Abstract.
The conservation in situ of colonial archaeological remains is today regularly required by heritage and planning authorities. Examples in post-colonial nations have proliferated in recent years, in line with similar archaeological projects around the globe. These conserved sites tend to fall into a number of categories: archaeological landscapes, where conserved remains become a layer in a rich urban environment; archaeology as an aesthetic focus: where the archaeology inspires a design approach to a place; and symbolic or ‘sacred’ sites; where the site is linked to, or embodies, crucial cultural and historical themes. These examples of conservation in situ are generally cited as examples of the maturing heritage conservation system, as in past decades conservation in situ was often seen as the unachievable aim of archaeological heritage management, due in part to minimal public and political support for conservation in the face of development pressure. While these places are certainly partly ‘conservation successes’, they are also the result of distinctive forms of cultural practice emerging in response to cultural change, including perceptions of cultural globalization. The technical achievement of conservation in situ, particularly when presented within bold new urban and architectural designs, represents the technological success of the fully modern nation as participant in the global economy, while also constructing ‘material memories’ of pasts which are portrayed as uniquely local. Such cultural practices have recently been termed ‘memory work’ because of the way the conservation of archaeological remains can be seen to construct material memories of particular aspects of the past (Hamilakis and Labanyi, 2008). I argue that this involvement of archaeological conservation in ‘memory work’ has meant that some of the traditional philosophies and practices of archaeological heritage management have been outgrown, and suggest ways that significance assessment and conservation methods in particular, need to be re-conceptualised in the context of cultural change.

1 Introduction

In a globalising world where architecture and urban design are no longer clearly differentiated between cultures and locations, newly layered urban environments are an attempt to make the past a visible presence in contemporary life, emphasize local uniqueness and celebrate local identities and stories. My focus in this paper is urban archaeological heritage conservation in post-colonial nations; where history and heritage engage with the legacies of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the relations between colonizers and Indigenous peoples. I particularly want to explore the socio-cultural role of historical archaeological sites and heritage places i.e. sites which post-date colonization in this context, where material memories are crafted, literally, from the ruins of colonialism (Healy 1997).

Archaeological heritage conservation has participated in the creation of layered urban landscapes in several ways. It has advocated for the physical conservation of these past layers and it has provided the places, objects and stories to inspire creative past/present connections through design and interpretation. The interplay of archaeological remains and new architectural and urban designs could now be said to constitute a particular kind of ‘aesthetic’, a new urban vernacular of infinite local variation where urban design and architecture incorporate, and are inspired by, traces of revealed past landscapes. As architects and designers must come to grips with all aspects of the existing physical, urban and natural environment through their design process, archaeology can now be sought out as an aspect of the local environment which provides a design focus, a leitmotif or an identity, for an urban precinct.
This situation is a great opportunity for heritage managers and archaeologists, but it is not without challenges. In this paper I ask: what are the cultural drivers and causes for this situation? Is it the maturing heritage conservation system, as it garnered greater community support, or is it a response to broader cultural change? How can we better understand and respond, through our heritage management practices and philosophies, to cultural change and the role that heritage conservation plays in it? What socio-cultural role do these conserved archaeological remains go on to play in the life of communities; how are they experienced; what messages do they transmit and how do they shape understandings of past and present, community and place? This paper is based on research in progress for the: ‘Material Memories: the conservation of in situ historical archaeological remains in postcolonial nations’ project, funded by the University of Canberra, and represents the first steps in gathering data to begin to answer the questions posed above.

2 Heritage and Cultural Change

Contemporary cultural heritage breaks radically with the western tradition, documented from Renaissance and later Europe, of the appreciation of ruins and ancient sites as reminders of death and mortality; as moral lessons on humility, instructing how even the great and powerful are eventually reduced to rubble and dust (Woodward 2002, 88). In contrast, twentieth and twenty first century heritage sites are described as cultural anchors, touchstones, symbols of ownership, territory, belonging and identity. Rather than being understood as linking contemporary societies to death, humility and frailty; these sites conjure a vision of cultural immortality. This hubristic role of heritage has been intimately involved with the construction and bolstering of national and ethnic identities and, in the postcolonial world, with projects which range from legitimizing colonial occupation, to those which embody historical revision and reconciliation. What these contemporary forms of heritage have in common is their future focus, using elements of the past to represent shared values which become a basis for a vision of the nation’s future. This is a particularly powerful conceit in postcolonial nations, where suitable symbols of history and cultural values are constantly sought and constructed, as expressions of a shared identity for a culturally heterogeneous population (Ireland 2001, Rowlands 1994, Trigger 1989).

