism and scientific endeavours.

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161 Interview with Sue Hunt, 23 August 2003.
The exhibition included cultural artefacts, paintings, and natural history illustrations and specimens. Most of the objects included in the exhibition were derived from Dumont d’Urville’s voyages. In addition to highlighting the key events from each voyage, the colonial collection was reinterpreted through the examination of the political, economic and social context for European exploration and scientific research. Cultural artefacts and life masks were presented within the thematic topics of phrenology, physical anthropology and cultural property.

The objects and paintings used in the exhibition were collected during expeditions motivated by colonial expansion, racial dominance and at times, cultural plunder. Historically, museums played a vital role as repositories of material and knowledge gathered during such voyages of exploration. Such information was used as the basis of European colonial expansion, resulting in the displacement of indigenous cultures.

Rather than engaging in these issues, the exhibition steered away from examining the social and economic ramifications of European exploration expeditions. Instead, the exhibition focused on the changing role and attitudes of museums. The panel outlining the study of phrenology and physical anthropology concluded with ‘such practices in classifying cultures and races are now considered objectionable’.

The summary of how Dumont d’Urville was rewarded and promoted for taking the Venus de Milo back to France finished with the remark, ‘We now call this an audacious act of pillaging’.

The subject of colonial exploration and expansion was interpreted within a social history framework by the use of historical themes. This was not extended, however, to the presentation and interpretation of cultural objects displayed in the exhibition. Cultural items and life masks were separated from natural history objects, but the exhibition followed the traditional museum practice of taxonomic classifications. For example, the label accompanying the display of breast plate armour collected from the Solomon Islands included the name (‘Breast plate armour’), place of origin (‘Soloman Islands’), material and method of manufacture (‘woven coconut fibre
Museum of Sydney

and hair'), physical dimensions (‘90 x 45 cm’), and owner (‘Musee National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Oceanie’). Life masks were labelled in a similar fashion:

Life mask of Poukaiem
Otago, New Zealand
Pierre-Marie Alexandre
Dumoutier, c.1840
Plaster bust, 40 x 20 x 22 cm
Musee de l’Homme

The exhibition did not reflect the Trust’s cultural sensitivity toward ethnic communities as demonstrated by the traditional ceremonies held at the beginning and end of the exhibition. This gesture of cultural understanding was not integrated into the content or form of the exhibition, which continued to present non-European cultures within a Eurocentric framework.

Community input was more apparent in the public programs associated with the exhibition. ‘Fa’a Pasefika (The Pacific Way)’, was an open day held at the Museum of Sydney (Figure 8.19). The program included music, dancing, singing and displays of traditional crafts produced by Pacific Islander communities (Figure 8.20). In the Trust’s promotional material, visitors were invited to:

Celebrate the journey of discovery led by famous French explorer Dumont d’Urville in conjunction with the current exhibition, Lure of the Southern Seas . . . [and to]

Follow in the footsteps of Dumont d’Urville and make your own discoveries about Pacific Island cultures.162

The symbolic meanings of particular traditional performances were explained (such as the Kava ceremony), but the public program did not challenge the colonial perceptions highlighted in the exhibition. Lure of the Southern Seas represented Pacific Islander culture within colonial themes. The public program was intended to provide an opportunity for the Pacific Islander community to express their

162 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Events Calendar June-August 2003.
cultural heritage, but this was within a specified form and space. Rather than challenging the colonial perceptions of the past, the public program reinforced the notion that indigenous cultures are passive subjects to be observed.

Figure 8.19
The public program ‘Fe’s Pasifik’ was held in conjunction with the ‘Lure of the South Seas: The Voyages of Dumont d’Urville (HHT Public Program Calendar, 2002).
Figure 8.20
The program ‘Fe’s Pasefika’ included traditional Pacific Islander dancing and ceremonies (like drinking kava) (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2002).

