

THE YEAR OF EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE (1975) AND AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE PRACTICE – OVERLAPS AND DIVERGENCES

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ABSTRACT The 1970s were a time of great change and excitement in the Australian heritage profession. In addition to significant legislative reform, the decade saw the founding of Australia ICOMOS in 1976, and the first Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter* in 1979. Thus, the *European Architectural Heritage Year 1975* (EAHY 1975) place at a pivotal moment in the development of Australian heritage practice. Although there are some similarities between the *Burra Charter* of 1979 and the documents underpinning the EAHY, the original *Burra Charter* was a succinct, modest document by comparison, reflecting its more specific function. Perhaps more interesting are the changes made to the *Burra Charter* since 1979, which reflect Australia's heavy involvement in the conservation of Indigenous heritage places as well as expanding concepts of what constitutes 'heritage'. These changes may also indicate a degree of divergence between Australia and Europe in relation to heritage philosophy and practice.

1. AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE POLICIES IN THE 1970s

Even today, the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* (see appendix), both from 1975, are striking for their optimism, ambition and visionary scope, and impressive for the energy and spirit of cooperation that they reflect. In 1975, it was still possible for an Australian to feel like they were living on the edge of the world, peripheral to the 'important' matters that were taking place in Europe and the United States. However, while these grand events were unfolding within the world of cultural heritage in Europe in 1975, Australia was not idle. On the contrary, the early 1970s were a period of rapid social change and radical political reform in Australia, and the Australian cultural heritage profession was an important part of these changes.

A new Prime Minister (Edward Gough Whitlam) had been elected in 1972 by the Australian people and he immediately embarked on a period of reform. In the lead-up to his election, Whitlam had spoken of the importance of a nation's cultural heritage to its sense of identity (Whitlam Institute 2015). Soon after his election he oversaw Australia's ratification of the *World Heritage Convention* (August 1974), and created the *Australian Heritage Commission* (June 1975), its role being to prepare a *Register of the National Estate* that was to list natural, Indigenous and historic heritage places of importance to Australia. The Australian Heritage Commission was also responsible for prioritising and funding conservation projects. The *Register of the National Estate* would ultimately include over 13,000 places. These reforms reflected an increasing awareness within Australia of our cultural heritage places and the need to conserve them. This awareness extended to unlikely people and places. For example, in New South Wales (Australia's most populous State), the *Builders Labourers Federation* (BLF) imposed a series of 'green bans' on heritage sites between 1971 and 1974, to prevent their demolition and redevelopment (Burgmann and Burgmann 1998) (Fig. 1). At the time, the BLF represented all unionised labour in the construction industry and it used this power to prevent any work from proceeding that might adversely impact heritage places. The BLF imposed 'green bans' at the request of members of the local community, and the BLF soon became a thorn in the side of developers in Sydney. As a result of the 'green bans' many of the nineteenth century



Fig. 1: *Builders Labourers Federation* leader and heritage activist Jack Munday being detained at The Rocks, Sydney in 1973 (Photo: Robert Pearce)

buildings in The Rocks, Sydney (now a heritage precinct and major tourist destination) were saved from demolition, among other heritage places. The last ‘green ban’ took place in 1974, the year before the 1975 Year of EAHY 1975.

Our state and national legislatures were also active at this time. In New South Wales, the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* came into force (in 1974) introducing processes for the identification and conservation of Indigenous heritage places. Three years later, the New South Wales *Heritage Act* was enacted for the conservation of built heritage and historical archaeology. It was in this environment that Australia ICOMOS was founded, in 1976.

2. THE BURRA CHARTER

It is difficult to gauge what role the European events of 1975 played in shaping these measures in Australia. Certainly, Australian heritage practitioners were aware of, and responsive to, the activities of their colleagues in Europe. In particular, the *Venice Charter* of 1964 figured prominently in the shaping of Australian heritage practice, as discussed below in relation to the *Burra Charter* (*Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter* 2013a). Similarly, Australian practitioners at this time were drawing on heritage management principles emanating from the UK. Thus, anybody who has read the *Burra Charter* will find familiar themes in the 1877 manifesto of William Morris, in founding the UK Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (Morris 1877). However, Australian heritage practice, and activism, in the 1970s was also drawing inspiration from the United States, with high profile heritage ‘disasters’, such as the demolition of Penn Station in New York in 1963 a noteworthy catalyst (Moore et al. 2000).

