

HERITAGE 2010

HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Edited by

Rogério Amoêda
Sérgio Lira
Cristina Pinheiro

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Edited by

Rogério Amoêda
Sérgio Lira
Cristina Pinheiro

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Rogério Amoêda, Sérgio Lira & Cristina Pinheiro

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Ana Maria Longras Pinheiro

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The Editor

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Separation or procrastination? A retrospective on indigenous-industrial heritage conflicts in Perth and Ottawa

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ABSTRACT: The Carbide Mill in central Ottawa and the Old Swan Brewery in Perth are notable industrial heritage sites, the former because of the technological discoveries that occurred there and the latter for the quality of its architecture. In the late twentieth century, and following the cessation of industrial operations, both abandoned buildings became the sites of occupations by Indigenous groups. While the Canadian occupations in particular were related to wider social issues, in both cases the protestors claimed special affinities with the sites upon which these buildings had been erected. In Perth and in Ottawa there was a degree of public acknowledgement of both the Indigenous and the industrial heritage claims, but the ways in and the extent to which these acknowledgements have subsequently been translated into more concrete reality have differed significantly. In Perth, the redevelopment of the brewery into luxury apartments, offices and eating places includes no indication of the Indigenous significance of the site. However, the state government has worked with local Indigenous and philanthropic organizations to develop a trail through the parkland surrounding the brewery site and local Aborigines lead interpretative tours through the area. In Ottawa, plans for a multicultural meeting place adjacent to the mill have been on the books for several decades and, in the interim, an Indigenous cultural tourism venture has been allowed to operate on the site. This presentation will consider how, following frequently acrimonious confrontations, varying accommodations have been or are being achieved for very different heritages.

1 INTRODUCTION

Graham et al. (2000, 17) contend that "heritage is part of the past which we select in the present for contemporary purposes, be they economic, cultural, political or social". However the "we" that does the selecting in the case of large scale or high profile heritage sites or objects is not necessarily representative of all the groups who may feel that they have a stake in these sites or objects. Where there is dissonance (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996) or contestation (Jones and Shaw, 1997) over the heritage significance of a major site or object, conflict may ensue with the terms and issues of heritage significance to one group being privileged while those of value to other groups are downplayed or obliterated. The dynamiting of the Buddhist statues in the Bamiyan valley of Afghanistan by Islamic fundamentalists in 2001 is a particularly graphic recent example. One context in which there is inherent potential for heritage contestation is that of settler societies, where the heritages of various Indigenous and settler groups are frequently co-located if not necessarily co-existent (Anderson, 2000; Jones and Birdsall-Jones, 2008).

In this paper, we consider two instances of heritage contestation between Indigenous and settler groups over sites and buildings in the centres of the (post)colonial cities of Perth in Australia and Ottawa in Canada. In both cases, derelict nineteenth century industrial buildings with alleged settler heritage significance (architectural in Perth, technological in Ottawa) were sited either on or close to natural sites of alleged cultural heritage significance to certain Indigenous

groups. Also in both cases, these buildings were occupied by groups of (predominantly) Indigenous protestors seeking to establish either their rights to the sites or wider social and political recognition or both. However, the accommodations between the heritage claims of the Indigenous and settler groups at both sites are more diverse and are still ongoing. Therefore, although we have commented on these issues more extensively in an earlier publication (Jones and Bird-sall-Jones, 2003), we see some merit in bringing these stories up to date and in providing something of a retrospective on the two disputes. In the remainder of this paper we will treat the two sites separately, summarizing the Indigenous and the settler heritage claims and tracing the history of the heritage conflicts and of their partial and/or incomplete resolution before drawing some comparisons between them.

2 THE OLD SWAN BREWERY SITE, SWAN RIVER, PERTH, AUSTRALIA

The Swan Brewery was built in an embayment on the steep northern bank of the Swan River approximately a kilometre downstream from the current site of the Perth Central Business District. Prior to European settlement, this area, which they termed Goonininup, had both socioeconomic and spiritual significance for the local Nyungar Aboriginal people (Vinnicombe, 1989). The Swan River and the surrounding bushland offered valuable food sources for the Nyungars and, although the river estuary is saline at this point, there was a freshwater spring at the foot of the slope. This site was therefore suitable for camping, hunting and gathering. The site's spiritual significance relates to its location on a dreaming track related to the Waugyl, a mythical serpent and creator being associated with water courses. In different versions of the creation stories, the Waugyl either entered or left the river at this point. A large rock at the site was considered to be the Waugyl's egg. This was removed by early European settlers and its current whereabouts are unknown.

