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The protection of industrial movable cultural heritage and the role of volunteer organisations in Australia

Rola organizacji wolontariuszy w ochronie ruchomego dziedzictwa przemysłowego w Australii

Introduction

Heritage listing provides formal recognition by a local council, State Government or Federal Government that an artefact has heritage significance and that the community wants to keep it for future generations.

Industrial heritage, in the sense of actual machinery and workings, is poorly represented in Australian listings of heritage sites and places. While listings and documents such as *The National Heritage Register* [1], the *Victorian Heritage Register* [2] and the *Australian Heritage Strategy* [3] record a number of places connected with industrial activities, the architecture of the buildings generally receives more detailed attention than the functional facilities. The Day's Flour Mill Complex listed in the *Victorian Heritage Register* [4], for instance, comes up under the category "Registered object integral to a registered place", but the photographs provided are all exterior shots of buildings, and the description focuses heavily on the buildings and grounds, with almost nothing about the actual machinery and processes undertaken at the site.

More detailed descriptions of functional characteristics are afforded to the few movable heritage items that are listed without an associated historical place, such as the Bucyrus Railroad Steam Shovel [5], but this is unusual as most Australian heritage listings and documents, like the *Australian Heritage Strategy* and the Victorian Govern-

ment's 2018 *State of Heritage Review: Local Heritage* [6], specifically exclude movable cultural heritage (whether it is industrial or not).

In excluding industrial objects and sites, or minimizing reference to their industrial aspects, these documents implicitly fail to provide any direction on their preservation. In the *State of Heritage Review: Local Heritage* for example, the Heritage Council of Victoria reviewed the status of the state's cultural heritage resources and any steps necessary to protect and conserve them. Not only does this study exclude movable cultural heritage, but even its section dedicated to Industrial Heritage Adaptive Reuse Case Studies is overwhelmingly focused on adapting the architecture, with heritage machinery being relegated to the role of decoration or atmosphere. The adaptation of the 19th-century Crago Flour Mill in Newtown, Sydney, for example, merely notes that the residual machinery has been retained "to give the project a specific character" [7]. What that character is, or why it is significant, or how the machinery worked is not addressed.

Ian Wills, in his 2013 presentation to the Engineers Australia 17th Heritage Conference [8], explained that the reasons for the treatment of industrial heritage sites could be attributed to their original functional purpose and lack of aesthetic appeal, negative associations such as pollution or harsh working conditions, and the fact that industrial sites in major cities are often attractive for redevelopment. Wills also found that industrial heritage is subject to the prioritisation of replacing the old with "newer and better", often as the result of the culture of the engineering profession itself, although it could be argued that strong economic drivers are

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also prevalent. At the end of an industry's commercial life, land use change resulting in development often means that *in situ* preservation of the machinery used in these industries is almost impossible, with machinery, tools, associated records and paraphernalia removed, scrapped or sold.

There are rare examples of the *in situ* preservation of engineering heritage providing a comprehensive, integrated and holistic industrial story, but *ex situ* preservation is more common, with significant industrial heritage items being owned by public organisations and within privately owned collections. These collections are generally subjected to different risks and threats than *in situ* artefacts.

Collections and acquisition of industrial movable cultural heritage

Public collections are often centralised in population centres and tend to target highly significant artefacts, but donations and poor de-accessioning policies mean that significant artefacts are often jumbled with less significant items. Good collecting policies help to ensure that the acquisition of any item is based strongly on its significance, with preservation and conservation also being key areas of focus, but acquisitions are now also being driven by a need to entertain and tell specific stories. Generally, but not always, the more significant artefacts are retained by public collections, being publicly owned and conserved, preserved or restored by paid staff. However, as specialist skills become less prevalent, there is a move towards paying for restoration/repair services that is becoming more common across the sector.

Private and community collections, by contrast, are often created through serendipitous purchases or additions. Artefacts are usually purchased, retained or inherited with little recognition or acknowledgment of significance. This results in privately-owned machinery tending to represent more common artefacts, whether this is small agricultural pumping engines or (in Australia) the ubiquitous grey Ferguson tractor (Fig. 1).

Often the acquisition is based on availability rather than significance alone, although highly significant items are viewed more positively and often have a price premium. Some private collections can become important because of this, either through their size – often focused on one brand or purpose – or from the almost accidental aggregation of significant heritage artefacts. These collections are often at risk of poor understanding of their significance, dispersal, or export.

