Developing the 1970s notion of 'significance' in the Burra Charter

Dr Bronwyn Hanna

Developing 'significance'

EBasically it [the Burra Charter] was just teaching people they have to i bXYfghUbX 'k \Uh'h\YmÑfY 'XYU`]b['k]h\ 'VYZcfY 'h\YmXYU``k]h\ ']h' 'H\UhÑg k \Uh']hÑg'U```about.Ñ

Clive Lucas, oral history interview with Bronwyn Hanna for the NLA, 2011

H]gHJ`_`X]gW ggYgH Y `\]gc f]WJ``XY j Y`cda Ybhc Zh Y bchcb c ZEg][b]ZWJbW Ñ]b 1970s Australian heritage practice based on research into the making of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, including 23 oral history interviews with pioneering heritage practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. Most these 23 interviews are now available for listening on the National Library of Australia, amounting to about 60 hours of recording. Where appropriate permissions have been granted, they can be heard by following the links on the National Library of Australia website at:

http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Search/Home?lookfor=bronwyn+hanna&type=all&li mit[]=&submit=Find

ICOMOS, the Venice Charter and the Burra Charter

Whereas thetalks about the Î d fY gY fj Uhc b' and fY grc fUhc bl' ofÎ a c bi a Y bhgi ž'thetalks about the Î Wc bgY fj Uhc bl' of Î d`UW g'ofcultural g][b]Z]WUbW'l. The change of emphasis in thewas not justsemantic. As Susie West explained in her history of heritage management:

• Î The] created an international impact on how heritage professionals make decisions about the meanings of heritage sites and places. It did so by renaming the heritage category 'sites and monuments' as 'places of cultural significance '. This switched the

1974 Hope Inquiry into the National Estate

The immediate forebear of the Burra Charter was the 1974 Hope Inquiry into the National Estate, instigated by the Whitlam Government. There was a causal relationship in that the Hope Report recommended the founding of an Australian chapter of ICOMOS.

There were also important conceptual continuities. For example the Î BUHc bU^{**} 9gHUHYI^{*} is explained in the opening words of the Hope Report as Î h\Y'things that you _YYdI^{*} (1974, p20). These words are deceptively simple, in fact they embed relationship, motivation and action. The report offered a sophisticated, even radical approach to heritage. It stated that the National Estate was Î bchimerely objects for dfYgYfj Uhc bI^{*}. Instead it emphasised Î h\Y'\i a Ub'gJXYI^{*} and the Î fY'Uhc b'VYfk YYb'EJhYa gÑc Z'h\Y'BUhc bU^{**}9gHUHYI^{*} and Î h\Y'total Ybj Jfc ba YbH^{**} (Hope Report, 1974, p26).

The Hope Report discussed proposed criteria for evaluating significance in terms very similar to that which would be used in the :

[The National Estate is defined as being] Î c Zsuch aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, cultural, ecological or other special value to the nation or any part of it, including a region or locality, that they should be conserved, managed and presented for the benefit of the community as a whole] (Hope Report, 1974, p334).

The Burra Charter and significance

In 1979 the stated, Î H, Y aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a d'UWT and defined Î ci `hi fU``g][b]Z]WUbWT as Î UYgh, Y h]W, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generationsï. The 1999 revision added a fifth criterion Î gd]f]hi U`T 1 largely to address Aboriginal heritage concerns.

Miles Lewis, a professor of architecture in Melbourne and on the original committee which wrote the , explained

Burra Charter and significance

Many of the people interviewed gave examples of why it was crucial for significance to be understood before management decisions are undertaken. James Semple Kerr, facilitator of the 1979 committee, explained:

 Î 5 \ 'yes, in the case of the Snowy Mountains authority ... the National Trust [Historic] Buildings Committee wanted to classify a stone mountains hut that had been used for walkers and by rangers and people for nearly 100 mYUfg"""" 5 bX h\Y @UhcbU";Hi ghy BUh fY Q7 cbgY fj Uhcb Wca a]HYY i bXYf j cf'K mUhgU]X """ Doc'k UmN <Y gU]X bc \\i hWUb VY WUgg]ZYX]b'U' conservation area for natural significance. So this was a way where policy was driving the assessment of significance. And what should have happened, of course, which is what we originally tried to do, was to allow both the natural conservation area listing to stand and the [listing of the] hut to stand, and then to decide what should be done about it. But both should be recognised in the beginning. And so this process should be kept in a proper sequence" (Kerr, 2011)

Liz Vines, the current chair of Australia ICOMOS, explained:

Î =h\]b_icbYicZh\YifYUgcbgk\m=j\Yi_Ydhk cf_]b[i]bi5g]UiUbXiUibi a VYfcZ Australians consult there is that as a professional group we are respected VYWUigYik YiWUbi[citciUig]hYiUbXiUddimUidUfh]Wi Ufa Yh\cXcic[m'KYNfYi bchUddim]b[icificd]b]cbgcficifigYbgYicZk\UhfgZUg\]cbUViYicfig\ciiXiVYi XcbY''K YNfYiUddim]b[iUif][cfcigdfcWigg''''''''=Uik UmggUmh\fYY-step process, of you first look at and understand the significance, you then develop the policies, and then you implement the policies''I ''(Vines, 2011)

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