In 1979, representatives of Australia ICOMOS drafted the first version of the *Burra Charter* (for a summary background see Walker and Marquis-Kyle 2004, 6–7). Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, this version made no mention of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* or the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. Rather, the preamble states that the Charter was prepared: “Having regard to the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1966) [sic], the Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas (Nairobi 1976) and the Resolutions of 5th General Assembly [sic] of ICOMOS Moscow.”

By the time of the 1981 version of the *Burra Charter* (Fig. 2), the reference to the *Nairobi Recommendation* had been removed, but there was still no mention of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* or the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. Rather, the *Venice Charter* was the document of principal importance to the authors of the first versions of the *Burra Charter*. In the preamble to the 1979 version it states explicitly: “Australia ICOMOS continues to respect and observe the Venice Charter as a document of international agreement and sees these Guidelines as following it closely in most respects.”

In 1979 the *Burra Charter* had modest aims when compared with the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. The 1979 version of the *Burra Charter* was a succinct document being just over a single A4 page, comprising 29 ‘articles’ with no explanatory notes. It reads as a document intended for use by architects and tradespeople, rather than as a call to arms in the battle for heritage conservation. However, there are still similarities with the documents underpinning the EAHY 1975. For example, the main focus of the *Burra Charter* in 1979 was also architectural heritage. The introduction states: “This [...] is now the working document for use in Australia, binding to ICOMOS membership and recommended to all Australian authorities and organisations concerned with *conservation of the built environment* and all places with cultural significance” (emphasis added).

Critics of the *Burra Charter*, in even its most recent form, argue that the phrase ‘and all places with cultural significance’ is too easily forgotten, and that the *Burra Charter* still reads like, and is used like, a document written by architects for architects. This is an unfair criticism but perhaps an understandable one in 1979, notwithstanding that Article 5 stated that: “Conservation of a place should take into consideration all aspects of its cultural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one at the expense of others.”

Readers of the *Venice Charter* would not find anything too surprising about the *Burra Charter* in 1979. It defines ‘conservation’, ‘preservation’, ‘restoration’ and ‘reconstruction’, and provides guidance on when these activities would be appropriate and how they might best be undertaken. The adaptive re-use of heritage places was also a focus of the *Burra Charter* in 1979. However, the differences between the *Burra Charter* and the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* are quite striking in other respects. For example, the European documents are notable for their recognition of cultural heritage as a *social* phenomenon, having impacts on such things as national identity and even rental increases beyond the means of the poor. Also, the European *Declaration* and *Charter* emphasise the need for integrated legislative frameworks and whole-of-government approaches. These are matters that the *Burra Charter* did not discuss in 1979, and still does not directly address today. Additionally, the European documents should be commended for making much of what we might today call ‘Historic Urban Landscapes’ and heritage ‘places’ most broadly defined to include whole areas within towns and villages. In 1979, the *Burra Charter* did require a consideration of a place’s ‘surroundings’ (Article 1) and ‘visual

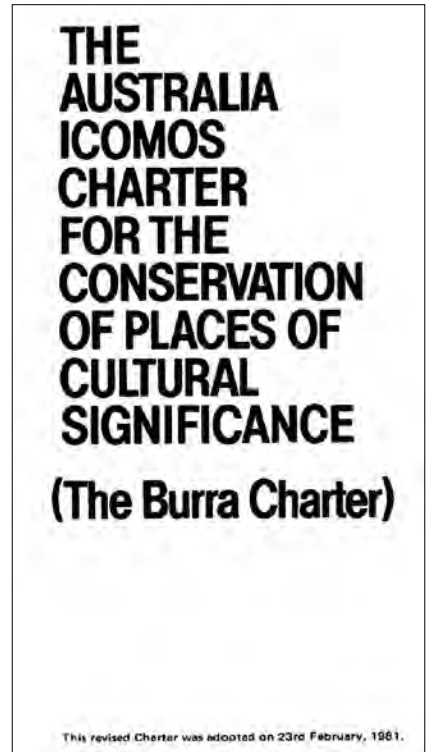


Fig. 2: Cover of the 1981 *Burra Charter* (the 1979 version had no cover). Its unadorned and plain cover reflects the *Burra Charter*’s sober content when compared with the *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*