As Diana Giese observed through her work with different ethnic communities, the majority of cultural and artistic initiatives which truly challenged cultural stereotypes and increase awareness of ethnic histories are all developed at a community level – ‘at the fringe of the major government and cultural institutions’.

The disparity between how major cultural institutions represented cultural diversity and multiculturalism, and how ethnic communities portrayed their own identity, was made apparent at an open day event at the MoS. As part of the ‘Changing Sydney’ program, the Trust organised ‘Changing Sydney Day’. The event also served as the opening to the 2002 Carnivale Festival.

The open day included performances by artists from different ethnic backgrounds showcasing mainly traditional dancing, singing and music – Chinese performers displayed an acrobatic routine, Spanish dancers performed the flamenco, and Argentinean musicians played the drums. Expressions of ethnicity were restricted to ahistorical expressions of dance and music.

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163 Interview with Diana Giese, 29 August 2003.
164 The Carnivale is a government initiative that promotes the cultural and artistic endeavours of ethnic communities and artists through an annual festival of public events, performances and exhibitions.
The only exception was a performance by a young Australian-Vietnamese writer and performance artist. Thao Nguyen recited the Australian Anthem with revised lyrics that questioned the supposed freedom of Australia and the treatment of refugees. It was performed within the context of the Tampa crisis in 2001, when the Australian government refused to accept 438 Afghan boatpeople who had been rescued by the captain of the Norwegian tanker, *Tampa*, from their sinking wooden boat. Nguyen’s performance challenged the idealistic statements espoused by government indigenous and immigration policies that promoted Australia as a multicultural and tolerant nation. Ending with the statement, ‘Advance Australia Black’, the response by the mainly of Anglo-Australian audience was silently hostile. While the flamenco dancing aroused loud applause and cheering, Nguyen’s performance was met with an uncomfortable silence. No one clapped, except for a few museum guides.

Nguyen was invited to perform at the ‘Changing Sydney Day’ by Diana Giese, who noticed her at a low profile community arts event in Cabramatta. Thao later explained how ‘Changing Sydney’ was ‘supposed to be about Sydney and a representation of the cultural diversity of Sydney’:

> It is a stereotype but when people talk about multiculturalism they talk about people wearing their traditional dresses and banging drums and lotus performances and eating souvlaki . . . whereas it is completely different. It is about how people of ethnic backgrounds are interacting in society . . . When you have a multicultural festival, those things aren’t looked at. So what I wanted to do was to look at those things. Everyone was wearing their traditional dress and I was on straight after an Argentinean traditional folk dance. I was just wearing jeans and a t-shirt, and I went up there and rewrote the Australian anthem. I called it *Revisited* and I talked about things like the refugee policy. I talked about irony of our second stanza ‘For those who’ve come across the seas we’ve boundless plains to share’. The ridiculousness of the anthem, which is supposed to be representative of Australia. It is *Advance Australia Fair*, and it is not ‘fair’ in terms of colour or in terms of our politics. So I just ended it with ‘Advance Australia Black’.¹⁶⁵

Some of the audience later approached Giese expressing their disapproval that such a performance was allowed.¹⁶⁶ It demonstrated the limits of ‘tolerance’ and the assumption that multiculturalism was an aspect of Australian society as long as

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¹⁶⁵ Interview with Thao Nguyen, 15 October 2003.
¹⁶⁶ Interview with Diana Giese, 29 August 2003.
ethnic communities and migrants did not appear to play an active role in mainstream politics. For the audience who attended the open day, the idea of cultural tolerance was limited to an afternoon of singing and dancing.

The representation and participation of ethnic communities through traditional cultural performances was not unusual. The Trust used a similar format for the ‘Festival of the Olive’ at Elizabeth Farm as a means of engaging with its predominantly post-war migrant neighbours. The tendency to interpret ethnicity through such food and music public programs can be likened to folklife festivals in America. While Australia does not share the same history in folklore, programs like the ‘Changing Sydney Day’ were based on similar ideological foundations.

