

The National Trust and the Heritage of Sydney Harbour

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Campaigns to preserve the legacy of the past in Australian cities have been particularly focused on the protection of natural landscapes and public open space. From campaigns to protect Perth's Kings Park and the Green Bans of the Builders Labourers Federation in New South Wales to contemporary controversies such as the Perth waterfront redevelopment, Melbourne's East West Link, and new development at Middle Harbour in Sydney's Mosman, heritage activists have viewed the protection and restoration of 'natural' vistas, open spaces and 'scenic landscapes' as a vital part of the effort to preserve the historic identity of urban places. The protection of such landscapes has been a vital aspect of establishing a positive conception of the environment as a source of both urban and national identity. Drawing predominantly on the records of the National Trust of Australia (NSW), this paper examines the formation and early history of the Australian National Trust, in particular its efforts to preserve and restore the landscapes of Sydney Harbour. It then uses that history as a basis for examining the debate surrounding the landscape reconstruction project that forms part of Sydney's highly contested Barangaroo development.

In recent decades there has been a steady professionalisation and specialisation of heritage assessment, architectural conservation and heritage management as well as a gradual extension of government powers to regulate land use. This has occurred in parallel with the rise of environmentalism as a distinct sphere of political activity and professional expertise. In combination, these trends have had the effect of splitting place protection into two distinct terrains: heritage conservation and nature conservation. Each has its own subsets of specialised knowledge and skills and its own civic organisations and activist movements. In Australia, at the state level, where heritage protection and nature conservation are generally managed, they tend to have separate legislative apparatuses as well. Consequently, an earlier continuity between heritage and environmental conservation has been obscured. It is now mostly forgotten that the impulse to keep places – as a way of enriching memory and promoting certain place-based identities – was shared by those who wanted to protect the natural environment and its scenic places from desecration and those who wanted to preserve and repair old buildings and townscapes. This paper helps to resituate our understanding of place protection in Australia by highlighting the importance of landscape conservation to efforts to foster place-based citizenship at both urban and national levels.

The architectural and urban historian Daniel Bluestone has argued that the familiar origin story of historic preservation in the United States – the protection of George Washington's home by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

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(1858–60) – and the origin of wilderness protection in the form of the creation of Yellowstone National Park (1872) should be considered together (Bluestone, 2011). Both efforts, he argues, ‘aimed to protect valued resources from the unfettered and often destructive prerogatives of a market economy ... and both movements claimed that social refinement, cultivation and enjoyment’ would result from the protection of these singular places (ibid, p 104). Bluestone’s own account of the effort to save the ‘scenic landscapes’ of the Hudson River Palisades is richly illustrative of the intertwined histories of city and nature in New York and New Jersey. Likewise, the centrality of landscapes and their meaning to the role of the national trusts in both England and Scotland is almost too obvious to mention. But to even begin to claim the same for Australian cities and their settings demands that we understand something of the institutions and individuals who initiated and shaped place protection efforts in Australia.

The standard story of heritage conservation as it developed in Australia in the early twentieth century understandably focuses on the apparent clash between proponents of modernisation and the antithetical development of a heritage conservation sensibility among a loosely defined group of cultural conservatives, antiquarians and nationalists (Davison and McConville, 1991; Freestone, 1999). But when the wider issue of landscape protection is included, the picture begins to change. It becomes evident that heritage advocacy also contained within it a strand of progressive reform that sought to constrain economic development by both government and the private sector on behalf of citizens and their environment. The task of building this more comprehensive historical picture of place protection in Australia has been enabled by new perspectives and research that have appeared since 2000. In *Colonial Earth*, for example, Tim Bonyhady (2000) has argued that many Australian colonists in the nineteenth century were strongly attached to the Australian landscape. This view stands in contrast to the historical clichés that have depicted European settlers as universally afraid of and hostile to the distinctiveness of the Australian landscape and careless of their physical surrounds generally. Moreover, a desire to ‘protect and preserve’ parts of that landscape was quite evident, Bonyhady argues. Understandably, given the concentrated and urban character of Australian settlement in the nineteenth century, many of the places that were treasured were ‘within easy access of the cities’ (ibid, p 314). Indeed, Bonyhady argues that ‘preservation of Sydney Harbour’s beauty’ was part of ‘a local tradition in which the encouragement of culture and protection of the environment were all of a piece’ (ibid).