1.1 COLONIALISM AND HERITAGE

The title of this paper recalls Chris Healy’s From the Ruins of Colonialism: history as social memory (1997). Healy’s research dealt with how ideas about the past circulate in the public sphere; how museums, heritage places and less formal commemorations ‘perform’ the relationship between past and present and create a field he termed ‘social memory’. Healy’s research began in the 1980s (1988 was the Bicentenary of the arrival of the First Fleet in New South Wales and the founding of Sydney), an era of unprecedented government interest and investment in Australia’s historical landscape and in promoting representations of national identity. His research was completed in the 1990s, when Australia had plummeted into the ‘history wars’, a period when the meaning of the colonial past was hotly debated in politics, the media, and in scholarship (Macintyre and Clark, 2003). The ‘history wars’ were largely about the legacy of colonialism; how should the nation understand and deal with this legacy and how was it perpetuated through practices such as heritage, history and archaeology? These were poignant questions for heritage practitioners, who had been lobbying for recognition of the values of colonial and Indigenous cultural heritage since the late 1960s. Anne Bickford wrote in 1991 about colonial heritage places such as Port Arthur in Tasmania: ‘Such abandoned sites are Australia’s romantic ruins, the equivalent of Britain’s Tintern Abbey or Stonehenge. The presence of old sites has a powerful effect. It legitimises a society’s occupation of the land and gives it historical depth. Surely a people must have a valid claim to ownership of a land punctuated with sites marking its conquest’ (Bickford 1991, 77).

These concerns were shared broadly around the Pacific, where, since the 1970s, ripples of critique of the ongoing implications of colonialism were caused by indigenous cultural and political movements as well as academic analyses (Lydon 2006, 297). In her comparative review of historical archaeology in the Pacific region, Lydon has pointed out how, in societies administered by neo-colonial governments; such as Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, struggles between settlers and Indigenous people continue for control of the past, while states moving towards, or having achieved, independence, are actively employing ‘archaeological narratives as materials for identity building’ (Lydon 2006, 297). Both situations embody challenges for archaeological heritage management. In Australia, there has been a tendency for Aboriginal cultural landscapes, as opposed to archaeological sites, to remain invisible to cultural heritage managers, although reformulations of landscape approaches since the 1990s attempt to redress this (see for example Byrne 2003,
Cultural heritage has played an important role in critiques of colonialism but has also been implicated in perpetuating some aspects of the historical master narratives of Europe. Heritage management has grappled with cultural imperialism since the 1960s when heritage tended to promote essentialised views of Indigenous cultures. However fundamental transformative practice occurred in many countries by the 1980s, when Indigenous rights discourses incrementally increased acknowledgement of Indigenous ownership and control of their heritage in many post-colonial nations (Murray 1996). A further response to these issues has been the growth in community-based heritage, history and archaeology projects, which has seen ‘consent and consultation’ style research transformed into ‘community controlled’ research (Marshall 2002).

Cultural heritage has therefore been a site of conflict between different social groups and the heritage management system is an arena through which post-colonial nations arbitrate contested identity politics (Ireland and Lydon 2005, 3). The state of ‘post-colonialism’ is characterized most by an urgent political desire for identity and by questions of cultural authenticity. However, there is nothing very ‘post’ about post-colonialism; colonialism can’t be left behind because cultures and environments have been transformed through these processes in ways in which communities and scholars are still trying to understand. As a means of demonstrating the attachment of people to place, and the significance of the past to the present, heritage plays an important role in post-colonial politics, a role which emerges from real life experiences and conflicts, rather than simply from intellectual discussions, as Laurajane Smith observes: ‘While the increasing awareness of subaltern understandings and memories may have been facilitated, both in Britain and in the rest of the Western world, by post-modernist shifts in intellectual theorizations, their existence is not a reflection of this. Certainly the use of heritage to contest received and collective memory is particularly pronounced in post-colonial nations…’ (Smith 2006, 62).

1.2 GLOBALIZATION AND THE ‘CULTURE OF MEMORY’

Early explanations of globalization suggested that the modern world of nations was well on its way to being replaced by a new global system which proclaims an epochal change in world history (eg Albrow 1996; Appadurai 1996). Appadurai, who has since tempered his view on the imminent obsolescence of nations, observes that globalization has led to a complication in the field of sovereignty, which in turn tends to intensify the politics of the past because ‘the coherence of location and recollection cannot be taken for granted’ (Appadurai et.al 2001, 36). When asking how, and under what conditions, locality is produced in the context of globalization, Appadurai suggested that archaeology and its attendant discourses of science and authenticity could be combined to produce a local sovereignty which is perceived as more valid, to ratify and sustain a past which otherwise might seem more vulnerable, this interpretation fits well with both Indigenous heritage and the ‘invention’ of colonial tradition, in a range of post-colonial contexts (Appadurai et.al 2001, 43).

