

1 August 2004

Submission to the Conservation of Historic Heritage
Places Inquiry.

I write with my background in the public advocacy of heritage preservation in the city of Ballarat and the surrounding goldfields region. This region of Victoria contains many fine examples of built heritage, ranging from city and towns to small country villages, many fine industrial structures associated with the development of transport systems, and remnants of our gold mining heritage.

In Ballarat, the process of identification and listing of heritage sites has received detailed study since 1979, when the first heritage study of the city was undertaken. Many buildings are listed on the Register of the National Estate, Victorian Heritage Register, and are listed on the local government planning scheme. In recent years the move has been to identify heritage precincts within the city. The Ballarat City Council has yet to adopt the recommendations of its most recent heritage study and incorporate these precincts into the planning scheme.

Even though Ballarat became a member of the World League of Historical Cities, built heritage continues to be undervalued by the city. This is despite the fact that Ballarat's architectural qualities as a nineteenth century city make it a cultural tourism destination.

Conservation and maintenance of historic properties remains a great challenge. This applies especially to our many fine churches, where small congregations are burdened with high maintenance costs. Commercial buildings in heritage precincts also need work to be undertaken on the restoration of facades and reconstruction of nineteenth century verandahs. Funding from local government is extremely limited, as is Heritage Victoria support, with no accessible fund from the Commonwealth.

Sale of heritage properties causes threats – e.g. churches. Impact on historic pipe organs, public meeting and concert spaces lost.

Recommendations.

State Governments should take leadership in heritage identification, funding of heritage studies and funding for conservation of heritage buildings and buildings in heritage precincts.

Governments should also be responsible for conservation of historic structures such as railway and road bridges.

There must be incentives to entice owners of heritage-listed properties to restore their buildings. An excellent incentive would be through a taxation incentive scheme for the restoration of heritage buildings (Similar to the Cultural Gifts Scheme, which has assisted Art Galleries and Museums to build collections)

This would address the serious problem of absentee owners of heritage properties who have no commitment to heritage through a sense of community spirit. This has been a particular problem in the CBD of Ballarat, where heritage properties in Sturt Street are owned by people who live interstate, and have no interest in Ballarat. They have been totally unresponsive to attempts to interest them in restoration of facades and verandahs. However, they maybe responsive to restoration projects under a taxation incentive program, monitored by heritage advisers approved by State Heritage authorities.

War memorials. There are structures in many cities and towns that commemorate Australian participation in wars, and celebrate national identity. I think particularly of the Prisoner of War memorial in Ballarat, which is a memorial of national significance. These memorials need to be conserved and maintained with federal government support.

Yours sincerely,
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Ballarat, Victoria.