The overwhelming majority of Australia's industrial heritage is held in community organisations and by private owners, with only a small proportion of artefacts being held in public collections [9]. Even then, only a small proportion of these are listed by statutory heritage organisations. Protection given under current legislation or regulation is minimal and what protection there is lies within each organisation's policies and practices. The result is that heritage artefacts – public and private – coexist with a variety of arrangements for preservation, conservation or restoration.

Frameworks for the protection of industrial movable cultural heritage

Owners of heritage-listed buildings and real estate who wish to make major changes to their properties which may affect heritage significance, may need to seek approval from a local council or a state-based heritage authority. Ownership can often bring the terrible perception that if it is yours, you can do what you like with it and this works against the idea of stewardship. This misconception has been debunked for heritage places, where there are well established statutory controls, sometimes tested and enforced through an administrative process to ensure that the core significance of a heritage item is retained.

The only similar protection for movable cultural heritage is the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* [10] which aims to protect Australia's movable cultural heritage by regulating its export. Under this Act



Fig. 1. Ferguson Tractor line up at a show in Western Victoria (photo by N. Myers)

Il. 1. Szereg ciągników Ferguson na wystawie w zachodniej Wiktorii (fot. N. Myers)



Fig. 2. A Mann tractor: a) rebuilt in the 1970s from the wreck of a tar sprayer, b) 2017 after extensive modifications (source: Lake Goldsmith Steam Preservation Association)

II. 2. Ciągnik Mann: a) przebudowany w latach 70. XX w. z wraku opryskiwacza smoły, b) w 2017 r. po szeroko zakrojonych modyfikacjach (źródło: Lake Goldsmith Steam Preservation Association)

exporters are responsible for ensuring that items meet all export permission requirements for private and commercial purposes, but the Act does not provide for the protection for the fabric, context or significance of an object, or require the exporter to provide detailed evidence that the object is not significant to Australia. In fact the exporter is not required to provide much information at all, and there is actually a financial incentive to provide minimal information on the item being exported. The perverse outcome of this system is that if you want to ensure that an engine or artefact is protected and NOT exported, you need to apply for an export permit for it, provide as much evidence as possible to demonstrate its significance to the Australian context and hope the export permit is refused. This in turn is a fairly strong incentive to provide an overblown rather than a strictly accurate assessment of the object's significance. The review of this legislation undertaken by Simpson in 2015 [11] recommended changing these requirements so that, if there is no information provided on an object's significance, the object is refused an export permit (this is similar to the precautionary principle, where insufficient information is not accepted as an excuse to avoid action). This change would throw the onus of providing proof that an artefact is not significant onto the exporter (who is also the party who is most likely to profit from the export of the object).

Figure 2 shows the modifications to and destruction of original features of steam traction engines and tractors originally imported into Australia, with unsympathetic modifications destroying the features that clearly identified the original purpose and significance of an artefact, the evolution of its role over time and the signs of working life maintenance and modifications.

The volunteer workforce

The level of volunteer participation in heritage machinery preservation tends to be much larger than realised. Data gathered by Operating Heritage Australia suggests that private owners and volunteers account for around

300,000 people across 2,500 organisations, putting in 25 million hours of work per year, with an economic contribution valued at around \$2 billion.

The average age of most industrial and agricultural heritage clubs is rising. Often, machinery preservation clubs have members who are predominantly retired, and who often worked within the industries that serviced or maintained similar collections. A lack of new and younger recruits means that membership numbers are generally static, or slowly reducing.

Membership issues

As generational change occurs, the "hard" skill levels of volunteers tends to drop as, in general, the industries that many of the retired members were once involved in have evolved, and younger professionals in these industries have different skill sets. Heavy industries generally no longer rely on localised specialist skills to repair or maintain equipment, or the manual skills once required for these tasks have overtaken by cheaper, often more accurate automated alternatives. This provides significant challenges and opportunities for the restoration of large machinery.

Younger recruits, however, tend to come from more diverse ethnic, gender and occupation backgrounds, and they bring new skills to the sector that are often undervalued. These recruits can be more resourceful and are generally more comfortable looking for solutions to preservation and restoration issues globally, rather than seeing this as a last resort.