While it is clear that the way the relationship between past and present has been imagined has changed significantly in recent times, should this be seen as a true epistemic shift (Appadurai 1996)? Does globalization represent a complete break with the past, or is it more a consolidation and intensification of the trends of modernity (Lazarus 1999, 18)? The latter position seems to better explain the historical and political realities of the post-colonial world. Globalization, albeit in an earlier technological form, can be interpreted as the key process which has shaped the colonial world: exploration, imperialism, colonization, mass migration and the spread of capitalism are processes which have been crucially inter-woven with the subsequent rise and spread of post-colonial nationalisms. While in many nations, globalization appears to have resulted in an intensification of the level and intensity of nationalistic imagery, it is also clear that existing forms of national and collective identity, and thus shared or social memory, have changed and fragmented in recent decades and, that perhaps, this should be understood as a cultural effect of globalization.
Heritage can be seen as not only a global discourse, but also as a discourse of globalization in its promotion of the idea of heritage as material and authentic (Ireland and Lydon, 2005, 20). Heritage thus occupies a dual position as both a cause and effect of cultural globalization. Andreas Huyssen has claimed that memory politics reached a crescendo as a transnational, and arguably, a global phenomenon in the 1990s, and that this was caused by a transformation of spatial and temporal experience as a major effect of cultural globalization (Huyssen 2003). Huyssen is concerned with the role of trauma, in particular the Holocaust, as a focus for the shared historical memory of the 20th century. In Australia, as in many other post-colonial nations, the narrative of the ‘stolen generations’ and memories of other forms of violence and injustice against Indigenous people form a core of trauma at the heart of 1990s and contemporary public historical discourses and commemorations of the colonial past. Non-indigenous histories of colonialism also tend to focus on shared trauma, including themes of sacrifice in war, convictism, forced migration, slavery, exodus and exile, and battles against a harsh environment (Curthoys 1999, Ireland 2003b). Sharing memories of past trauma in places of commemoration also adds to the effect, noted by both Augé and Nora, of using the material remains of the past to reinforce contemporary concepts of identity through contrast with a brutal past: ‘No longer a genesis, but the deciphering of what we are in the light of what we are no longer’ (Augé 1995, 26, and see Nora 1989).

The field of memory studies casts heritage conservation as ‘memory work’, highlighting a society’s active construction of the physical conditions for shared performances of remembering or commemoration (Hamilakis and Labanyi 2008). Laurajane Smith notes that heritage conservation’s function as both ‘things to have’ and ‘something that is done’, highlights its role in creating the material conditions for rehearsing shared social memory and also in the process of negotiating what will be remembered and what may be forgotten (2006, 65). The rise of the ‘culture of memory’ has also been associated with the emergence of ‘values-centred’ conservation in the United States, where the ‘preservationists’ traditional focus on materiality is augmented by a means for dealing with different cultural interpretations, competing political demands, and economic influences (Mason 2006, 28). Mason earlier suggested however, that the extent to which heritage conservation implicitly shapes memory through its material interventions and the extent to which heritage conservation actually sets out to shape memory and uses conserved material as a means to this end, are questions which are insufficiently explored in conservation or preservation literature (Mason 2004, 64).

1.3 MATERIAL MEMORIES

Archaeology is therefore one of the ways contemporary communities practice or perform social memory and it is a distinctive practice because of its material dimension. As a result of their materiality, archaeological sites and remains are not only amenable to the discourses of empirical science, in a way which history is not, they can also be experienced as things or places which appear to carry the past into the present, in an apparently unmediated way. Rowlands has suggested that ‘in escaping the deceit of historical writing, the production of past material cultures has the spontaneity of a kind of unconscious speech, a taken-for-granted, common-sense existence which simply demonstrates that a people have always existed in that place’ (Rowlands 1994, 136). The materiality of archaeological remains, along with the understanding that they have been lost but are now recovered, is a key to the sensory, experiential and evocative dimension of conserved, excavated sites. This evocative character, combined with the concept which material remains reveal truth and cannot intentionally embody bias, are ideas which have a tradition in Western literature from at least the Renaissance, and are foundation aspects of the modern practice of archaeology (Lowenthal 1985, 244, Thomas 1991, 5).

Archaeology can also reveal the ordinary and everyday things from the past and this has been seen as an antidote to the propensity of history and heritage to focus on the grand and the great. Small things speak of the day to day lives of ordinary people; a factor which has been an important theme in historical archaeology in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. The archaeological study of the recent past, where the historic context is rich, can be justified on the grounds that things reveal information about people who have no monuments and no historical voice: slaves, Indigenous people, women, the illiterate and the poor (Little 1994). Thus historical archaeological sites and research is closely linked to ‘subaltern’ histories which have been influential in challenging dominant imperial narratives.
Things therefore render the past more significant, more palpable, but crucially, not better known. Shared memories are evoked through a sensory experience of authentic material remains, but these archaeological places of memory are created deliberately, shaped by their context in politics and society; they are not involuntary, Proustian moments of recollection inspired by the scent of afternoon tea, but a planned arena where a community agrees to commemorate. Each and every response to an object or site relies upon a memory, a history or a narrative framework within which it can be sited. The experience of contact with archaeological remains of the colonial past in culturally diverse, post-colonial societies links more strongly to shared understandings of the progress, success and inclusion of the postcolonial nation, than to particular interpretations of the past. The experience of authenticity is an important component of this carefully constructed ‘aesthetic’ of archaeological remains conserved in the midst of new urban places. Archaeology, science and history combine to produce a frisson of contact with an almost forgotten past (Jones 2009, 136, Holtorf and Schadla-Hall 1999, 243).

