

Submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Conservation of Australia's Historic Built Heritage Places

Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of Residents 3000 Incorporated, The Carlton Residents Association, EastEnders Incorporated and the Carlton Gardens Group.

In 2004 the Royal Exhibition Building and the surrounding Carlton Gardens were World Heritage listed by UNESCO with the support of the Federal, State and local governments (MCC). The basis was "criterion (ii) - exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design."

The inscription said that the REB and the surrounding Gardens (CG) represent the "main extant survivors of a Palace of industry and its setting, together (they) reflect the global influence of the international exhibition movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The movement showcased technological innovation and change, which helped promote a rapid increase in industrialisation and international trade through the exchange of knowledge and ideas." They were already listed by the national and state authorities.

Management

The REB is currently managed by the Melbourne Museum. It is frequently used for a wide range of exhibitions and appears to be in good condition.

The Carlton Gardens are on State Government land but are managed by the Melbourne City Council.

In recent years the MCC has licensed the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS - managed by International Management Group on behalf of the flower and landscaping industries) to be conducted in the *southern section* of the CG. The MCC justifies this MIFGS use on the grounds that the Gardens were an essential part of the REB and that the Gardens were used for exhibits which could not be housed in the REB.

The Problems

Our submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry is that this is a misreading of the historic role and purpose of Carlton Gardens, which leads it to a failure to conform to the intention of the WH listing, and indeed is directly contrary to it.

The Carlton Gardens were certainly designed in a direct relationship to the REB. However the only use of the CG to house exhibits associated with the REB's exhibitions, occurred in the *northern section* of the Gardens ie on the north side of the REB and Museum. Indeed on some occasions temporary building were erected in the *northern section* to extend exhibition space and later removed - this space is now occupied by the Museum.

The southern section was never used for exhibits nor was it ever intended to be.

What was the function of the southern section?

The southern Gardens (closest to the City) were designed and built as “**pleasure gardens**”. They provided (and still provide) a beautiful avenue of elms from Victoria Street (ie the City), with a wonderful view of a fountain (now the Hochgurtel Fountain) and the REB at the end of the vista. The Gardens were intended as grand and peaceful area where visitors to the REB could parade on their way to the Exhibition - and where they could sit and think after they emerged again - to recover from the shock of seeing the rapidly changing world of technology and innovation in the REB. The southern section of Carlton Gardens were never used (nor intended to be used) to house exhibits.

The MIFGS

This Show normally runs for 5 days, but the Gardens are shut to the public for 10 days or more to allow the setting up of the Show. The Gardens are enclosed in a wire fence - far removed from the original style of fence. Large earth-movers, heavy trucks, concrete and brick laying, fork-lifts, electric lighting/wiring through trees, large mobile toilets, heavy refrigerated vans are involved; all of which damage the Gardens (see photographs for the type of work involved in setting up and dismantling).

The public have to pay a substantial entry fee, for what is a totally commercial enterprise - a market place. Indeed you can buy a Ford motor vehicle there, and other goods such as paint, clothes and shoes, very large stone pizza ovens, sets of Tupperware kitchenware, spas etc.

The wholly commercial nature of this commercial was further emphasised in 2005 by the renaming of the historic Hochgurtel Fountain as the “Floriana Fountain” (leading one interstate visitor to suggest renaming the REB “Yates Flower Market”). And visiting children splashed and played in the fountain in front of their parents and stallholders. This recently restored which has a history of damage by vandalism. Drought water restrictions caused it to stop operating, until the Yarra City Council donated water from its swimming pool.

The use Carlton Gardens as a very large commercial marketplace every year is a wrong and damaging activity. And despite the assertions of the show organisers and the MCC it is contrary to the historic use of and design of Gardens, and therefore to the intention of the WH listing.

It said the heaviest exhibits should be on the hard surface provided by the concreted Museum Plaza - although the IMG/industry groups appeared to agree, this undertaking has simply not been honoured. We believe this demonstrates a failure of management by the MCC.

Conclusion

We urge the Productivity Commission to advise that the MCC should restore the integrity of Carlton Gardens and should respect the reasons for the Gardens being WH

listed. This area is of important economic and cultural value to Melbourne and Victoria. Visitors/tourists flock to there to see the REB, the Gardens and of course the Melbourne Museum. Indeed the building of the Museum on the north side of the REB was a confirmation of the sacrosanct nature of the southern Gardens.

We also urge a recommendation that the MCC should proceed with the Carlton Gardens Master Plan, finalised last year. Unfortunately the MCC 2005-2006 allocates only \$50,000 to capital works in the Gardens - an inadequate amount in view of the demands of the Master Plan and the work needed to bring the Gardens back to the World Heritage status won by the REB (that is, as a magnificent pleasure gardens for those going to the REB and for passive recreation).