Dean MacCannell described the folklife festival as ‘a modern form of cultural production’, and academics like Roger Abrahams and Beverly Stoeltje have traced such public programs to traditional events like festivals and fairs where ‘cultural goods and values’ were placed on display through participatory events. Richard Bauman and Patricia Sawin highlighted the similarities between folk festivals and museums:

which also exist for the display of culturally valued forms, though where museums tend towards the display of material objects, folk festivals, in keeping with the ambience and dynamic of the festival form, are more participatory and oriented towards action and performance.

For a museum without a collection, the adoption of the folklife festival form at MoS provided a means of interpreting ethnic cultures within a seemingly community-based forum. Bauman and Sawin also noted how:

The ideological foundation of contemporary American folklife festivals is essentially a kind of liberal pluralism. Folk festivals promulgate a symbolically constructed image of the popular foundations of American national culture by traditionalising, valorizing, and

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legitimating selected aspects of vernacular culture drawn from the diverse ethnic, regional, and occupational groups that are seen to make up American society.\textsuperscript{169}

For Australia, where a national identity was remoulded according to the principles of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, folklife festivals and the focus on traditional practices, provided a means of celebrating the presence of ethnic cultures without challenging the political or social status quo.

Such ahistorical representations of ethnicity were reinforced with the acquisition of the photographic series, \textit{Welcome Sydney}, as part of the Museum of Sydney’s permanent collection. Acquired in 2003, this was the Trust’s first collection of multicultural material. The collection of seventeen photographs by artist Anne Zahalka was initially commissioned by the Sydney Airports Commission for the international terminal in Sydney.

The purpose of the photographic series was to illustrate the many different ethnic and cultural groups who migrated to Sydney from countries like Vietnam, Italy, South Africa, Nigeria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, New Zealand and Hong Kong. In composing the photographs, Zahalka asked each family or individual to select an object that represented a personal or cultural association with the original homeland, and pose against a landscape that reflected their new life in Australia. By contrasting the ‘old’ with the ‘new’, Zahalka wanted to explore stereotypical notions of different cultures.

The visual representation of the different nationalities produced mixed messages about the status of migrants or those with ethnic backgrounds in Australian society. For example, the Chinese community was represented by Guangan Wu, who migrated from mainland China twelve years earlier (Figure 8.21). He was photographed in a traditional Saipan coolie hat against the backdrop of the market gardens at Rockdale near Sydney Airport. A passing Qantas plane, symbolising contemporary Australia, was also included in the photograph.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
This photograph was reminiscent of the nineteenth century caricatures that depicted Chinese people in baggy peasant or 'coolie' clothing, working in rice fields, eating cats, or worse, overrunning western civilization (Figure 8.22). Chinese-Australians have a long presence in Australia since the early nineteenth century to more recent decades following the ending of the White Australia Policy. There is also great cultural diversity within the Australian-Chinese community, and not all Chinese people are from China. Many Chinese immigrants arrived from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Vietnam. Furthermore, the majority of Chinese people are not market gardeners, and are represented in all types of occupations and socio-economic groups.

Rather than challenging cultural assumptions and stereotypes, the photographs suggested that migrants were socially and culturally removed from mainstream
Australia, and therefore unable to participate in contemporary society. The labels accompanying the photographs indicated a different story. For example, Catherine Phan was photographed in a traditional ‘ao dai’ dress and ‘saipan’ hat (Figure 8.23). Phan migrated to Sydney from Vietnam in 1982 when she was five years old, and ran an internet café in Cabramatta. Shabnam Hameed, who migrated from India in 1980, was an independent film maker and was making a documentary about truck drivers and their sons at the time.

*Figure 8.23*

The visual juxtaposition of the ‘old’ ethnic culture against the ‘new’ Sydney landscape continued to define migrant and ethnic populations within a dichotomous relationship to Anglo-Australians. The individual stories behind each photograph indicated otherwise – that migrants do not exist in social and physical isolation, and interacted with people of similar and different social and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, most migrants identified with more than one cultural group.