2.0 Archaeological Places

The previous discussion provides some context on the potential and observed cultural effects of globalization, and how history, heritage and memory participate in these processes. It is broadly agreed that the fields of memory and heritage occupy a somewhat different social space in post-colonial nations, to that in Europe or other ‘old world’ countries, but whether further patterns of experience can be identified in post-colonial heritage and memory requires further research and analysis. Huyssen argues that the invasion of our urban spaces and cities by manifestations of memory and temporality is one of the most intriguing cultural phenomena of our times, suggesting that imagined palimpsests of historical memory are increasingly being given material form: “the strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses and heterotopias” (Huyssen 2003, 7). The need for experiences of the past in the present, and for the use of conserved archaeological remains in urban environments, as a trigger for social memory, has intensified, become more broadly shared in communities in many parts of the globe, e.g. APPEAR project, (Matero 2000), and for archaeology in Metro stations around the world see the Metrobits website). While there is extensive literature on the technology and techniques of archaeological conservation and preservation in situ, there has been more limited discussion on its perceived cultural effects and the meanings and responses these places might transmit to, or shape in, communities (but see Asensio 2006, Fouseki and Sandes 2009).

The growing number of archaeological places around the world conserved and displayed in situ is generally understood as evidence of the maturing heritage conservation system, related to the growth of cultural tourism and the building influence of the ICOMOS Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage, the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter and related international doctrine (Willems 2008). While these places are certainly partly ‘conservation successes’, and while the important effect of conservation doctrine is not disputed, the growing use of conserved archaeological remains over the last two decades, particularly in urban locations, also needs to be recognized as the result of a distinctive new form of cultural practice emerging in response to cultural change, including perceptions of cultural globalization. This cultural practice is a form of urban design which has created an aesthetic of material memories and authenticity. Is this a problem for the aims and ethics of heritage conservation? Only if heritage conservation fails to critically engage with cultural change and the challenges it poses to established philosophy and practice.

I was drawn to investigate this particular area of heritage practice because my ‘in-the-field’ experiences suggested that the socio-cultural context for this practice was changing, and had in fact changed considerably since I first started working in heritage management in the late 1980s. Conservation in situ of significant colonial archaeological remains, particularly sites of high research potential, has been an aim of archaeological heritage management in Australia since the 1980s, following trends in historical archaeological site conservation in the United States (Temple 1986 and 1988). Successful examples of conservation in situ were however rare and often highly controversial, not only because conservation in situ prevented commercial development, but also because of disputes about the value, significance and meaning of the physical remains in question. However, in the last decade the number of conservation in situ projects in Australia and New Zealand has grown steadily and quickly both in capital cities and regional towns. This project appears to have a number of drivers. Consent conditions imposed by regulatory authorities requiring conservation are certainly one, but I have also been involved in a recent project, which is still underway, where the developers and their design team decided to plan for in situ conservation and display of archaeological remains prior to consent conditions being imposed.
Anecdotal evidence suggests that conservation of colonial archaeological remains is today seen as a more desirable option by more members of the community, whereas, in previous decades, many would have suggested that this kind of activity was only appropriate in places like Greece and Italy and that the archaeology of colonial periods was not really old enough to be of interest. I suspect that this change of attitude is more likely to be driven by the designers, engineers and architects who expound the vision for how the past and present can co-exist in the urban landscapes, than by the more academic assessments of the cultural significance of the remains in question. Is this idiom, or ‘aesthetic’, of archaeological remains from the recent colonial past conserved in situ, a device which mimics the historic depth of ancient European cities? Does it aim to make the post-colonial decades, more like Europe by providing evidence of similar historical depth? Does this also link to the use of archaeology to provide material evidence of legitimacy and tradition as a basis for sovereignty? I suspect all these elements have some significance in the process; but I think that the key here is the use of archaeological remains as a device to highlight the modernity, technological sophistication and economic success of the post-colonial nation, i.e. the contrast between old and new emphasizing ‘progress’ from a colonial outpost to a fully modern nation (Hamilakis 2001).

