

Third ACT Historical Archaeological Workshop
The Ruins of History
Held at
Donald Horne Institute, University of Canberra
Saturday 3 July, 2010

Presentation Abstracts

The third Historical Archaeological Workshop, held in July, was another success, with a broad range of presentations coming from professionals and members of the public. This time we had a presentation by an undergraduate student, Celia Cramer, from the Donald Horne Institute. We look forward to having more students stepping up to the podium next year. Canberra Archaeological Society (CAS) would like to thank our sponsors, in particular Dr Tracy Ireland and her hard working students who ensured that the day ran smoothly and comfortably with plenty of food and refreshments.

Ploughlands in the ACT - Obscure but cute

Michael Pearson

This presentation was developed from a study undertaken for the ACT Heritage Unit in 2002. Ploughlands are areas of land cultivated with single furrow ploughs for planting of crops, and are relics of a pre-mechanical pastoral past. Most of the surviving ploughlands have poor integrity as their ridges and furrows have been eroded almost flat over time, or they have been physically disturbed (but not destroyed) by development or subsequent mechanical ploughing or harrowing. The most significant ploughlands are those associated with other components of rural cultural landscapes, to which they contribute a richer history. The best are:

- Old Orroral ploughland and homestead site;
- Glenburn group, Kowen;
- Booroomba (Blythburn group);
- Well Station #2 ploughland;
- Orroral Homestead ploughland; and
- Mulligans Flat #1 ploughland.

The ACT may have a good surviving collection because of the peculiar history of land resumption by the Commonwealth, which discouraged cropping at the start of the tractor era, and may be uniquely placed to conserve some of these examples in a near-urban area.

The Revival of Rock Valley, Tidbinbilla

Juliet Ramsay

Rock Valley, Tidbinbilla is a relict cultural landscape now transmitting to the public a story of its pioneering farming origins. This presentation traced the settlement history of the Rock Valley, individuals associated with the place and their achievements, the fate of the property when acquired for a national park and utilised for a park depot, its bushfire survival story, and the remarkable rebirth of a garden with a mind of its own.

This presentation showed how a small interesting capsule of Canberra's mountain heritage is captured in the extant cultural landscape. Included was an outline of a feasible management program that can enhance the heritage story and work within the greater management area of the nature reserve.

The Captains Flat Weigh Station. A ghost of heritage past

Elizabeth Estbergs

This paper discussed the impact of the demolition of the structure in the context of the mining heritage of Captains Flat. The Weigh Station, also known as the ore concentrate loader was part of the mining operations in the Captains Flat area. In 2006, a cultural survey of mining at Captains Flat identified the weigh station and loading ramp as an important element in the cultural landscape. The site was not placed on any heritage list. Captains Flat Community Association (CFCA) campaigned to save the building, with a media campaign and representation to local and state politicians. It was destroyed by NSW Rail Corp in 2010 because it was assessed as being unsafe, even though remedial work was being done on the structure by another NSW government body. A motion was put to Palerang Council to examine why it was knocked down and ask how to prevent further places of potential heritage significance from being knocked down.

CFCA are continuing their campaign to protect the un-destroyed remainder of the site and get answers about the process leading to the destruction. A tale of a small community that was not consulted and became very annoyed by the loss of a part of their local heritage.

Robertson Cottage – Oaks Estate

Karen Williams

Robertson Cottage, 9 Hazel Street, Oaks Estate, has been on the ACT Heritage Places Register waiting list since 1993. The condition of the cottage has deteriorated significantly through neglect and vandalism since being left unoccupied following the death of the occupant, Les Robertson. Robertson Cottage is the last remaining Canberra construction workers' 'humpy' in the ACT. The cottage, built c.1911, and the Robertson family, link the early 19th century history of Canberra and Queanbeyan to the construction era of the federal capital. The Oaks Estate precinct

includes the Queanbeyan Railway station, The Oaks homestead and the earliest road and river crossings between Canberra, Duntroon and Queanbeyan, all situated at the junction of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers within approximately 100-200 meters of each other.

The cottage, on the verge of ruin, has recently and unexpectedly jumped from the bottom of the funding list to the top with the Chief Minister offering funding but tied to a different perspective to that of the community . This presentation discussed issues that arise from that sudden elevation in priority in relation to establishing recognition and protection of its supporting precinct, and ideas for ongoing funding and future maintenance.