**SUMMARY CONCLUSION**

As Sharon MacDonald remarked, ‘museums are the key cultural loci of our time’.

Out of all the museums managed by the Historic Houses Trust, the Museum of Sydney best exemplified this statement. Spanning fourteen years from when the archaeological remains were uncovered to the opening of the Museum, the site

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metamorphosed from symbolising and commemorating the ‘birthplace of a nation’, to a place of multiple values and perspectives, including the recognition of Aboriginal dispossession by Europeans. The re-invention of the museum as a ‘forum’ not only reflected changing philosophical changes under the banner of the ‘new museology’ and the recognition of social significance within the museum and heritage movements, but also broader global and national political and social changes. The growing momentum of the native rights movement, the decline of European colonialism, and the rise of former colonised nations as dominant economic and political powers after World War II, particularly in Asia, was reflected in Australian government cultural policies and cultural institutions. The concepts of cultural diversity and multiculturalism were born.

Emmett’s Museum of Sydney embodied this changing relationship between Anglo-Australians, indigenous Australians and migrant Australians. The idea of the museum as a ‘forum’ and a ‘vehicle for different voices’, and the development of visual and performing arts inspired multimedia interpretative displays, provided a means of overcoming the traditional hierarchical relationship between European nations and colonised cultures as represented in museum displays. The Trust attempted to avoid cultural bias by positioning itself as a ‘facilitator’ and therefore outside the subjective process of interpretation.

The Trust, as with other cultural institutions, no longer interpreted different cultures within a single ‘master narrative’, but the way they were defined and represented remained shaped by historically specific assumptions of cultural differences. Despite abandoning conventional museum methods of display and labelling, the Trust assumed an implicit stance regarding indigenous land rights, ethnicity and cultural differences. Far from being a neutral agent, it actively promoted an idealised Australian identity. The Museum’s initial exhibits strongly supported the notion of a surviving and continuing indigenous culture. Its later exhibits and programs reflected increasing government and public acceptance of multiculturalism and the positive recognition of migrants and ethnic differences. But this was largely confined to the elemental and tangible like food, culture and style.

This does not, however, discount the potential for the museum to challenge existing cultural stereotypes or perceptions. The Museum of Sydney was a bold and
ambitious project that sought to alter the status quo. Its fundamental flaw was generated by the Trust's inability to acknowledge itself as a producer of historically and culturally specific messages. The Trust analysed the subjectivity and relativity of everyone but itself, and as a result, became an alternative myth maker. As Ann Curthoys noted, the Trust also needed to include the narratives that it implicitly sought to rise against. In response to the Cronulla race riots in December 2005, Peter Watts wrote:

Of all places it is our beaches, where, stripped of almost all our possessions and identifiers of status and position, we have achieved an almost unparalleled equality. The violence, and the underlying circumstances that led to it, only reinforces what we have strived so hard to do, in our own modest way, at HHT, especially through our exhibitions and other programs at the Museum of Sydney; that is to encourage and contribute to a climate of understanding of tolerance of different cultures and different points of view. It is so vital that all cultural institutions do this. So often our examination and interpretation of other people and places, through their art, architecture, literature and material culture, that we find a common humanity and understanding and a fascination with the richness and diversity of human experience and endeavour.

Such an acknowledgment of the influence of museums and the associated responsibilities is a positive step in facilitating a meaningful exchange and dialogue between museums and their varied audiences.

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172 Peter Watts, "Watts On", InSites, no. 46 (Autumn 2006): i.
Figure 9.1 Windows to our past and present. Convict silhouettes at the Hyde Park Barracks by Heather Dorrrough, 1991 (Photograph by Anna Wong, 2007).
CONCLUSION

History, Heritage and House Museums

... she passed down the gallery whose floor was laid with whole oak trees sawn across. Rows of chairs with all their velvets faded stood against the wall holding their arms out for Elizabeth, for James, for Shakespeare it might be, for Cecil who never came. The sight made her glooming. She unhooked the rope that fenced them off.