2.2 TYPES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL PLACES

Rather than looking at how remains have been conserved as the basis for a typology of conserved archaeological places (Fouseki and Sandes 2009), I consider categories based on their meaning and significance as they are encountered in the urban environment. This typology is partly based on understandings of the cultural significance of these places, as it has been expressed in assessments, but also highlights how cultural significance assessments tend not to foreshadow well, the way places change as they are revealed and conserved, and they way they are experienced following their conservation and display. Displaying the excavated archaeological remains of the colonial past is a selective and constructed process, perhaps particularly so in places like Australia and New Zealand, where colonial sites are likely to be unencumbered by monumental masonry and where remains are usually small scale and require considerable interpretation to be visually legible. The examples discussed in this section are drawn from Australia and New Zealand and focus on urban places, rather than rural or remote sites which are conserved and experienced through somewhat different processes and in different contexts.

I suggest three categories for the analysis of conserved archaeological places. First, archaeological landscapes, where the archaeological remains are experienced primarily as a historic layer in an urban environment.; Secondly archaeology as an aesthetic focus where the archaeological remains inspire a design approach to a place or precinct. Thirdly, symbolic or ‘sacred’ sites, where the fabric of the site is of such high cultural significance, research potential, symbolic or social value, and is linked to such powerful cultural memories, narratives or events, that its physical conservation is seen as necessary for commemoration. Of course many sites cross over these categories and display aspects of each of the three types, but the types are useful to explore the conservation in situ process and the nature of the urban places it creates.

Archaeological Landscapes

In this category archaeological remains are used to manifest memories of past places and communities, and to merge their traces with contemporary developments. This is a popular approach in Australia and New Zealand in 2010, with the inventory of places growing annually, although very little has yet been published about such projects. The Cumberland and Gloucester Street excavation in Sydney’s Rocks district is an exception. The excavation and subsequent research outcomes have been published widely and have been significant to the historical archaeology of the colonial world (eg Karskens 1999). The decision to conserve the site in situ was made several years after completion of the excavation and after its research results had been publicized widely and promoted in publications by the excavation team (Godden Mackay Logan Heritage Consultants and Grace Karskens). The archaeological remains on the site consist of low footings, stone flagged floors and streets, a number of wells and cesspits, all the humble remains of a humble neighborhood. Not visually arresting, they need to be traced carefully by visitors so they can understand what they are looking at. However the depth of research carried out, reflecting in turn the integrity of the archaeological site, has populated this ghost neighborhood with the stories of people who lived here, the extraordinary and ordinary stories of convict and immigrant families. This site challenges the understandings of visitors about what life was like in the early colony. In recent years the site has been given a new life with the development of a Youth Hostel, which sits lightly over the site, conserving the entire archaeological neighborhood in situ and using it as an education facility (Figure 1).
archaeological landscape approach is a feature of Sydney's Rocks district as a whole, which has many conserved sites contributing to the experience of a rich, layered urban landscape, with a deeply rooted urban identity and sense of place (Johnson 2003).

An example of the archaeological landscape approach from Dunedin in New Zealand, is the remains of corduroy track, found during excavations for the construction of a new shopping centre (New Zealand Historic Places Trust/Pouhere Taonga n.d.). The remains of the 1840s timber causeway have been conserved and will be displayed underneath a glass floor within the new shopping mall complex. The timber is still currently being conserved off site, but the display has been constructed. This ‘archaeological landscape’ suggests historical depth and continuity of use in this place, even over the relatively shallow timescales of the colonial period. The causeway was assessed as an evocative remnant of Dunedin’s frontier past when the town was known as ‘Mudedin’, due to the boggy conditions of the area prior to major development following the Otago gold rush of the 1860s. Is this how it will be understood by viewers in the context of a viewing port in the floor of a new shopping mall? The archaeological landscape of the Rocks is contextualized within a district where the urban form has changed little since the early 19th century and where the streets and laneways provide a context and a scale, within which archaeological remains are interpretable.

Archaeology as Aesthetic Focus

In 2003, the utilitarian, partly demolished site of the 1920s Glebe incinerator was a remnant of Sydney Harbour’s industrial past, designed by the famous architect Walter Burley Griffin. Through archaeology, interpretation and urban design, the site has become a ‘homage’ to Griffin’s architectural legacy and to the lost history of Sydney Harbour as an industrial working port. Architectural remnants and archaeological remains, in distinctive Sydney sandstone revealed through excavation, were incorporated into the design of a new residential complex which set out to use the archaeological remains as an ‘aesthetic focus’ for the new development (Australand et al 2007).

