

Heritage of the Air Conference

Lost or found? Intangible cultural heritage workshop



Summary report

Thursday 14 November, 1pm-3.50pm, RG Menzies Building Library, ANU

Background

As part of the *Heritage of the Air* conference, this workshop – convened by the National Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage – asked: *is intangible cultural heritage now part of ‘place-based heritage practice’ or is it still lost in the wilderness?*

Through case studies, our three speakers helped unearth the intangible cultural heritage of place through selected case studies: in Central Australia, Sirius building (Sydney), and the Quarantine Station, Sydney.

Small ground discussions explored the tools, techniques and guidance that are needed by heritage professionals today, contributing to a review of our Practice Note – [Intangible Cultural Heritage and Place](#).

Lisa Sturis welcomed participants and acknowledged the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, traditional custodians of the lands on which the workshop was being held and other First Nations Peoples present today.

Richard Morrison set the scene for the workshop, introducing the Australia ICOMOS National Scientific Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage (NSC-ICH) – its formation, role and membership and the development of the [Practice Note](#) and [Background Note](#). [Read more ...](#)

Richard explained this workshop was developed as part of a review of the PN and to expand on our present case studies. This conversation was considered invaluable in identifying further examples of Australian ICH, more broadly test whether we have got it right in the PN’s approach, identify what tools are needed to assist in dealing with ICH and to guide the NSC’s future activity.

Chris Johnston spoke about some of the challenges in crafting the Practice Note. Scoping was a challenge and having agreed to focus on ICH as defined in the UNESCO Convention, we decided to exclude intangible qualities of places that are not ‘cultural practices’. She also noted that there is currently no Australia ICOMOS Practice Note on why or how place attachments form.

Chris highlighted the issues raised by those who have responded to our Practice Note review survey (you can read more about this survey [here](#)):

- linking to the UNESCO Convention but recognizing that ICOMOS’ role relates to place
- defining ICH so that it is relevant to place-based heritage: the encompassing term selected was cultural practices
- avoiding terms that might result in confusion (e.g. intangible cultural heritage values)
- recognising both the intangible and tangible attributes of place
- exploring the characteristics of ICH
- keeping the Burra Charter in our minds at all times!

As Practice Notes are intended to reflect and guide practice, it is right that they change over time. The workshop was designed to explore these issues and appreciate the perspectives of participants. Chris also pointed to the Background Note which documents the process of preparing the Practice Note, the

definitions and issues explored, and the terminology used in the Burra Charter and Practice Notes. It demonstrates that practice guidance emerges from reflection and debate!

After this brief introduction, Chris welcomed and introduced our three guest speakers.

Case Study Presentations

Case study: Protecting country along the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line



Susan Donaldson is a consultant anthropologist with over 20 years' experience working on intangible cultural heritage protection in the Central Desert region of the NT. In the late 1990s Susan was the Central Land Council anthropologist responsible for the Tennant Creek region when the railway line was being extended from Alice Springs to Darwin, and this was the focus of her case study. Susan currently works on a range of anthropological research projects across NSW and the NT and is a member of NSC-ICH

Powerpoint presentation (PDF): [Protecting country along the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line](#)

Written presentation: [Talk notes](#)

Case study: Sirius Building, Sydney

Dr Anne Warr (Anne Warr Heritage Consulting) is an architect. She has worked in Australia for the NSW Government Architect's Office and the City of Sydney, and is currently in private practice. Anne has also worked in Shanghai, running an architectural practice, teaching and starting a tour guiding business, walkshanghai. Anne is involved in heritage advocacy through the Sydney Forum for Architecture and Urban Design, Save our Sirius, and the Millers Point Resident Action Group.



Powerpoint presentation (PDF): [Sirius Building](#)

Case study: Feeling the Landscape at the North Head Quarantine Station



Professor Annie Clarke (University of Sydney) teaches museum and heritage studies. She spoke from her work on the Quarantine Project, an ARC Linkage project on the historical inscriptions at the *North Head Quarantine Station: Stories from the Sandstone*, the book published from the project was awarded the 2017 NSW Premiers' Prize for Regional and Community History. Currently, Annie is working on Groote Eylandt continuing a community archaeology repatriation with the Anindilyakwa Land Council. She is also a Chief Investigator on the Heritage of the Air Linkage Project on aviation collections.

Powerpoint presentation (PDF): [Feeling the Landscape at the North Head Quarantine Station](#)

Discussion

Following these presentations, a facilitated group discussion took place. Participants were encouraged to discuss and reflect on what tools, techniques and guidance are needed by heritage professionals today in small groups. There was robust conversation around the room and participants were also provided with good ol' butchers paper and pens to record these discussions. These responses were transcribed and compiled by the NSC. Some of the responses to the workshop included:

What does ICH mean to you?

- Traditional knowledge and the transmission of this information
- If a community has lost its 'place' – how does this impact on ICH?
- Documenting people who are not on the historical record – remaking the narrative
- Living engagement with a place over time.



When asked about the challenges, participants said:

- How are we going to manage intangible heritage on the internet and digital age?
- Heritage Lists are problematic, people expect these to be static.
- The role of tourism and its impacts on ICH, particularly local places
- Engagement and education of different levels of government and industry
- Is the PN focus on place too restrictive?
- Protections and the law
- Digital accessibility and ways of engaging with younger people.



Finally, participants said useful resources would include:

- More case studies especially difficult or contested places
- Accessibility of information for practitioners and researchers
- Understanding of legal responsibilities.

This information is invaluable in understanding how the PN has been used and to shape future reviews. We hope participants enjoyed the discusses and made new connections!

Where to from here?

Rebecca Madgin was invited as our rapporteur to wrap up and reflect on the presentations and discussions at the workshop:

Dr Rebecca Madgin is Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow. Her work focuses on the values of urban heritage during the process of urban redevelopment and place-making initiatives, focusing on the ways in which people develop emotional attachments to the historic built environment. Rebecca works with local and national organisations in her research. She is a member of Historic



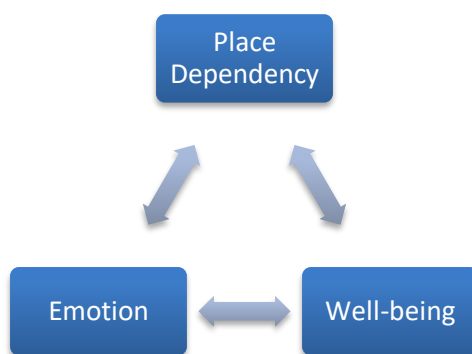
England's 'Historic Places Panel' and 'Expert Advisory Group' and on the Editorial Board of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation's professional journal, 'Context'.

Powerpoint presentation (PDF): [People-place connections](#)

Rebecca opened up three questions, drawing from each of the presentations and small group discussions:

- What do people do in place?
- How do those things we do in place make us respond: cognitively and with our bodies?
- How does this make us feel emotionally?

Key points from her talk along with this interesting diagram – are [summarised here](#) – definitely worth a read!



Thanks

NSC-ICH would like to extend our sincere thanks to our presenters, Susan, Anne, Annie and Rebecca. Thank you also to the organisers of the Heritage of the Air conference including Tracy Ireland, Ashley Harrison, Amy Jarvis and the volunteers to helped ensure the workshop ran smoothly. Last but not least, a huge thank you to the participants who spent the afternoon with us. Your enthusiasm and interest in this topic and the activities of the NSC are appreciated!



National Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage, Coordinating Group members

(Pictured: Richard Morrison, Lisa Sturis, Lance Syme and Chris Johnston)