She sat on the Queen’s chair; she stirred her fingers in the aged rose leave; she brushed her short hair with King James’ silver brushes; she bounced up and down upon his bed (but no King would ever sleep there again for all Louise’s new sheets) and pressed her cheek against the worn silver counterpane that lay upon it. But everywhere were little lavender bags to keep the moth out and printed notices, ‘Please do not touch’, which, though she had put them there herself, seemed to rebuke her. The house was no longer hers entirely... It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living. Never would beer be spilt here any more... Never would ale be brewed in the workshops outside the house. Hammers and mallets were silent now. Chairs and beds were empty; tankards of silver and gold were locked in glass cases. The great wings of silence beat up and down the empty house.

Virginia Woolf, Orlando (1928)

Based on Knowle House, Woolf’s transformation of Orlando’s lively ancestral home into a silent house museum captured the time-honoured stereotype of this museum genre. House museums have certainly progressed. Had Orlando’s journey continued into the late twentieth century, the fate of Knowle House may have been very different.

From the conventional ‘great man, great house’ museums like Vaucluse House, and the romanticised Colonial Revival Experiment Farm; to the empirically-motivated but innovative house museums like Elizabeth Bay House, Rouse Hill House and Elizabeth Farm; and the ‘socially inclusive’ museums like Hyde Park Barracks, Susannah Place and the Museum of Sydney – the history of the Australian house
museum covers the gamut of heritage, museum, historiographical, cultural and political trends in this country, and internationally, over the past century.

This aim of this thesis was to examine how the house museum occupied a central role in the heritage movement, and how it was, and remains a ‘cultural locus’ of changing cultural perceptions and values. Rather than being a simple reflection of a single set of ideas as espoused by a house museum’s creator or curator, the conservation and interpretative history of house museums revealed the complexity of this process. A multitude of social, cultural and political factors, both from the past and present, all converged to shape the house museum and heritage movements.

Considered within this framework of ‘converging forces’, this thesis concludes with three main points. First, the origins of the Australian house museum and heritage movement were closely aligned to international trends, particularly with the ideals and nationalistic aspirations of the American heritage movement. This does not suggest, however, that ideas from other countries were adopted without question or wholeheartedly. Rather, they were adapted to facilitate the development of Australia’s own cultural heritage and innovative interpretative techniques. In recent decades, Australia has been internationally recognised in the areas of heritage, museum and the arts.

The second point is that the adoption of empirical practices through the ‘professionalisation’ of heritage and museum practices in the 1970s blurred the boundaries between history and heritage - a confusion that continues to this day. Despite recognising the subjectivity of heritage conservation, the empirical desire for cultural objectivity and neutrality remains in heritage and museum practices.

And finally, the introduction of socially and culturally inclusive programs and policies have elevated the profile of the audience and given recognition of multiple values and experiences. Nevertheless, museums have not discarded their role in communicating a master narrative entirely. House museums, and museums and heritage conservation in general, continue to play a major role in defining cultural differences and shaping the cultural identity of Australia.
CONCLUSION

AUSTRALIAN HOUSE MUSEUMS AND ITS INTERNATIONAL LINKS

The international standardisation of heritage practices is usually discussed in
time to the modern empirical system and the introduction of international
charters, like the World Heritage, Venice and Burra Charters, since the 1960s and
‘70s. Heritage conservation has certainly attained strong global recognition on both
government and community levels since the 1970s, but this has tended to overlook
the parallel development of Western heritage practices on a global platform prior to
this period.