The story of how such affection and care for natural places in and around Australian cities evolved into an institutional apparatus has been taken up recently by Andrea Witcomb and Kate Gregory (2010). Their history of the National Trust in Western Australia is attentive to the full range of activities that motivated Trust founders and members in that state and highlights the shortcomings of the existing literature on heritage and conservation in Australia. Witcomb and Gregory view the activities of the Western Australian Trust as comprising a wide-ranging effort to foster urban and regional place identity by protecting wild flowers, visual perspectives and parkland as well as significant historic buildings. ‘Embedded in the Trust’s early understanding of landscapes,’ they argue, ‘was a sense that they, just as much as buildings, were redolent of the evidence of the

past and offered a connection to it' (ibid, p 80). Protecting the existing course and expanse of the Swan River was just as important to early Trust activists in Western Australia as the well-known effort to save the Barracks at the end of St Georges Terrace. The concerns of the National Trust's founders in New South Wales (NSW) were similarly expansive. Seeing the landscape of the city and its surrounds as integral to Sydney's distinctive identity, they likewise viewed the protection of parts of that landscape as absolutely essential to the Trust's mission.

Using the archives of the National Trust of Australia (NSW), especially the documents connected with its founding and early decades, this paper argues that the protection of bushland, and what was often called the scenic landscape, was integral to heritage protection in Australia. The protection of the Sydney Harbour landscape – notably its 'natural' headlands and foreshore areas – is one of the more pronounced aspects of that story. In the final section of the paper, I use this history to examine the recent landscape reconstruction project at Sydney's Barangaroo. In particular, I consider whether that piece of landscape design and reconstruction extends or travesties the long-standing tradition of scenic landscape preservation that has been so important to heritage protection in Sydney.

Origins of the National Trust of Australia (NSW)

Where the shared terrain of nature conservation and heritage conservation has been recognised by researchers in this field, it has mostly been in the context of discussions of the policy innovations of Australia's National Estate programme in the 1970s or the Green Bans (NSW) initiated by the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), which were active in the early 1970s (Burgmann and Burgmann, 1998; Yencken, 2001). Yet a continuous tradition of place protection in Australia stretches back to the efforts in the 1890s, described by Bonyhady, through the reform-oriented groups of the early twentieth century and on to the national trusts and the widening efforts of government and civil society in the 1970s and beyond.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the effort to protect Sydney Harbour from being spoiled by industrial development – especially by the proposed colliery at Cremorne – became a major public issue. Moreover, as Bonyhady (2000) has noted, the issue was explicitly linked to issues of cultural heritage and national identity. The future parliamentarian AB Piddington remarked at that time, 'We in Sydney are the trustees for all Australia and of all time of that national heritage of beauty which gives us our pride of place amongst the capitals of this continent' (ibid, p 314). This same note of national feeling and pride in the Sydney region's natural gifts motivated Annie Wyatt, who would go on to become a founder of the National Trust of Australia (NSW). In the inter-war decades, Wyatt and her neighbours on the North Shore formed the Ku-ring-gai Tree Lovers' Civic League (1927). The aim of the group was to 'foster the love of our own Australian trees, as being peculiar to our land, and likely to thrive best in its soil and climate' (Save the Trees – Conserve our Forests, 1944). The league's activities included a significant 1931 project to work with the North Sydney Council to protect and restore the landscape at Ball's Head on Sydney Harbour. In the developing but still bushy terrain of Sydney's North Shore in the 1920s and 1930s, theosophism, progressive educational thinking and nature conservationism all thrived as part of a new cultural outlook that attempted to establish a more meaningful and holistic connection between spirituality, place and nature.

