

CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIA'S HISTORIC HERITAGE PLACES - 18.08

Productivity Commission p.5 Question: Rationale - Unless government bodies are involved in assessment, listing, planning and conservation of Australia's historic heritage places - be it natural environment, indigenous or built - it would be impossible to maintain. Volunteers should also be partners, which should help to minimise costs of upkeep, and this should be part of the assessment process and criteria.

Current pressures are imposed by local councils, which seem bound to bow to the government's "urban consolidation" maxim, which encourages highrise near railway stations, where many heritage houses may be overshadowed and/or landlocked by tall unit /shop buildings and owners forced out. Sydney is losing its own character and even some of the leafier, beautiful suburbs are being attacked by developers. The mad rush to accommodate migrants in major cities just further isolates country towns, who need population and workers, in order to survive. Cheap imports create unemployment in Australia, so more people are dependent on Commonwealth funds rather than paying wages tax to help others.

Page 9, suggests a comprehensive survey of historic heritage places in Australia. This could be collected on a statutory form issued to all groups and owners and advertised by the Commonwealth Government, calling for photos and stored on a national database.

E.g.: The Lidcombe Heritage Group Inc. currently has 93 members on the books, although only a portion is actually active. Originally, we had more than 100 names, but over the period of our existence since 1994, some members have passed away. We are affiliated with the Royal Australian Historical Society, who negotiate public liability insurance for all the groups, but it still is a hefty sum to be paid annually, just in case someone takes offence at us.

Our aim is to collect and disseminate the history of the former Lidcombe Hospital as well as promote the conservation of as much of the artefacts, archives, landscape and historic buildings on the site. The first book, "Lidcombe Hospital Centenary 1893 to 1993: a pictorial history" by Don Keast has been reprinted, and the second "a historical tour of Lidcombe Hospital" 1995, by Dr Greg Marcar and John Ballard, has now been revised and updated to 2005.

Sadly, in the year of its Centenary, 1993, the government of the day decided that Lidcombe hospital with all its credentials as a "centre of excellence in gerontology and chronic disease" in 1990, could be sold off as surplus to requirements. All that expertise acquired over the many years of medical and surgical experience and acting as a teaching hospital in several fields for universities was to be dispersed to other hospitals and the teams broken up. Hundreds of local residents reacted to the loss of a vital facility by forming protests in Bankstown and Auburn and on site. But even a change in government did

not stop the loss, and in 2000 Sydney staged the best Olympic games ever, with 6,000 media personnel housed in buildings and portables all over the Lidcombe Hospital site. Quite a few hospital buildings were demolished to fit the hundreds of portables onto the site, notably the 1933 Administration Block, gateway to the Heritage Precinct, 1886

Now the last 44ha has been levelled for Australand's Botanica Estate of 750 dwellings, after a 10½ day battle in L & E Court.

Epic battles like this need to be recorded nationally we believe.

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