As examined in Chapter 1, the genesis of the Australian heritage movement relied
equally upon identification with England as the Mother Country and America as the
independent and progressive future; and Australia’s own historical consciousness
and national history. Unlike America, which based its national identity on the War
of Independence and separation from the British Empire, Australia did not actively
seek to sever its ties with England. The pioneering (but nameless) bushmen and
settlers who created Australia (as represented in the literary and artistic traditions),
and the popular international exhibitions of the late nineteenth century, were
characterised by a sense of independence and self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, their
ancestry was clearly English, with Australian heroes like William Charles
Wentworth presented as a founding father of Australia, but with a clearly defined
English lineage.

Despite retaining an emotional attachment with the Mother Country, Australia also
perceived itself as a ‘new America’. As discussed in Chapter 2, the conversion of
Vaucluse House into the ‘Mecca of Australia’ and William Charles Wentworth as a
‘founding father’ in 1915 was a process transplanted from America’s Mount
Vernon and George Washington. This yearning to achieve a similar status as
America meant the adoption of American practices and ideals. At the beginning of
the twentieth century, America was dominated by progressivist thoughts, and its
influence on Australia permeated not only to heritage practices, but also to other
areas like health, education, urban planning and social reform.

This ideological openness continued throughout the twentieth century. As
examined in Chapter 3, the adoption of English institutions to provide historical
credibility and the American means of creating a timeless heritage coalesced with

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the formation of the Australian National Trust and its promotion of Colonial Revival ideals at Experiment Farm Cottage. This does not suggest that the Australian heritage movement adopted various ideologies and practices without question. Rather, these were adapted to promote Australia’s own sense of heritage and being. At Experiment Farm, James Ruse was elevated to the status of ‘founding father’, and consequently came to symbolise all convicts who effectively built the English colony. By marrying the Colonial Revival ideals of agrarianism, morality and redemption with the Australian pioneer legend, Australia overcame its convict stain. This transformation of the common person to hero status in Australia is one of the key aspects that differentiated Australian house museums from its American and English counterparts.

HISTORY VS HERITAGE: THE PUBLIC HISTORY DIMENSIONS OF HOUSE MUSEUMS

The range of buildings conserved at different times, and in different countries, reflects how heritage is a subjective and dynamic process. Heritage conservation conserves elements of the cultural environment that symbolise or represent the values of particular groups or communities. As such, heritage cannot avoid some inherent bias and exclusion.

The influence of social history methodologies, especially in the use of quantifiable data and the promotion of material culture as empirical evidence and part of the historical record, was the major influence on heritage and house museum practices in the twentieth century – an influence that remains central to current practices. The adoption of this new methodological and historiographical approach also blurred the boundaries between history and heritage.

The adoption of social history and its impact upon heritage and museum practices was the focus of Chapter 4. The restoration of Elizabeth Bay House by Clive Lucas in the mid-1970s promoted empirical analysis of historical and physical evidence as the key to objectively understanding the importance of a place or object. It was an assumption fraught with contradiction. The identification of one building as ‘heritage’ over another was in itself a subjective process, as was the restoration of the house to a particular period. The selection process of heritage assessment and
CONCLUSION

conservation will always make the process of determining ‘cultural significance’ an emotive exercise.

There were also positive outcomes in the professionalisation of museum practices (Chapter 5). For the Historic Houses Trust, the development of a systematic approach to research, recording, collection, conservation, interpretation, community relations and promotion at Vaucluse House established a high standard that continued in the presentation and understanding of all its subsequent house museums. As Peter Watts noted, ‘the approach adopted at each property was guided by a careful analysis of all the circumstances, plus an element of creativity in interpretative approach’, including the analysis of historic records, building fabric, landscape setting, collection, significance, existence of comparable sites, neighbours, and marketability.¹ It is this convergence of multiple factors, both internal and external to the museum, which has limited the impact of social history on history and house museums. The ‘Constitution Room’ at Vaucluse House was retained until 1991, although William Charles Wentworth still remains a founding father. The room settings at Vaucluse House may have changed, but whether the ideological basis of its interpretation differs dramatically from the early twentieth century is questionable.