The North Shore, however, was not the only source of inspiration for the tradition of conservation that developed in Sydney from the late nineteenth century onwards. Today, the outer western-Sydney suburb of Rooty Hill is best known for its outsized Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) Club. But the history of heritage and conservation in Australia is steeped in the experiences of a largely forgotten Rooty Hill. As the place where Annie Wyatt grew up, the district was a source of inspiration for her pastoral evocation of the Sydney region in an earlier phase of its settlement. In 1956, she wrote a short memoir that described the area during her childhood in the 1890s:

I wish I could give you a glimpse of how lovely Rooty Hill was then; most of it was heavily timbered, yet large sections set out in orchards, vineyards and grazing land. The soil was deep and rich and all things grew to perfection. There were paddocks waving knee-high in bluebells and buttercups, and one which seemed to specialise in orchids, pink and yellow. Mother saw to it that the cows be kept out of those places many weeks before the flowers were due. After rain the low lands were white with mushrooms, as large as bread and butter plates – one never sees the like of them now-a-days (Wyatt, 1987, p 10).

Wyatt's conservation activism, which began in earnest in the 1920s, was evidently motivated by the steady loss of Sydney's hinterland to urbanisation. Alongside this concern with the destruction of the natural environment and its scenic and environmental qualities, she worried about the destruction of historic buildings. The loss of some of the city's most recognisable early colonial buildings in the inter-war years, such as the Commissariat Stores in Circular Quay and Burdekin House in Macquarie Street, caused her, she recalled, 'to lie awake and wonder desperately what could be done about the destruction' (ibid, p 12).

Wyatt's memoir makes quite clear that, in enacting her place-centred citizenship, she gave equal weight to protecting places of natural or scenic beauty and buildings of historical or architectural significance. This dual mission was imprinted in the National Trust of Australia (NSW) from its early years. The group who came together with Wyatt to found an Australian version of the Trust first seriously considered the idea at a 'Save the Trees – Conserve our Forests' conference in 1944. For most of that group, the protection of flora and fauna had been a central factor motivating their civic engagement before their involvement in the Trust and would be intrinsic to their activities as Trust founders and members.

In 1948, less than 12 months after it was formally constituted, the National Trust of Australia (NSW) campaigned for the protection and purchase of Chinaman's Beach at Middle Harbour so as to protect 'one of the few remaining beaches with unbuilt background in Sydney Harbour' (National Trust, 1948b). In the Trust's second official *Bulletin*, it noted that it had strongly 'urged the Mosman Council to acquire Chinaman's Beach and the Council of the Trust has now congratulated the Mosman Council on its public spirit and vision in acquiring the beach' (ibid).

Minutes of Trust meetings in the early years reveal that the Chinaman's Beach campaign was just one of several efforts to protect the headlands, islands and harboursides, in which the incipient advocacy group invested energies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1947, Wyatt, along with linguist and amateur landscape designer EB Waterhouse, and others associated with the Trust lobbied

the responsible state minister to resume the lands known as the Dingle (National Trust, 1947a). It was a piece of steep foreshore below Kirribilli Avenue, just to the east of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which included what the *Sydney Morning Herald* described at the time as a 'giant Moreton Bay Fig, 30 feet around at the base' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1947). In 1948, the Trust joined the local campaign against the erection of oil tanks at Greenwich Point, a headland area also on the North Shore of the harbour and just to the west of North Sydney. It was noted in the minutes at the time that the Trust should 'support the local movement against despoiling of such harbour foreshores' (National Trust, 1948c). The Trust also turned its attentions to places further from the city centre. In 1951, it mounted a campaign to protect land at Cottage Point on Cowan Creek at the top of Ku-Ring-Gai Chase and prevent its sale to private owners (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1951).