Because of the site's economic and spiritual importance, it became a seasonal camping site and a location for teaching and initiation ceremonies. The precise locations for these activities are not known and, in the case of the teaching and initiation sites, this knowledge would have been restricted to initiated and gender specific Nyungar subgroups only. However, it is likely that the social and camping sites would have been closer to the spring and the river (i.e. the present brewery site) while the spiritual and initiation sites would have been in the more secluded, forested valleys on the steep river slope.

Gatherings of Aboriginal people were noted at the site by Dutch and French explorers in the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries respectively. However, European settlement did not occur until 1829 when Lieutenant Governor James Stirling designated Perth as the capital of the newly founded Swan River Colony. Although the local Aborigines left Goonininup after British soldiers camped at the site in 1829, several returned there in the 1830s. As a response to escalating violence between the Nyungars, who were being deprived of their hunting grounds, and the early settlers, who were appropriating these lands for farming, Stirling designated Goonininup as the "Mount Eliza Native Institution". This reserve accommodated about 50 Nyungars in the mid 1830s but, by 1838, most had either died or moved away. For a short while Nyungars visited the former "Interpreter" of the Institution at his house in Perth. But, following complaints from his neighbours, "increasingly stringent measures were introduced ... culminating in legislation which forbade Aboriginal people to enter the City of Perth without written permission" (Vinnicombe, 1989:25). Since this legislation was not repealed until 1954, Nyungar people had their access to Goonininup restricted for over a century.

The presence of river access for transport and the freshwater spring made Goonininup a desirable location for the early British settlers. It was used as a shipyard before it became the Native Institution and afterwards it housed a saw mill, a flour mill, a convict hiring depot and an old mens' home before the first brewery was built in 1879. The Swan Brewery Company took over operations in 1888 and in the 1890s, at the height of the Western Australian gold rush, it commissioned leading local and British architects to design a much larger new building, which was completed in 1897. The new brewery was recognized a 'state of the art' facility and was featured in the London *Brewers Journal* of 1902 (Welborn, 1987). As with most industrial buildings, it underwent modifications over time, but the major external structures remained

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Although a local Nyungar elder had called for the property to be bought by the state and turned into an Aboriginal Cultural Centre in 1978, the brewery was sold to a local developer in 1980. For several years thereafter successive redevelopment proposals for the site were rejected by the City of Perth Planning Committee, largely at the instigation of lobby groups who wished to see the building demolished and the resultant open space (re)integrated into the surrounding Kings Park. In 1985, the State government purchased the site and, having failed to interest any commercial operators in a public-private partnership, it commenced its own redevelopment of the brewery buildings including "a small tavern, theatre and the usual food and retail outlets" (*The West Australian*, June 20, 1988).

At the same time, elements of the Nyungar community made formal and informal appeals to the Town Planning Appeals Tribunal and to several state ministers for the demolition of the brewery and the preservation of the site as open space in acknowledgment of its Indigenous significance. When these appeals all failed, Aboriginal groups occupied the construction site during the workers' absence over the Christmas-New Year break in 1998-9. Many non-Indigenous bodies including church groups and trade unions supported and even joined the occupation and an injunction on the building work was obtained. Finally, in a major and sometimes violent operation involving over one hundred police, the protesters were physically removed from the site in October 1989.

For some time thereafter, battles over the brewery raged in the courts. In 1991, the Full Court ruled that building work could resume. In 1992 the Heritage Council designated the brewery precinct as a place of cultural heritage value, both for its buildings and for its Indigenous significance. In 1995 the state government granted a major construction company a 65 year lease on the property and its redevelopment, as a mixture of offices, luxury apartments and restaurants was finally completed in 2002. The redevelopment adhered strictly to the Heritage Council's architectural guidelines and the building's (settler) industrial heritage is widely acknowledged in machinery exhibits, photographs, signage and marketing. A recent student exercise found that virtually no acknowledgement of the Indigenous significance of the site could be identified on, in or around the building (Dr. Nancy Hudson-Rodd, Edith Cowan University, pers. comm. 2010). Small Indigenous protests occurred outside the building following its completion, initially on a weekly basis and, for several years, on such occasions as Australia Day/Invasion Day.