The recognition of material culture as historical evidence was fully embraced at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill Estate (Chapter 6). The Trust introduced a more academic approach, with the application of material culture studies to the conservation and interpretation of the house museum, where material culture was recognised as part of the historical record. It created a new house museum form that promoted the value and conservation of in-situ collections and physical evidence. Such an approach was ideologically opposite to the period rooms that preceded it. Guided by James Broadbent, these museums were based on the notion of historical transparency, where the fabrication of historical information and detailing was avoided. It was also through these museums that the process of conservation became an integral part of a historic site’s public interpretation.

Ironically, the preoccupation with empirical data and evidence did not automatically translate into a more insightful historical study or understanding of the past. At

¹ Peter Watts, per.comm. 2 February 2007.
CONCLUSION

Susannah Place and the Hyde Park Barracks, the continual preoccupation with demonstrating an objective and transparent investigative and conservation process hindered the potential for these museums to challenge historical stereotypes and misconceptions. As discussed in Chapter 7, the limited use of historical archaeology principles as the ‘conscience of heritage management’ at these properties meant the interpretation of both artefacts and the built fabric was limited to form and function.

Nevertheless, these museums were innovative in their attempt to represent the entire history of a site. They were also the first house museums associated with a social group, rather than specific individuals, and reflected the (somewhat belated) influence of social history on broadening heritage beyond places associated with the colonial middle-class or landed gentry. The result was not a more balanced history, however, but the promotion of convicts and the working-class as new national heroes of the late twentieth century.

House museums have dual roles in conserving and interpreting heritage sites, and in providing a public history of the past. The lack of differentiation between historical scholarship and heritage conservation at house museums can obscure the public’s understanding of what is the history or heritage of a conserved site. House museums are cultural testimonies of their time. The places not represented by house museums are just as telling. While there are house museums representing the ethnic diversity of Australia (such as the Chinese Joss House in Victoria), a house museum representing Aboriginal history has yet to open.

EXHIBITING A MODEL WORLD: SOCIAL INCLUSIVENESS AND CULTURAL NEUTRALITY

Reflecting the impact of the ‘new museology’, the Museum of Sydney reflected contemporary social issues, such as the Aboriginal Land Rights Movement, the Mabo decision and the growing influence of former colonised states (particularly in the South-East Asia region). Unlike Broadbent’s empirical stance of a singular historical interpretation, Emmett sought to re-invent the museum into a ‘forum’ or a ‘vehicle for different voices’ (Chapter 8). Emmett’s approach was admirable and challenging, and despite attracting much criticism, it was one of the first museums
in Australia that tried to challenge the traditional role of museums and actively avoided the communication of a ‘master narrative’.

In its attempt to provide a ‘forum’ at the Museum of Sydney and engage with different audiences, the Trust developed inventive multimedia displays and exhibits that were heavily influenced by the performing and visual arts. Such an approach was also being adopted in most of the Trust’s museums, as it sought to develop new ways to communicate the history, stories and significance of a place. From the theatrical settings at Elizabeth Farm, to the commissioning of artists, actors and performing artists for the development of interpretative displays and performances at its other properties, such creative explorations broadened heritage and museum practices beyond its traditional confines of architecture, objects and passive didactic displays.

Despite the Trust’s enlightened intentions, the Museum of Sydney remained a purveyor of cultural stereotypes and master narratives. Its exhibits and programs addressing issues and representations of Aboriginality, cultural diversity and multiculturalism promoted particular messages about indigenous culture and land rights, race and cultural differences. Far from being a neutral agent, the Trust actively promoted an idealised Australian identity. It was a repackaging of nineteenth century classification practices with twentieth century issues.