setting' (Article 8) as part of its heritage conservation, but it lacked the scope and sophistication of the European *Charter* and *Declaration* on this issue (a matter that has been rectified since).

Perhaps the most notable difference between the *Burra Charter* (both in 1979 and today) and the 1975 European documents is that the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* appear to have been designed with a view to lobbying governments and advocating for legislative and administrative reform. This has never been the function of the *Burra Charter*, which has always been envisaged as a guideline document prepared by senior professionals for the conservation of heritage places, without a political or overt advocacy dimension. The *Burra Charter* presents heritage 'best practice' but leaves advocacy to others.

Any consideration of the *Burra Charter* that stops in 1979 would be flawed. There have been significant changes made to the Charter since then, some of them resulting in the *Burra Charter* of today more closely resembling the European documents of 1975. For example, the conceptualisation of a heritage place has been markedly expanded so that it now clearly encompasses cultural landscapes and cultural routes, historic urban landscapes, streetscapes, and the like.

The *Burra Charter* defines a 'place' of 'cultural significance' broadly: "Place means a geographically defined area. It may include elements, objects, spaces and views. Place may have tangible and intangible dimensions (Article 1.1). Cultural significance means 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 (Article 1.2)."

The *Burra Charter* goes on to state: "Conservation requires the retention of an appropriate setting. This includes retention of the visual and sensory setting, as well as the retention of spiritual and other cultural relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place (Article 8). Setting means the immediate and extended environment of a place that is part of or contributes to its cultural significance and distinctive character (Article 1.12)."

An 'explanatory note' to 1.12 says: "Setting may include: structures, spaces, land, water and sky; the visual setting including views to and from the place, and along a cultural route; and other sensory aspects of the setting such as smells and sounds. Setting may also include historical and contemporary relationships, such as use and activities, social and spiritual practices, and relationships with other places, both tangible and intangible."

These changes in part reflect a sympathetic response to the evolution of heritage conservation in Europe, but they go further than most European Charters and Declarations, reflecting the particular challenges faced by heritage practitioners in Australia who work with Indigenous cultural heritage. Australia's approach to Indigenous heritage places parallels that of other nations around the world, but especially the Anglophone settler societies of the USA, Canada, and New Zealand (Lilley 2000). Australia was at the forefront of the shift away from Western ethnocentric approaches to the conservation of Indigenous heritage places from the early 1980s, and to this extent there has been some departure from the European approach to heritage conservation as reflected in the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage* of 1975. In the 1980s, in a process conceived as one of 'de-colonisation', archaeologists and anthropologists within the Australian heritage profession began working with Aboriginal peoples to lobby for legislative reform. This reflected a trend elsewhere in the world (Lilley 2000) and resulted in the establishment of the World Archaeological Congress (or WAC) in 1986, as an alternative to the UNESCO-based International Union of the Pre- and Proto-Historic Sciences.

Today, in Australia, heritage is clearly understood within the heritage profession to extend beyond buildings and western-centrally conceived 'place' to include the Indigenous worldview. Further, although it is not made explicit in the *Burra Charter* of today (Fig. 3), the charter implicitly recognises the importance of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) to the *social* dimensions of Indigeneity.

Thus, the *Burra Charter* has come to resemble, in some respects, the social dimensions of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. Other changes made to the *Burra Charter* through the 1980s and 1990s included (quoting Walker and Marquis-Kyle 2004, 7):

“Explicitly recognising associations between places and people, the importance of the meaning of places to people, and the need to respect the co-existence of cultural values.