More recently, however, the Indigenous heritage of the wider area has been much more extensively acknowledged in and beside the Lotterywest Federation Walkway which was opened immediately upslope from the Brewery in Kings Park in 2003. (Lotterywest is a corporatised, and relatively independent, state government instrumentality which uses the profits from its lotteries for a range of charitable purposes.) Although the 620 metre long walkway was undertaken as a project to celebrate the centenary of Australian federation in 2001, there was significant Nyungar (as well as settler) input into its design and construction. It includes a Nyungar Beedawong (performance area/meeting place), features much Nyungar artwork – including depictions of the Waugyl – and, in its elevated (treetop) section overlooks, if not dominates, many views of the Brewery. Furthermore, a local Nyungar group now offers Kings Park Indigenous Tours, using the bush and parkland surrounding the Brewery to demonstrate the area's Indigenous history and heritage. In this part of Perth, therefore, both the Indigenous and the (architectural) settler heritages are now acknowledged, albeit with a degree of spatial separation.

3 THE CARBIDE MILL, VICTORIA ISLAND, OTTAWA, CANADA

Victoria Island is part of the Asticou group of islands in the Ottawa River, very close to what is now the Ottawa city centre. The river was an important travel route for the original Algonquin inhabitants and there is archaeological evidence of a small Indigenous settlement on the south (Ontario) bank opposite Victoria Island. Asticou is the Algonquin word for a boiling pot or kettle (Bond, 1968) and was the original name of the waterfall located between Victoria Island and the north (Quebec) bank of the river. This site, like Gooninup, had Indigenous spiritual significance and, in 1613, the French explorer, Champlain, described ceremonies in which the Al-

gonquin made offerings to the spirit of the falls which he named, in a direct translation, *la Chaudiere* (Kennedy, 1970: 9).

For several centuries following first contact, the Native American tribes of this region were partially co-opted by the Europeans, first into the lucrative fur trade and then into the colonial wars between the British and the French. The colonial authorities therefore sought to maintain good relations with the Indigenous groups to secure their cooperation in the fur trade and, following American independence, their assistance in hostilities with the USA.

With the demise of the fur trade and the end of the War of 1812, the colonial economy shifted to farming and timber cutting. In the nineteenth century the Algonquin and the other local tribes were gradually divested of their lands and forced onto reserves at some distance from Victoria Island and Ottawa (Huitema, 2000).

In the 1820s Captain John Le Breton acquired land on the southern bank of the river which gave him access to Victoria Island and the Chaudiere Falls (NCC, 1988). A bridge was built across the river using the Island in 1828 and, in 1829, the first of several timber slides were constructed to enable large rafts of logs to navigate the falls. In 1842 a dam was constructed to harness the water power, initially for a saw mill, and, by mid-century, the island group had become "the industrial heartland of Ottawa" (Darcy, 2000:1).

In 1857, Ottawa was designated as the capital of Canada and impressive Parliament buildings were constructed on a bluff overlooking Victoria Island by 1866. In spite of this, the islands remained as an industrial area and, in 1900, Thomas Willson, the inventor of a process for the mass production of carbide opened a carbide mill on Victoria Island (http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16300-20450-27615-27616&lang=1&bhcp=1. Accessed April 30, 2010). However, this occurred towards the end of the islands' industrial era. The Federal District Planning Commission (predecessor of the current National Capital Commission) began purchasing property on Victoria Island in 1910; many of the industrial buildings became warehouses and, from mid century, many were cleared to create "landscaped green space" (Darcy, 2000:5). The former carbide mill, by this time one of the few remaining industrial structures, was designated as part of the Canadian National Estate, both as an example of industrial heritage and as the site of notable technological advances.