While most of the Trust's energies from this early period were invested in places threatened by new development or destructive neglect, its council also mounted a more strategically focused effort to identify key places worthy of long-term protection. Rae Else-Mitchell, the jurist and legal scholar who was an energetic contributor to National Trust activities in its early years, successfully argued for the creation of a register of 'places of natural beauty' that should be preserved and/or acquired for the public benefit. Priority should be given, he argued, 'to areas and places fronting harbours and rivers, places suitable for recreational facilities or parklands, view points and lands giving access to such areas and places' (National Trust, 1948d).

The range of existing civic groups who offered their support and endorsement to the National Trust was testimony to the breadth of its activities. Prominent among groups that affiliated themselves with the Trust, as one might expect, were the historical societies. But equally notable were the progressive planning groups and conservation-oriented societies. The Parks and Playgrounds Movement of NSW was one of those and, like the Tree Lovers' League, was engaged in lobbying local government to maintain and restore coastal and foreshore landscapes, such as the Kurnell Peninsula on Botany Bay. The Wildlife Preservation Society was another group that affiliated with the National Trust in 1948.¹ The early involvement and influence of such groups gave the National Trust its scope and left a powerful mark on the organisation.

In brochures the Trust produced through the mid-1950s, it highlighted that protecting nature and scenic landscapes was central to its activities. In a short list of aims and objectives, one such brochure noted that the Trust aimed '(t)o safeguard the charm and interest of the Australian countryside in the form of wildflower patches, stands of timber, primitive reserves, aboriginal relics, vistas, lagoons or streams etc, with special regard to the breeding places of native birds, animals and plants'. In the same brochure, the Trust noted that in March 1953 the federal government had given the Trust full 'control of the fauna and flora of Montagu Island, the main breeding ground on our coast of seals, fairy penguins and sooty terns etc'; it boasted that its sponsorship had seen the formation of the 'Hawkesbury Scenic Preservation Council to consider the controlled development of the Hawkesbury River'; and that it had 'successfully requested the State Government to declare Cabbage Tree Island a Fauna Reserve' (National Trust, 1954).

The founding members of the National Trust drew a distinction between natural beauty and historic buildings but they did not necessarily privilege one over the other. The motto they adopted when they formalised the group in 1947 was 'For the preservation of historic buildings and natural beauty'. In the vision of Annie Wyatt, the farms of the Rooty Hill district, the tributaries and banks of the Hawkesbury River, the bushy harbour headlands, the busy harbour and mellow old buildings at Circular Quay were a continuous landscape. It was a romantic vision in which Sydney's historical and geographical identities were one and the same and therefore the protection of the city implied wide-ranging efforts that went beyond individual buildings or properties.

The reputation of the Trust in later decades as primarily a protector of buildings has tended to colour perceptions of the organisation and obscure its origins and breadth of interests. Certainly, it was concerned with buildings from the very beginning. During the late 1940s, for example, protecting a group of 'Macquarie buildings' – the Hyde Park Barracks, St James Church and the Government House Stables, among others – was a high priority (National Trust, 1947b; 1948a). In the 1950s, the effort to create a register of historic buildings, based on the advice of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and the labours of architect and historian Morton Herman, was probably the most prominent aspect of its activities (Cumberland County Council, 1956). But the formal recognition of the Trust in state legislation and its activities in 1960 underlined the ongoing commitment to place protection in the wider sense, as well as the importance of environmental protection and of landscape identity to the work of the Trust.

The National Trust and the 1960s

In 1960, some 15 years after the National Trust of Australia (NSW) was founded and a decade after it was incorporated, the New South Wales parliament passed legislation establishing its role and status as the pre-eminent organisation in NSW vested with the authority to 'protect and preserve' lands, buildings, works, structures etc 'for the benefit of the public' (National Trust of Australia (New South Wales Act) 1960). One of the objects of the Trust, as defined by the Act, was 'to protect and preserve the natural features of, and to conserve the fauna and flora on, any lands referred to in paragraph (a) and acquired by or under the control of the National Trust'. With the Act in force in the 1960s, therefore, the National Trust was legally obliged to engage in nature conservation and scenic landscape preservation.