Explicitly recognising that the conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for the participation of people for whom the place has special associations and meanings.”

In 2013, a new *Practice Note* was prepared to augment the *Burra Charter* entitled ‘The *Burra Charter* and Indigenous Cultural Heritage Management’ (Australia ICOMOS 2013b). It states: “‘Place’ includes locations that embody spiritual value (such as Dreaming places, sacred landscapes, and stone arrangements), social and historical value (such as massacre sites), as well as scientific value (such as archaeological sites). In fact, one place may be all of these things or may embody all of these values at the same time.”

It continues: “The *Burra Charter* defines ‘cultural significance’ very broadly to include ‘aesthetic, historical, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations’. This definition captures places of cultural significance to Indigenous cultures. It also includes places that provide a physical location that is integral to the existence, observation and practice of intangible heritage. The *Burra Charter* definition of cultural significance encompasses all forms of spirituality, regardless of the culture from which it emanates. Similarly, aesthetic value is not limited to a ‘western’ perception of aesthetics.”

In other words, the *Burra Charter* advocates for a holistic approach, and one that does not preference western science or aesthetics, and emphasises the close links between tangible heritage (e.g. a scatter of stone artefacts) and aspects of intangible cultural heritage (e.g. spiritual practices, belief systems). These concepts reflect international trends including the developing concept of the ‘cultural landscape’ (and the related concept of the ‘cultural route’) which conceives of heritage places linked by history, function or other characteristics as a suite of features that are inter-related and which therefore demand an integrated management response (e.g. Lennon 2012). Again, this holistic and integrated approach is akin to the one advocated in 1975 by the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. But the other changes described above illustrate how far Australian cultural heritage practice has moved from an architecturally-based approach to the identification, assessment and management of ‘place’, which is the one that prevailed in both Europe and Australia in 1975.

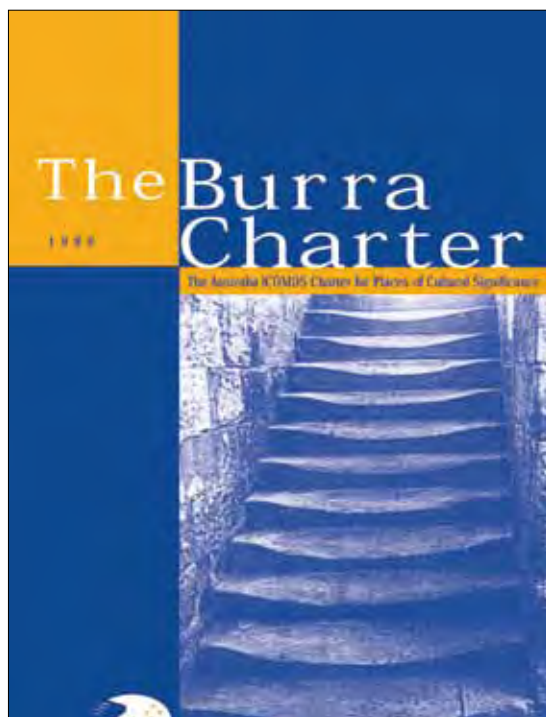


Fig. 3: The cover of the Burra Charter in its publication of 1999

CONCLUDING WORDS

The *Burra Charter* remains an important part of Australian professional heritage practice, and it has found acceptance (to greater and lesser degrees) in many countries around the world, including in Europe. It is an evolving document, subject to occasional review. Since the 1970s, it has expanded beyond the principles of the *Venice Charter*, and in some respects beyond the principles espoused in 1975 in the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage*. This reflects the influence of Indigenous heritage management in the Australian context, more than any dissatisfaction with European principles of heritage practice. On the contrary, Australia continues to look to Europe for guidance and inspiration in relation to heritage management, in addition to the USA and the rest of the world. However, the *Burra Charter* remains a ‘guidelines’ document, a statement of philosophy and professional practice, rather than a manifesto or declaration of intent for use by advocates and activists. Even forty years after the event, the *Burra Charter* reads as a rather modest document when compared to the bold vision and optimistic goals espoused in the EAHY 1975.

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