Conservation of objects from the Joint Operations Command, Defence site excavation Celia Cramer

The subject of this presentation was, “What happens to the artefacts after they are excavated by archaeologists?” Artefacts from archaeological excavations at Hennessy’s Hut complex, the Hibernian Hotel site and several Aboriginal sites were used by students from the Donald Horne Institute, University of Canberra to practice investigation, examination and conservation techniques. The project provided an opportunity to add to the archaeological record. The students found that:

- Dirt is good – residues on and inside objects can contribute to an understanding of the objects;
- Water washing of artefacts can destroy evidence;
- Close and long visual and microscopic examination of objects revealed interesting facts (for example, worn and not macroscopically recognizable inscriptions on objects);
- Questions were asked: where did this object come from, how did it get to where it was eventually found, what were the details of disposal; and
- Use wear analysis revealed information on the history and use of the artefact.

One of the main points that arose from the examination of these artefacts was that to understand them better they should be related back to the archaeological excavation. The conservator can make better identification of objects and the context of which they were owned with a better understanding of the site from which they came. The presentation was enhanced by displaying the artefacts for the audience and a discussion around each.

Belconnen Naval Transmitting Station – A history to be ruined or saved?

Peter Dowling

Belconnen Naval Transmitting Station was opened in 1939 to serve as the main communications facility for the Royal Australian Naval fleet. The Receiving Station for the facility was located at HMAS Harman. Bells, as it was affectionately known throughout the Navy, was part of a world-wide naval network of radio establishments providing communications for the Australian, British and other Commonwealth nations and allies. It played a major role in the defence history of Australia and was listed on the Register of the National Estate and Commonwealth owned Heritage Places Register. It was decommissioned in 2005, and the Department of Defence (DoD) is in the process of selling the buildings and land. Its future is yet to be determined. In 2006, despite a strong campaign by the National Trust and Engineers Australia (ACT), the main transmitting masts were felled and sold for scrap metal, despite being listed as integral elements of the heritage fabric. Since then, the process towards eventual disposal by the DoD has continued with uncertainty about the conservation and retention of the transmitters and buildings.

The History of Ruins – Hoping to involve people/government in site conservation and interpretation

Helen Cooke

The Canberra Archaeological Society (CAS) has been active in advising the ACT Government on the conservation of several historic sites in the ACT.

The Valley – Gribbles Homestead, 1860s, located in Gungahlin on ACT land. A CMP has been prepared but not implemented. The site remains fenced and the stone, brick and pisé walls are deteriorating due to weathering. There was considerable interest by the Bergmann Anglican Primary School in the early 2000s in conserving it, and although students are still visiting the site there has been no financial or other support from the ACT Government. CAS applied to review the CMP and recommend management policies on the Valley but was unsuccessful in a grant application. There is, however, some positive future for the site as the ACT Government has allocated funds to the conservation and CAS has submitted a programme including reviewing the conservation plan and subsequent investigation and conservation.

12 Mile Homestead site in the Molonglo Valley – Richard Moore's lease. The area is to be developed for a new town just north of Weston Creek. CAS wrote to the Chief Minister to offer assistance and advice and to comment on a heritage investigation but was not at first successful. However, CAS was asked to attend an on-site meeting at 12 Mile with Heritage Unit and ACT Planning and Land Authority staff to discuss future protection and conservation requirements. CAS may be able to do an excavation on site before development. Ceramics, glass and iron artefacts have been identified at the site.

Crinigans Stone Cottage ruin is a conservation success story. The site was excavated by CAS in 1992 and 1994. Crinigan family members were instrumental and active in the retention of the ruin and its preservation and conservation. The fence which enclosed the site has been removed and the area cleared to allow public access. The low remains of the stone walls were conserved to show the plan of the building. Collected artefacts from Crinigans have been catalogued and nominated to the ACT Heritage Register.

The artefacts collected from Crinigans are in the possession of family relatives so they are safe in the short term. But this raises the question of whether the ACT Government plans to provide a local museum to house this and similar collections for future conservation and study.

Horse Park Homestead, Gungahlin, and grounds contained historic, built elements, natural significance in the wetlands area (Latham's Snipe) and evidence of Aboriginal occupation pre-colonization and after contact (glass artefacts). The Indigenous, historic and natural heritage values of the site were recognised in heritage listing but only a small area of the former grazing property has been retained and the values of the wetland and associated cultural sites has been compromised. At the time the ACT Government decreed a large area of degraded agricultural land, artificial dams and regrowth as a nature reserve – Mulligans Flat. This sop to the environmental lobby blurred the political horse trading which resulted in the loss of sufficient space around Horse Park to conserve its landscape.

In summary it appears that places of significance may be conserved or at least interpreted if they are lucky enough to be in areas ACTPLA has already ear marked for public open space – usually on the fringes of new suburbs or in areas which have too many topographical challenges to lead to large profits from development. If only the ACT adhered to the principles of the Burra Charter (to which Australia is a signatory) which state that an assessment of significance should be made before and independently of management requirements.