However, the Trust defined for itself a wider sphere of activity than what was specified by the Act. A National Parks Act for NSW, the reserving of municipal land for public use and the promotion of other planning tools and public powers to prevent the destruction of places of natural beauty all remained firmly on the National Trust agenda in the 1960s. During the 1960s, lectures on fauna conservation, articles on the establishment of specific national parks and reviews of books about a wide range of environmental concerns were a staple of National Trust bulletins. Rachel Carson's landmark book *Silent Spring* (1962) was given an extensive and favourable review in a 1963 edition of the Trust *Bulletin*, and concern about the fate of bushland on Bradley's Head on the North Shore of Sydney Harbour was a front-page story for the Trust in May 1964 (National

Trust, 1963; 1964). Nature conservation and the wider realm of environmental protection both remained in the forefront of Trust activity even as architects took on growing prominence in the organisation.

A perennial complaint of non-architect heritage specialists in Australia has been that architects and canons of architectural taste have exercised too much influence on registers of historically significant places (Davison and McConville, 1991). Certainly, this concern is borne out to some extent by the experience of the National Trust in Victoria in its early years, where Roy Simpson, Robin Boyd and John and Phyllis Murphy all exercised considerable influence (Clark, 1996). However, while heritage conservation was guided by prevailing architectural tastes in the period, the greatest contribution of architects to the heritage discussion nationally in the 1960s was not related to the finer points of formal criticism and questions of stylistic development. Rather, their most significant interventions were motivated by a broad-based environmentalism.

In their writing and activism, architects Robin Boyd (1960), Donald Gazzard (1966) and the son of well-known conservationist Myles, Milo Dunphy (Goad and Higham, 2012), drew explicitly on the work of North American and British commentators Peter Blake (1964), Ian Nairn (1955) and Gordon Cullen (1961) in criticising the visual environment of Australian cities and their surrounds. In 1964, Sydney-based architect–planner Gazzard attempted to synthesise these concerns in his landmark exhibition staged by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (NSW). The exhibition had the title ‘Australian Outrage’ – which referred directly to a 1955 special issue of British journal *Architectural Review*, edited by Ian Nairn and released later as a book – and Gazzard’s exhibition shared Nairn’s concern with what he called the ‘disfigured landscape’ created by post-war urbanisation.

Gazzard’s international sources were overt and acknowledged (Atchison, 2013). But it is equally clear that the environmental and landscape protection discourse of the National Trust in the early 1960s deeply informed Gazzard’s position, and that it was something of a launching pad for his critique of Australian habits of landscape destruction. In the text of the 1966 book that followed the Outrage exhibition, Gazzard (1966) quotes extensively from a 1964 National Trust *Bulletin*. The piece he quotes carried the heading ‘Preservation of Bush and Shore’, and the author argued that the public must be more responsible for the destructive actions of their local authorities. This author further warned that if a person wishes to drive all the way to sites of natural beauty ‘instead of his beauty spot he will probably find a car park not unlike the one at his nearest regional shopping centre’ (National Trust, 1964). Gazzard shared the National Trust’s concern with the intergenerational benefits to be derived from the proper protection of beautiful and important places and understood implicitly how the protection of ‘parks and bushland, beaches, headland and waterways’ (Gazzard, 1966, p 29) was connected to the wider effort to protect and foster place identity through the conservation of buildings. He invoked the idea of custodianship of place and concluded, ‘If we let progress take its toll, we not only lose part of our visual inheritance, we somehow put a low value on man himself’ (ibid, p 29).