In 1975, the first Indigenous occupation of the mill occurred after the Native People's Caravan, which had progressed across the country from Vancouver, was displaced from its protest site on Parliament Hill. The protestors invaded the boarded up carbide mill and remained there from September 1975 to February 1976. The mill was has also been the (eventual) site of two further Aboriginal protests against the federal government. The first, in 1990, was an offshoot of an Indigenous protest and occupation at Oka near Montreal. A much more protracted occupation occurred from 1995-1999. This involved the Assembly of First Nations, a group from a variety of tribes from across Canada, which was protesting about land claims. In all three cases the protestors moved from Parliament House/Parliament Hill to Victoria Island/the carbide mill citing both the political significance of being in a visible location close to the Parliament and the cultural and spiritual significance of the proximity of the site to the Chaudiere Falls.

The first group of protestors was evicted from the carbide mill after a period of harassment by the police and the city council, which included the withdrawal of water and electricity during a Canadian winter. Possibly because of this - at least in part - wider government acknowledgement of Indigenous concerns and Indigenous heritage on Victoria Island became apparent as early as 1977. In that year, the National Capital Commission produced a report on the central area of the capital city, with particular reference to the island, which noted that:

"the ethnic and cultural diversity which typifies Canadians should be portrayed. The indigenous native peoples and those minorities not now adequately represented should be adequately featured, as should their relationship to regional and geographical areas. This passive image of Canada past, present and future may complement an active form where individuals may discuss and/or debate National issues. The above activities may be developed inside or in the vicinity of the Carbide building. Small ancillary commercial functions may also be encouraged in the area, such as cafes, craft shops etc." (NCC, 1977: 57)

This recommendation has been built on in subsequent plans and reports (NCC, 1988; 2000; 2005). Indeed, the 2000 publication contains architect's drawings of a "Proposed Aboriginal Centre" (NCC, 2000: 15) to be constructed on the site. To date, however, the rhetoric has not been matched by reality. Even though the 1977 report had recommended that the government

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should "begin development of the Eastern portion of Victoria Island as soon as possible" (NCC, 1977, 55), the carbide mill remains a ruin and the cultural centre is still no more than an architect's drawing.

In spite of these delays, in Ottawa as in Perth, a largely unrelated development has led to the provision of an Indigenous heritage experience at the Eastern end of Victoria Island adjacent to the carbide mill. In 1998, the Odawa Native Friendship Center (which is part of a national network of non-profit, non-political organizations which aim to provide services for Aboriginal people regardless of their tribal affiliations) sponsored the establishment of the Turtle Island Tourism Company. This group initially organized Indigenous performances and displays for schools, tourists and community events. When the third occupation of the carbide mill ended in 1999, they negotiated with the National Capital Commission to set up an Aboriginal Experiences Village (with a stockade, teepees, canoe building and other displays) at the Eastern end of Victoria Island. This venture has been operating successfully for more than a decade and has been the recipient of several regional tourism awards.

4 THE BREWERY AND THE CARBIDE MILL: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Both buildings and their co located Indigenous spiritual sites are on - or in - rivers and are adjacent to their respective city centres. The time lines of the two case studies are impressively similar. First contact between Europeans and the Indigenous populations took place in the seventeenth century. Although interaction between Europeans and the Aboriginal population was much greater in the intervening period in the Canadian case, both Perth and Ottawa were first settled as towns in the 1820s. Construction of the brewery was completed in 1897 and of the carbide mill in 1900, with industrial production occurring for several decades at each site. The occupations of the carbide mill (1975-1976, 1990 and 1995-1999) spanned that at the brewery (1988-1989). The Indigenous heritage significance of Victoria Island/the Chaudiere Falls was officially acknowledged in 1977 and that of the brewery site in 1992. Both buildings were also heritage listed for their industrial significance at around the same time. An Indigenous (heritage) tourism operation commenced at Victoria Island in 1999, while the (partly) Indigenous themed walkway was opened in Kings Park above the brewery in 2003, with an Indigenous tourism operation commencing shortly thereafter. Construction of an Aboriginal Culture Centre on Victoria Island has been proposed since 1977, though construction has yet to commence. The use of the brewery buildings as an Aboriginal Cultural Centre was first suggested in 1978 but this plan was not realized. Much more recently, an Indigenous Cultural Centre has been proposed for the Perth waterfront, a short distance upstream from the brewery. A business case for the Perth waterfront redevelopment, including the Indigenous cultural centre, will be presented in 2010.