Towns Place at Walsh Bay, Sydney Harbour (Figure 2) is another site where archaeological remains and materials have provided design inspiration for the redevelopment of this inner city precinct. The site of a significant archaeological excavation of a harbourside industrial precinct, remnant architectural remains have been incorporated within new buildings and the distinctive texture and tones of old, and new, Sydney sandstone provide the theme for the design, evoking colonial architecture, the natural environment and the underlying geology of Sydney. Artefacts relating to the seafaring past of the precinct are displayed in foyers around the square, forming repetitive patterns from the archaeological objects. The use of Sydney sandstone at this site, as at the Glebe incinerator site, evokes a particular sense of place. It suggests not only the natural environment and prior Aboriginal occupation, but also the distinctive colonial use of this building material; particularly its associations with the convict chain gangs which were used to quarry the stone for roads and other construction. These sites use archaeological remains to create an identity for a new urban precinct, taking the edge off newness by referencing the past and its aesthetic qualities.
Sacred/Symbolic sites
The final category includes sites where the conservation of the fabric takes on a much higher priority, because of its association with significant historical events and people, and as rare physical evidence of early colonial history. Such places link to strong, mythic themes in history and memory, particularly to notions of origins and birthplaces. A New Zealand example in this category is of particular interest because Maori cultural remains have been conserved in situ in the centre of the capital city of Wellington. Remains of the Te Aro Pa, a Maori habitation site, which was occupied in the early colonial period from the 1820s to the 1880s, were discovered during construction of an apartment building (Kerr 2008). Following extended negotiations, the apartment building was redesigned to enable in situ conservation of three structures (whare ponga), with two permanently accessible for public display. The conserved site was opened in October 2008, with cultural rituals, conducted by Maori people from Wellington and Taranaki, designed to re-awaken the site. These archaeological remains have been interpreted by the Wellington City Council as an important symbol of the shared colonial heritage of Wellington, particularly significant as rare surviving remains of Maori heritage within the urban context of New Zealand’s capital city.

By way of contrast, in Sydney in 1995, a focus on Indigenous and contact history in the newly opened Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House was seen as an affront by some groups who had campaigned for its preservation and who resented the Museum’s ‘failure’ to celebrate the site as the birthplace of the nation (Ireland 1996). While the Museum of Sydney has since been successful and provocative, it has provided little focus on the meanings of the material remains over which it presides.

The Museum of Sydney is on the site of the archaeological remains of Australia’s first Government House (Figure 3), the construction of which began in 1788, the first year of white colonization in NSW. It was demolished, after housing nine colonial governors, in 1845. After a series of excavations of the site from 1983, and a long term public campaign for its preservation, the NSW government finally agreed to conserve the site in 1987. There followed several years of deliberations on how best to achieve this end and finally it was concluded that the fabric of the site, largely soft, under fired bricks, was too fragile for long term display and should be reburied and conserved under a plaza. Only two small areas are now exposed to public view (Figure 3).

At this site the archaeological exposure of tangible relics of 1788 evoked an, at the time, unique response from the community. However following the in situ preservation of the archaeological remains, archaeology became only one of several competing modes of interpretation of the place. As the issues of conservation of the remains became pre-eminent, research questions for the excavated material were not developed and this caused long lasting problems for the interpretation of the site. The first curator of the site’s museum accused archaeology of producing meaningless, fragmentary interpretations for the public: ‘What is this place?... It’s not an archaeology site; the conservation action was to preserve the site under concrete. It’s not a house museum; the house doesn’t exist. It’s not a museum of collections; we have a collection of archaeological artefacts that will be stored in the study centre but can never be the basis for complete interpretation of the place’ (Emmett 1994). The conservation action of reburying most of these highly symbolic remains seems to have caused a conundrum for their interpretation. The fact that
archaeological research on the excavated material was not persevered with, has also meant that their interpretation cannot be anchored in authentic narratives derived from the material—in the way that the interpretation of the Cumberland and Gloucester Street archaeological landscape, discussed above, has been successful.

Figure 3. Archaeological remains on view in the Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House. Source: the author.

A final example in this category is the conservation of the archaeological remains discovered during the redevelopment of Sydney’s Conservatorium of Music (Casey 2005). The conservation of these remains was not driven by archaeological assessments of their cultural significance or research potential. The aim of this landscape archaeology project was to extract as much meaning as possible from this landscape, designed and constructed from earliest colonial times, along with colonial and pre-colonial evidence of Aboriginal occupation (Casey 2005). Excavations in 1998 revealed, as expected, roads, drains and other landscape features; however the site then became the centre of a public campaign designed to stop the re-development of the Conservatorium site. The conservation in situ of the archaeological remains was therefore driven by a public campaign which developed an argument for community attachment to these features, but in the context of opposition to the proposed new design for the site (Casey 2005). The retention of some archaeological elements in situ was then required by the government regulatory authority, necessitating amendments to the architectural design but certainly not avoiding the impacts of scale the community activists had opposed. This conservation in situ included landscape features, such as drains, and also the removal of sections of a rock cut cistern and several lengths of a brick barrel drain, so that they could then be reinstated in the underground areas of the new building, in approximately their original location. The resulting display is visually quite heroic (Figures 4 and 5), but extremely limited in its interpretative value because of the unenlightening (banal) nature of the remains displayed (drains and a well), and the loss of relationship between these elements and their landscape context.