In Australia, the quintessential national characteristics of the ‘Aussie battler’, the ‘bushman’, ‘mateship’, and more recently, ‘culturally diverse’ and ‘multicultural’, are all terms that are equally applied to various house museums. Regardless of which era a house museum belongs to, they are all connected by a common goal to provide a particular image and interpretation of the past. Mythologised, idealised or romanticised – house museums play a central role in how we perceive our heritage, and what constitutes as being part of Australia’s history and psyche.

It is impossible for house museums to be culturally neutral mediums, regardless of whether they are conserved according to social history or post-modern ideals. The

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For example the exhibition ‘Secure the Shadow’ by artists Anne Brennan and Anne Farren, who used textiles collection from the Immigration Depot phase at Hyde Park Barracks for their photographic and sculptural pieces (see Anne Ferran and Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Secure the shadow: Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Greenway Gallery, Hyde Park Barracks, 29 August to 8 October 1995 (Glebe, NSW: Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 1995).
very act of selecting a place or object for conservation, or involving a particular
social group in a museum program will always be a subjective act. The separate
functions of a house museum need to be more clearly articulated to the public.
House museums are a form of public history, and this needs to be considered when
presenting particular stories about a historic site that is shaped by contemporary and
past issues and cultural values.

**EPILOUGE: LOOKING FORWARD**

In 2004, the Historic Houses Trust moved to its new head office at the newly
refurbished Mint building. The conversion of the former Coining Factory and its
redevelopment into office accommodation and a library involved the adaptive reuse
and development of a nationally significant site. The Trust’s creative balance of the
historic structures with starkly modern extensions and infill attracted eleven
architectural and conservation awards. As Peter Watts proudly reflected, the Mint
was the culmination and application of the Trust’s broad experiences and
approaches developed at its other properties, and made possible only because the
Trust does not categorise itself as purely a heritage or museum institution.³

Located on the exclusive Macquarie Street where the New South Wales Parliament
House is situated, the new address confirmed the Trust’s status within the
government, and also Peter Watt’s successful directorship. From a head office staff
of three and a portfolio of two house museums, the Historic Houses Trust has
grown to over 180 staff and twelve historic properties. Its future seemed assured.
Yet, the resignation of Premier Bob Carr and his replacement by Morris Iemma in
August 2005 demonstrated how quickly the political climate changes. For the first
time since the inception of the Historic Houses Trust, the Arts no longer warrant an
autonomous portfolio. Instead, the Ministry for the Arts, including the Historic
Houses Trust of NSW, was amalgamated into the Department of Arts, Sports and
Recreation. This signals a new phase in development of the arts and conservation
in New South Wales. The lowered profile of the arts under the current State
government and the potential negative impact is already apparent.

Since 2001, Peter Watts has developed the Endangered Houses Fund program, by which the Trust acquires historic properties, undertakes conservation works and sells them with caveats. This idea is modelled on a similar program by the English National Trust, and is based on the realisation that not every historic house can be turned into a museum. The Endangered Houses Fund was also initiated by a project in 1993, whereby the HHT purchased a house designed by Walter Burley Griffith and Marion Mahoney in Castlecrag, then conserved this house and re-sold it with statutory protection. Recent acquisitions under the program include Exeter Farm, Glenwood and Glenfield.

In 2006, Elizabeth Bay House held an exhibition called ‘Changing Spaces’ where the drawing and dining rooms were re-designed as contemporary self-contained apartments by different designers. The rooms were cleared of all but the main furnishings, and the designers were not allowed to alter the surfaces apart from the floor. The exhibition was undertaken with reference to the period when Elizabeth Bay House had been divided into flats, but it also challenged the previous belief that the only option for historic houses involves full restoration and use as museums.

As Peter Watts noted, the focus of the Historic Houses Trust in the next twenty-five years will be very different to its original mandate twenty-five years ago. What this means for the future of the Historic Houses Trust and house museums generally has yet to unfold. This thesis provides a basis to continue the examination of the heritage movement and house museums within the complex process of history making and cultural negotiation – the challenge of keeping house for different masters.

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4 Peter Watts, per. commun. 20 December 2006.
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512