It is no coincidence that Gazzard’s architectural practice in the 1960s is strongly identified with the so-called Sydney school of architecture (Taylor, 1972). The

best-known buildings of this Sydney school – the Ken Woolley House, Mosman (1962) and the Johnson House, Chatswood (1963) – emphasise the integration of building and landscape. Gazzard’s own Wentworth Memorial Church, Vaucluse (1965) is likewise a self-effacing building referring to vernacular precedents and establishing a strong relationship to its site. The operative ethic in this self-conscious Sydney regionalism was connected to the protection and enhancement of clear markers of place. Distinctive views, the preservation of bushland and topographical character were all vital to this architectural project. The Sydney school of architecture was, therefore, coherent with, and supportive of, the place protection efforts championed by the National Trust, as made explicit in Gazzard’s work as both designer and activist.

The efforts of the National Trust and of sympathetic architects and planners to strengthen place identity in the Sydney region were supported by a growing infrastructure of environmental law and policy, culminating in the passage of state heritage legislation in 1977 (Boer and Wiffen, 2006). Around the same time, members of the burgeoning landscape architecture profession undertook a series of large-scale landscape reclamation and restoration projects in places that had been degraded by industrial activities (Saniga, 2012). Such efforts to recognise and renew landscape elements in the Sydney region built on the early traditions of Trust activism – traditions that acknowledged the landscape as a powerful source of cultural meaning as well as an important source of what we now call ecosystem services.

Barangaroo: ‘A new natural headland’

The National Trust never ceased to be an advocate for environmental protection, but by the 1980s and 1990s its environmental activism was not as prominent as it had been. Given its statutory recognition as a body responsible for preserving lands of historical, cultural and natural significance in NSW, the National Trust was certainly capable, in theory, of accepting responsibility for the series of defence and other government-controlled sites around the harbour that successive federal governments sought to dispose of in the 1980s and 1990s. But the fact that the National Trust was not seriously in contention for this role highlights just how marginal the organisation had become to the landscape protection effort. In 1950, 1960 or 1970, it would likely have been regarded as the obvious steward for these places, given its record of advocating for the protection of natural profiles of the harbour headlands and for a de-industrialised harbour environment. Instead, a new Commonwealth body, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, was formed to take responsibility for preserving and renewing the defence sites.

Significant shifts in thinking in relation to heritage conservation in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s coalesced in the work of the Harbour Trust. Its focus was on regenerating and opening up several prominent harbour sites: Cockatoo Island, Middle Head Park at Mosman and Snapper Island among others. The architects and planners who led this effort – Geoff Bailey, Richard Leplastrier and Rod Simpson – promoted a tolerance for change and encouraged the sense that these sites, inaccessible to the public over many decades, should be knitted back into the urban fabric. While the lands were not to be treated as mere real estate, neither should they be simply ‘bushwalks or museums’, according to the

Harbour Trust at the time (Marr, 2000). This approach to harbourside lands was different from the National Trust's landscape conservation efforts from the 1940s to the 1960s and, for that matter, from the famous Green Ban at Kelly's Bush in Hunter's Hill. In those cases, conservation was seen as being in opposition to economic or urban development and the protection of bushland was the central value in the campaigns.

But not everyone understood or sympathised with the values of the Harbour Trust in its approach to the natural and cultural qualities of these places. As the campaigns to protect harbour lands going back to the early twentieth century revealed, the public had mostly valued such places for their natural profiles and the opportunities they afforded to glimpse sections of the harbour that appeared to be untouched by urban or industrial development. In 2000, New South Wales Premier Bob Carr told the writer and commentator David Marr that the former defence land 'is bushland and it's going to be saved as bushland because it conveys something of the ancient history of the place, that is water glimpsed through eucalypts' (Marr, 2000).