But why is this site included in the category for sacred or symbolic sites? The New South Wales Heritage Council, which required this conservation, suggested that these remains were of cultural significance because the community held strong beliefs about them. They summarized these beliefs thus:

- Because the archaeological remains relate to the Macquarie family (Governor Macquarie 1810-1821) and first Government House they are symbolic of the colonization of this country by the British and as such they evoke powerful emotions in sectors of the non-indigenous community relating to the establishment of order and authority in the new settlement...
- The existence of broad arrow or ‘convict’ bricks evokes images of hardship and suffering throwing into relief the maturation and success of present day Australia...
- these remains might evoke a similar but opposite emotion in the indigenous community centred on the complete modification and domination of the Sydney Landscape (sic) by the invaders… (Heritage Council of NSW 1998).

The Heritage Council of New South Wales therefore claimed very specifically that these archaeological remains were symbols of key themes of social memory for white Australians: the suffering of convicts, the hostile Australian environment, the colonial imposition of order and civilisation, and Governor Macquarie as hero. The findings also explicitly state the role of these remains in reinforcing a perception of contemporary Australia as a successful, modern nation, establishing clearly the ‘sacred’ quality of these remains in the context of national heritage.
Hamilakis has discussed the sacred qualities of antiquities in the context of the Greek nation in a brief review of archaeological displays in the Athens metro (Hamilakis 2001). In escaping the formal space of the museum, are these antiquities becoming more a part of everyday life and space or are they transferring their sacred/ritualistic qualities to the everyday spaces of the metro, transforming the typical ‘non-place’ of the modern metro station, into a ‘place’ (Augé 1995)? Hamilakis (writing in 2001) argued that it was still too early to judge what the socio-cultural effect of the antiquities ‘escaping’ the museum would be, but he suspected that these types of archaeological displays would expand the sacred qualities of the museum into the profane spaces of the urban environment, imbuing these places with special qualities which both represent the sacred realm of national heritage, as well as, ironically, reinforcing the modernity of the nation through contrast with the antique.

![Figure 4](image1.png)

**Figure 4.** Inside the below ground foyer of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, featuring in situ archaeological remains on the upper levels, exposed bedrock and display cases of archaeological finds. Source: the author.

![Figure 5](image2.png)

**Figure 5.** Remains of a rock cut cistern in the below ground foyer of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Source: the author.

### 3.0 Heritage Management Issues

The promise of archaeology, and the *raison d’être* of archaeological heritage management, is the promise that new knowledge can be acquired from the material remains of the past. The essence of heritage conservation however, lies in the connections made between memory and environment (Mason 2004, 64). This can cause tensions between using heritage places to confirm received interpretations, which link to themes of social memory, and exploiting the research potential and broader cultural significance of archaeological sites. Clearly, ‘heritage conservation’ and ‘archaeology’ are only two of a range of stakeholder positions amongst groups which construct meaning from the material past. The
examples discussed here clearly demonstrate that architects, designers, and property developers, as well as local and national, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, all engage in the active ‘use’ of colonial archaeological heritage, as much as any other form of tangible or intangible heritage. However, is the archaeological heritage management process successfully offering voice to the range of cultural positions and values which relate to archaeological sites? Is it living up to its ethical objectives of decolonization and empowerment of disenfranchised groups? This paper is not rehearsing an argument for regaining archaeological disciplinary control of the meanings of heritage, rather it reinforces the need for a more sophisticated analysis of the heritage management process which currently supports conservation in situ, but is less helpful in understanding the long-term results and benefits of these conservation actions in socio-cultural terms.

Willem Willems has recently written of the need for reflective critique of the use of archaeological conservation in situ as a heritage management tool, noting that the ‘success’ in Europe of the conservation in situ option has lead to its uncritical use and a tendency for preservation to be regarded as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end (2008, 289). This early research on archaeological conservation in post-colonial contexts, shows that archaeological remains are increasingly being seized upon to provide material links with the past in urban environments, a process which reinforces the importance and historical depth of the recent colonial period in an active memory making program. While assessments of cultural significance aim to consider the historic, social, scientific, aesthetic and spiritual significance of places, following the Burra Charter, it can be difficult to predict the form that community attachments to items revealed through excavation will take, as shown in the case of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. While the cultural significance of the remains of first Government House site in Sydney and the Te Aro Pa in Wellington seem to have been well understood at the time of their excavation, does that assessment of cultural value align with the way in which communities interact with these conserved archaeological remains today? How well is significance assessment guiding decision making about what should be conserved in situ and understanding the long term management requirements of such places? How can we plan for the management of the values of conserved archaeological remains, which change as the values of their encompassing architectural environment change and become dated, and less in line with public expectations for interpretation and display?