These issues impact on how projects are managed, funded and completed.

Funding

Funding for the preservation, conservation or restoration of movable cultural heritage is primarily from private sources, as is shown in Figure 3. Across the sector, almost 75% is privately funded, with the rate of funding through visitation varying depending on each individual

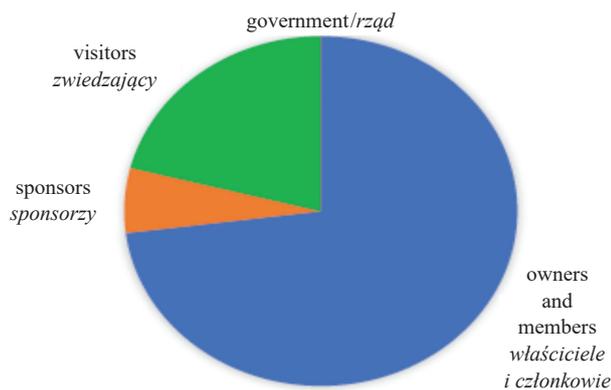


Fig. 3. Breakdown of funding sources for heritage organisations in Australia (source: [9])

Il. 3. Podział źródeł finansowania organizacji dziedzictwa kulturowego w Australii (źródło: [9])

organisation and their activities. For example, the National Steam Centre, operated by the Melbourne Steam Trac-tion Engine Club, regularly receives between 50 to 60 percent of its total income from visitation, the rest being sourced through memberships, storage of private displays, sales and facility hire.

Funding issues

Delving deeper into these figures shows a risk profile common among any volunteer based organisations. A large proportion of funds are coming into these organisations through visitation primarily through one or maybe two events per year, and not through weekly or day-to-day visits. Often a single event is responsible for around 80 to 90 percent of the organisation’s income derived from visitation. This exposes these organisations to a significant risk. Analysis of 10 years of the Annual Reports from the National Steam Centre [12] with data from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology [13], showed that weather was the key determining factor of the success or failure of the National Steam Centre’s annual Steamfest, with rain or excessively hot weather over more than a single day of their event having a significant impact on the funds earned. This risk is likely to be exacerbated with more extreme weather resulting from climate change. Nearly all weekends are booked for similar events in south-eastern Australia, with even fewer holiday weekends free, so the opportunity to adapt to a changing climate is limited.

Government funding is generally sourced from local Councils or State Governments, and nearly always has a specific outcome focus based on an annual spending and reporting cycle. Philanthropic trusts and sponsorships are similar in this respect, which severely limits the usefulness of these sources of funding, as it requires a project management cycle that can be completed within a year. As nearly all preservation or restoration activities of large machinery take more than a single year to complete these funding models encourage a change to disparate and fragmented approaches to project management to accommodate these timeframes.

Working with volunteers

Volunteers join an organisation for a broad range of reasons, from social interaction, maintaining or improving skills, or some focused interest. Within the industrial heritage movement, two motivations for becoming a volunteer often conflict – maintaining or learning new skills and undertaking heritage preservation. This is often viewed amongst volunteers at the National Steam Centre as two sometimes incompatible skill sets – the “hard” skills learnt throughout a hard-working life, and the “soft” skills of record keeping and archiving, preservation and conservation.

This hard skill/soft skill dichotomy can sometimes be attributed to a volunteer’s level of understanding of the importance of significance and context and its role within an organisation, especially in *ex situ* museums. For many individuals and organisations, the only aim is to run the machine. This motivation has always attracted a certain type of member and a certain type of visitor. Appreciating the social, cultural, contextual and historical knowledge of a machine, however, adds to the story and widens the attraction and potential pool of visitors and members [14]. To take advantage of this, skills in interpretation (story-telling), finance, project management, marketing, training and people management are required, but attracting people with these capabilities can be difficult, and integrating them into the organisation requires a significant cultural change that many organisations find challenging.