By the turn of the century, the ideal of unspoilt areas of harbour foreshore was in tension with an emerging professional consensus in architecture and heritage around the need to see the landscape of the harbour as being natural and urban all at once; nature inscribed with distinct cultural and industrial patterns. The fruits of this professional consensus in the new century can be seen at places such as Pirrama Park (2006–09) at Pyrmont, a landscape project realised in collaboration between Hill Thalys, Aspect and CAB, and the Hassell-led Coal Loader parkland project on Waverton Peninsula in North Sydney (2005–11). This difference between professional assumptions about how harbour conservation and regeneration should be achieved and an older set of public expectations has shaped the character of the debate about the Barangaroo project. That is, the two models for creating new public space at Barangaroo have reflected a clash of ideas between those who see the harbour's heritage as embodied in protected or restored – even reconstructed – natural headlands, and those who take a more design-led approach to regenerating former industrial sites as public urban places.

Dubbed the Hungry Mile by waterside workers in the 1930s, Darling Harbour East is now the focus of the vast urban redevelopment project known as Barangaroo, a name chosen to honour a Cammeraygal woman. The project has highlighted the great difficulties involved in reaching agreement about how to evoke the past and reinstate natural qualities in such areas. The project overall is a mixture of generic high-rise, commercial and residential development (South Barangaroo); a gambling palace that will make the Rooty Hill RSL blush (Central Barangaroo); and a landscape restoration project that the Barangaroo Delivery Authority (2013) described as a 'new natural headland' at the northern end of the site.

Every dimension of this renewal project has been deeply contested. The density and scale of development have been criticised; the lack of diversity in the tenure status of the land has come under fire as well. Special exemptions from site remediation requirements were created and overturned. Most controversially, the design development process was deeply politicised: the New South Wales state government dismissed the winner of a global competition to provide a masterplan and landscape design framework – Hill Thalys – and discarded the

plan. But, for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in just one aspect of the debate: the reconstruction of the so-called natural headland at the northern end of the site.

The newly landscaped area has been described as a ‘fattened version of the 1836 foreshore’ (*Butterpaper*, 2010) and is an attempt to evoke and recreate an earlier historical profile for that section of the harbour. The landscape design as a whole does not attempt to hide its artificiality or its designed character. It is, nevertheless, a strong contrast to the Hill Thalys scheme for the area, which used the orthogonal profile of the expansive 1960s-era concrete wharf to define the project’s northern and western edges. The Barangaroo Delivery Authority has highlighted this characteristic and has insistently focused on what it describes as ‘the restoration’ of the 1836 headland profile. It recently noted that ‘the works here will restore one of Sydney’s most stunning green headlands, visually linking the headland archipelagos of Balls Head, Goat Island and Ballast Point’ (Barangaroo Delivery Authority, 2014).

The National Trust (NSW), far from embracing a reconstructed harbour headland, has been one of the Barangaroo project’s most insistent public critics. Trust representatives described the proposed naturalistic headland as ‘false’ (ABC News, 2010) and argued that the project ‘disregards the area’s maritime history’ (National Trust, 2010). They sponsored alternative proposals that emphasised the protection of more of the industrial fabric of the area and suggested locating an international passenger terminal at the site to animate urban activity in the area and maintain the area’s connections to shipping.

The Trust’s commitment to a more finely honed sense of material authenticity is understandable, given the professionalisation of conservation standards and focus on authenticity developed by the conservation field internationally, especially under the auspices of the International Council on Monuments and Sites and their Venice Charter, which was created in 1964 and the subsequent adoption of the Burra Charter in Australia in 1979. Reconstructing buildings, except under very particular circumstances, is almost always frowned on in the field. But given that the particular historical fabric in question does not have established heritage significance, and given that questions of landscape heritage involve less clear-cut divisions between conservation, restoration and reconstruction than buildings, the merits of this reconstruction are more open to interpretation. It is not completely clear, for example, that the National Trust’s critique, or its vision for the area, would have better served the heritage embodied there than the landscape reconstruction project that has just been completed. Advocates of the headland scheme, especially former Prime Minister Paul Keating, have argued that the project is about remediating environmental damage – damage that notably affected the scenic profile of the harbour environment. In this sense, it has something in common with what happened at Ball’s Head in the inter-war years, and at Kelly’s Bush in the 1970s – the battle that initiated the storied Green Bans.²