In terms of the relationship between archaeology and the conservation process, Camardo (2007) and Matero (2000) have gone so far as to question the current distinction between the processes of excavation and conservation, where conservation is often seen as the neutral, technical process which follows on after excavation to preserve a site. Conservation is also a research process which can contribute cultural knowledge about a site, as well as about processes of deterioration and how to arrest them. Closer collaboration between conservators and archaeologists during the excavation phase, could contribute significantly to more sustainable and more culturally meaningful conservation and interpretation outcomes for archaeological sites. Conserved and displayed archaeological remains are no longer archaeological sites per se, they have become a new kind of heritage place which is used by communities in different ways. We understand little about this process in post-colonial contexts and the risks and opportunities that it entails for heritage conservation (Asensio 2006).

Essentially, the current emphasis on conservation in situ within new urban designs gives rise to an urgent need for the cultural significance of conserved archaeological sites to be monitored and re-evaluated, just as the fabric of any heritage place needs to be monitored, as does the relationship between the condition of fabric and cultural values. In this vein, a priority is for more long-term studies of conserved archaeological sites to be undertaken to document how and why values and public perceptions of archaeological places change over time. Lyon’s study of the reconstructed Temple of Mithras in London is an example of this approach (Lyon 2007). Lyon argues that the decision-making process used to determine that the temple remains should be moved back to the temple’s original site, failed to consider the heritage values that the temple had accrued as an example of 1960s archaeological conservation and reconstruction, reflecting the values and socio-economic imperatives of those times (Lyon 2007, 31).

The political drivers for re-assessment and re-formulations of concepts of colonial heritage are unlikely to become less intense over the decades to come, although their emphases will undoubtedly change. Heritage conservation methodologies, including the role of the conservation process and significance assessment, need to be reformulated as anthropological tools for understanding cultural change, as well as for the more passive process of recording and documenting values, and stabilizing and preserving fabric, at any given point in time. The Parks Canada concept of ‘commemorative integrity’, which is used in monitoring the conservation of cultural significance, rather than in monitoring the performance of a management plan or organization, offers direction in this area, as discussed by Mason (2006, 40). Scholarly projects such as ‘archaeological ethnography’,...
which seek engagement with the political context and multi-temporal nature of archaeological sites, including consideration of the social and political interests served by research and conservation (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009) are similar.

Current cultures of memory tend to use archaeological remains, and their inherent aura of authenticity, to provide evocative experiences of the past, rather than building on archaeological research to present more challenging, or confronting interpretations (Ireland 2003a). This fact has worked against realizing the full research potential of colonial archaeological places, where conservation for future generations and for future research tends to be the stated aim (Karskens 2002, 44). However, as we saw with the First Government House site, debates over the range of meanings of the conserved material were hampered by limited archaeological analysis and research. New and challenging interpretations of the past require investment in research, analysis and creativity. Such interpretations of the past are not produced by technically excellent conservation, inspiring designs and architecture, or by the experience of authenticity. Without the input of critical and challenging archaeological research on the material culture of the place, and without an anthropologically informed theory of heritage values and memory making processes. The interpretations relayed by these colonial archaeological places tend to confirm received narratives and celebratory forms of nationalism, focused on how the civilized present has triumphed over a brutal and racist past.

4.0 Conclusions

Recent intensification of global cultures of memory, perhaps in response to transformations in the experience of temporality which are seen as a key effect of cultural globalization, give rise to challenges for archaeological heritage conservation. Archaeological places have been conserved in situ to serve a range of purposes: to manifest layers of history and provide past/present connections in urban places; as evocative, aesthetic devices which provide identities for urban designs; and as commemorations of symbolic and mythic associations which derive meaning from the aura of authenticity provided by material relics. These conserved places extend the domain of the museum into the everyday urban environment, creating a form of symbolic cultural capital which contributes to the identity of the nation and the locality.

But has this conservation process challenged and educated about the past and shown how the post-colonial present is riddled with the evidence of historically based assumptions and practices? As historian Greg Dening suggests, the experience of such heritage places tends to be largely sensory. Our experience of standing in the remains of a tiny room from 1820, touching the soft bricks from 1788, or the sandstone hewn by convict forbears, tends to confirm our present sense of ourselves and confirms how we have become more sophisticated, more affluent and more successful (Dening 1997). Archaeological heritage can disrupt this sensual experience of the past with more challenging ideas. It is the job of the heritage manager not to just neutrally document and conserve cultural values; but to engage with the conservation process, the history and the material remains to question how those values were formed and how places both shape, and are shaped by, cultural change. Significance assessment processes and conservation methods in archaeological heritage management need to be extended to acknowledge the various uses to which archaeological remains are being put, and to include ongoing monitoring and analyses of the ‘social life’ of these cultural places. In short, a critical and theoretically engaged heritage practice can see the development of heritage research which contributes to the understanding of cultural change in the context of cultural globalization, rather than simply documenting this change and conserving the relics of its passing.

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6. References