These chronological similarities are all the more notable given the varied geographical, political and cultural contexts in which these events occurred. In geographical terms, although a variety of industrial activities took place on the small embayment that was the brewery site for over a century, the slopes surrounding it remained under natural bushland until 1872 when the area was designated as Perth Park. It was renamed Kings Park in 1901 and has remained as one of the city's most popular recreational areas ever since. The industrial brewery buildings were therefore seen by many as at best a local anomaly and at worst as "that unsightly collection of dilapidated buildings" (Welborn, 1987: 206) on the riverfront and thus as being worthy of demolition. For this reason a number of 'establishment' settler groups concurred and even colluded with elements of the Nyungar population in calling for the brewery buildings' removal. By contrast, the Carbide Mill was located in the centre of Ottawa's main industrial area and removal of the structures surrounding it and their gradual replacement with parkland has been a much more recent process and was not such a controversial issue for the local community.

In political terms, Victoria Island is not merely in a central city foreshore location, it is a component of "Canada's Capital Core Area". Given the tensions between 'English' and 'French' Canada, it is symbolically significant that this area encompasses both the Ontario and the Quebec banks of the river and contains such national institutions as Parliament House, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Supreme Court. This area is therefore controlled and planned by the National Capital Commission which seeks to ensure that "the ethnic and cultural

diversity which typifies Canadians should be portrayed" therein (NCC, 1977:57). Even though three occupations of the carbide mill have taken place, the NCC has had a consistent, culturally inclusive and, it would seem, uncontroversial plan for this area for a third of century. No such consistency or harmony has been evident in Perth. The brewery redevelopment (or its demolition) and a series of plans for the redevelopment of the wider Perth waterfront have been divisive issues within Western Australia for decades. The battle lines have variously been drawn between the City of Perth and the Western Australian state government, between conservationists and 'Friends' of the park and the waterfront against architects, developers and those advocating more 'life' for the riverfront and between the Labor and Liberal/National (i.e. conservative) parties at state level. Not surprisingly therefore the fate of the brewery has been repeatedly contested in the City Council's planning committee, in state parliament and in the courts and the planning policies for the brewery and for the wider Perth waterfront have changed repeatedly following elections, parliamentary votes and court rulings.

Culturally, the major contrasts relate to the nature of the Indigenous involvement in both disputes. In Perth, the issue of the brewery's retention or demolition was highly controversial both within the settler community and in the Indigenous community, where the primary cultural loyalties of the Nyungar population are to extremely small clan/skin groups. Furthermore, after a century of Indigenous exclusion from the site, it was unclear which of these family groups could legitimately claim any cultural authority over the brewery site and its surrounds and the (pro-demolition) Indigenous leader of the occupation of the building site was a controversial and even a divisive, figure within the local Aboriginal community. In these circumstances, different elements of the Nyungar population either allied themselves with or were co-opted into both pro- and anti-demolition settler groups (Jones, 1997). In Canada, where treaties between the settlers and the native populations were the norm, one Algonquin group was clearly the Indigenous stakeholder for Victoria Island. Even though both the occupations of the carbide mill and the operation of the Aboriginal Experiences Village involved a range of Indigenous groups from all over Canada and, on occasion, from the USA, the Algonquin elders were able to negotiate successful outcomes ranging from a peaceful end to the final occupation to the management of a multi tribal tourist operation.

5 CONCLUSION

In different ways, both industrial and Indigenous heritages lie beyond the cultural – certainly the high cultural – mainstream. It is therefore notable that they have both been acknowledged in high profile sites in the centre of these two major colonial cities. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that it is the settler, industrial heritages that have – to date – been most evidently and formally accepted. The Aboriginal Cultural Centres in Perth and Ottawa are still no more than plans and promises more than three decades on from their first conceptualizations. The Aboriginal Experiences Villages is a temporary leasehold operation and the Federation Walkway is a philanthropic, rather than a government, initiative and was originally conceived to mark an important settler heritage milestone. In time in Ottawa and in space in Perth the official acknowledgement of Indigenous heritages have somewhat distanced from the sites at which the Indigenous protests occurred.

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