The point, then, is not to endorse or absolve the Barangaroo project either as an urban strategy or in its particulars as design and landscape reconstruction. Rather, my purpose is to question what it is we are trying to achieve when we protect places under the banner of heritage. The eventual use and meaning of the Barangaroo site raise interesting questions about how the past is recognised

and understood in the urban environment. It is certainly conceivable that a more profound heritage can be evoked at Barangaroo by actually destroying or demolishing several of the items that the National Trust wanted to be retained. For example, might important national narratives about settlement and dispossession be presented more cogently in the completed scheme than in one that retained more of the fabric of the area's shipping history?

Paul Keating, who has championed the landscape reconstruction concept for the Barangaroo headland, has repeatedly described the 1960s container wharf facilities that extended out on reclaimed land into Sydney Harbour as a piece of 'industrial vandalism' with 'no heritage value' (Moore, 2009). Moreover, he has argued that the evocation of the pre-European landscape on this important piece of Sydney Harbour represents a great opportunity to address Australia's settlement history, an approach that is more important than the physical evidence of maritime activity, especially the 1960s shift to containerisation, that provided the prevailing structure in the Hill Thalys masterplan.

Arguably, constructing a new landscape that evokes the character of the environment in the period before and during early settlement is an appropriate way to address questions of Aboriginal dispossession and to continue the cultural work of reconciliation between settlers and Aboriginal people. The lead designer for the landscape restoration project, Peter Walker, has expressed a desire to promote the significance of the site as a place of reconciliation. In a 2012 interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he explained that 'Mr. Keating had educated him about its place in the area's Aboriginal history and its connection to nearby Goat Island and surrounding headlands' (Moore, 2012). In other words, this part of the Barangaroo site might also be viewed as part of a larger landscape, one that testifies to the ongoing effort to evoke what the historian Bill Gammage calls 1788: his shorthand for the landscape created and managed by Aboriginal people before the arrival of British colonists (Gammage, 2011). Taken in this sense, the protected and recreated contours that define the harbour landscape might also become a richer setting for a new story of national origins and Aboriginal-settler encounter. While the focus on Aboriginal-settler encounter is a relatively new justification, the remediation of industrial damage and pollution in the environment is a long-standing theme of harbour landscape protection. It could be contended, therefore, that the Barangaroo Headland Park is a direct descendant, albeit an intensively engineered descendant, of the long tradition of harbour headland protection that goes back to Cremorne Point in the 1880s.

Conclusion

The heritage enterprise in Sydney and its surrounds has been deeply marked by efforts to protect the natural landscape as a way of fostering the identity of the place and paying tribute to its early history. The pride of incipient nationalists such as Piddington in the glories of the harbour and its surrounds; the somewhat nostalgic pastoral vision of Annie Wyatt; the regionalist commitments and sense of authenticity of Donald Gazzard; and the critical revisionism of Paul Keating: each assumed that Sydney's history and identity are embedded in its landscape. How each addressed the perennial conservation issues of renewal and restoration versus continuity and repair certainly differs, and is the subject for a separate

paper. The ideological resonances of settler colonialism in each phase of these landscape protection and restoration efforts have shifted subtly and are likewise a subject deserving of its own paper. But the clear commitment to landscape protection as cultural heritage has remained fairly constant. Notwithstanding its position on the Barangaroo development, the National Trust of Australia (NSW) has been the central institution in promoting this view: a role contrary to the widely held idea that it has been mostly interested in fixing up nice old houses.

NOTES

- 1 The National Trust corresponded with each of these organisations in 1947 and 1948. Correspondence 1947–48, Wyatt Papers, The National Trust of Australia (NSW) Archives.
- 2 The ‘Green Bans’ are among the best-known environmental and heritage protection campaigns in Australian history and are the subject of a number of detailed studies. The most comprehensive is Burgmann and Burgmann (1998).

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