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

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# Developing 'significance'

EBasically it [the Burra Charter] was just teaching people they have to i bXYfghJbX k \Uhh\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\ ]g'HJ`\_X ]gW ggY g'h\ Y`\ ]ghc f]WU`XY j Y`cda Ybhc Zh\ Y 'bchcb'c Zhg][ b]Z]WUbW\ N]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

#### Differences between Venice and Burra charters

Whereas the talks about the Î d f y g y f j U h j c b and f y g c f U h j c b i of î a c b i a y b h g z t he talks about the Î Wc b g y f j U h j c b i of î d `U W g of cultural g j b j z w j w as not just semantic. 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 emphasis from 'stones and bones', material culture, towards the meanings of places, the significance that humans attribute to material culture" (West, 2010, pp38-39)

Beyond the work of translation of the , the also offered new conceptual approaches for heritage practice. It insisted upon a logical approach to heritage conservation that the assessment of significance of a place should be done before any management decisions are made or works undertaken. Another contributions was the clarity of its central message, that in conservation, you should do

• Î Ugia i Wi 'Ugib Y WY ggU fmži Ugi']hi Yi 'Ugid c gg]V Y ii (Burra Charter, 1979-2013).

This Îj U`i Yg-VUgYX 'WcbgYfj Uh]cbl' approach was elaborated in the revised

## 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 ÎBUhcbu 9ghlh'l is explained in the opening words of the Hope Report as Îh\Y things that you \_YYd (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 Îbchmerely objects for dfYgYfj Uhcbi. Instead it emphasised Îh\Y \in a Ubig|XYi and the ÎfY`Uhcbi VYłk YYb PhYa gÑc Zh\Y BUhcbu ''9ghUhYi and Îh\Y 'total Ybi |fcba Ybhi "(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 Z'such 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

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

## 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 mY Ufg""" 5 b X f \ Y OB Uffc b U `Hi of Yg B Uff f \ Y O7 c b g Y f J Uffc b Wc a a Jft Y i b X Yf \ \ \ \ g C f K mUff g J X """ " B b c k Um N < Y g J X b c \ i h W b V Y W U g J X J 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" I (Kerr, 2011)

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

• Î=h\]b\_cbYcZh\YfYUgcbgk\m=j\Y\_Ydhkcf\_]b[]b5g]UUbXUbia VYfcZ Australians consult there is that as a professional group we are respected VYWUigYkYWb[chcUghYUbXUddmUdUfh]WiUfaYh\cXccc[m"KYjfYbchUddmUdUfh]WiUfaYh\cXccc[m"KYjfYbchUddm]b[cifcd]b]cbgcfcifgYbgYcZk\UhrgZUg\]cbUVYcfg\ciXVYXcbY"KYjfYUddm]b[Uf][cfcigdfcWygg"""=UkUmggUmh\fYY-step process, of you first look at and understand the significance, you then develop the policies, and then you implement the policies" (Vines, 2011)

#### Acknowledgements

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