There can be poorly conceived attitudes that restoring or rebuilding an engine or item of machinery – getting it running – is more important than preserving remnant signs of significance. This attitude is derived from familiarity with how people once worked with such machines in industry, rather than providing a heritage significance framework and structure for preservation and restoration work. The comment is often made that “People don’t want to look at a dirty old engine”, but the signs of machine’s working life often provide the most interesting stories, including valuable insights into work-day repairs, a tough working environment, and modifications to keep machinery operating well past a perceived “use-by” date [15]. For organisations that rely on volunteers to help conserve and restore their machinery, it is therefore vitally important to have clear and understandable policies in place for preservation and restoration projects, including a focused project plan that identifies a clear restoration goal, whether that be to restore the machine to a “new, as purchased” state, or “as it was at the end of its working life”, or anywhere along that spectrum.

Conclusions

There is a need to review and amend Australian Federal legislation and associated regulations to ensure that the onus of providing evidence to prove the lack of cultural significance of an artefact so that the export of the artefact will not detract from Australian cultural heritage, lies with the exporter. This would ensure that when the artefact is

documented as being significant, or when further research is required into the artefact's significance, the artefact is retained rather than lost to Australia's cultural heritage. This was proposed by Shane Simpson in his recent review of the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act* but is yet to be implemented [11].

The ability to nominate artefacts to prevent export would also benefit the retention of movable cultural heritage in Australia. Currently, the trigger for an assessment of significance of a movable cultural heritage artefact is when an item is nominated to be exported. Creating a complementary system to allow an owner to nominate a movable cultural heritage item to be retained would provide a method to identify and record significant artefacts and prevent them being nominated for export.

The same Federal legislation and regulations and State legislation could also be amended to provide control over the preservation, conservation and restoration activities of identified significant items. This is already in use for heritage places, but not for heritage artefacts.

Annual funding available through government sources and philanthropic trusts is commonly tied to an annual spending and reporting cycle. To enable greater utilisation of these resource pools by volunteer organisations, multi-year funding and reporting cycles should be encouraged where appropriate. Increased access to this funding pool in this manner would benefit many volunteer heritage organisations.

To retain the significant investment made by volunteers working on the preservation, conservation and restoration of industrial cultural heritage, all levels of government need to support organisations that involve volunteers. This can be through actions like ensuring community organisations have, or can access, appropriate advice on heritage significance, conservation and restoration practices and project management. Providing better transparency and accountability around the use of volunteers to preserve, conserve or restore items will encourage more volunteers to participate, and allow for better volunteer management within organisations.

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Abstract

This article focuses on issues related to the current legal situation of historic machinery and vehicles in Australia as well as the competencies, skills and commitment of persons (both professionals and amateurs, or volunteers) dealing with their protection. Australia's listed industrial heritage is generally limited to industrial buildings, as most often production equipment has been scrapped or relocated. The author discusses the need for legislative reform to enable the listing and protection of historic machines in a similar way to the listing and protection of historic buildings, based on an assessment of their value and relationships with local communities. He also discusses the need for volunteer organizations dealing with big stuff to re-examine what they need to do to attract professionals (diversified in terms of profession, age, interests, etc.) and work with protection funding bodies to create funding structures that support multi-year industrial heritage preservation projects.

Key words: Australia, industrial heritage, movable cultural heritage, volunteer organisations, machinery restoration

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono zagadnienia związane z aktualną sytuacją prawną zabytkowych maszyn w Australii oraz kompetencjami, umiejętnościami i zaangażowaniem osób (zarówno profesjonalistów, jak i amatorów, wolontariuszy) zajmujących się ich ochroną. Przemysłowe dziedzictwo Australii

to na ogół obiekty budowlane pozostałe po przemyśle; wyposażenie produkcyjne najczęściej zełomowano lub wywieziono. Autor omawia potrzebę reformy legislacyjnej, aby umożliwić spisanie i ochronę zabytkowych maszyn w sposób podobny do spisania i ochrony zabytkowych budynków, w oparciu o ocenę ich wartości i relacje z lokalnymi społecznościami. Omawia także konieczność ponownego przeanalizowania przez organizacje wolontariuszy zajmujące się dużymi maszynami (big stuff) tego, co muszą one zrobić, aby pozyskiwać fachowców (zróżnicowanych pod względem zawodu, wieku, zainteresowań itd.) i współpracować z organami finansującymi ochronę w celu stworzenia zasad, które wzmocnią projekty zachowania dziedzictwa postindustrialnego.

Słowa kluczowe: Australia, dziedzictwo przemysłowe, ruchome dziedzictwo kulturowe, organizacje wolontariackie, konserwacja maszyn