

RESIDENTS for ENVIRONMENT and CHARACTER CONSERVATION
Action Group: 84 Kenilworth Rd. Parkside 5063 SA

**SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION RE:
CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIA'S HISTORIC HERITAGE PLACES**

Having attended the one and only public session of the Commission in Adelaide I wish to make some very important points on behalf of the Residents for Environment and Character Conservation action group.

A country of immigrants

Australia is and has always been a country of immigrants. Prior to the great flood of post World War II European immigration, most of the settlers were Anglo-Celtic with a small sprinkling of other nationalities. In the post-war years the "White Australian Policy" limited the immigration to Europeans and White Americans. It took a generation before the Italian, Greek and Yugoslav immigrants were accepted by the community. The Vietnamese immigrants of the '70s had a similar hard time. It was only in the 80s that Australia embraced the concept of Multiculturalism. Now we are confronted with a fundamentalist Islamic community who have great trouble in accepting many of the Australian customs and values.

Need for a common foundation

It is paramount, for a Country whose population is forever changing and adapting, that all immigrants, old and new, share a solid common base. This solid common base is the HISTORY of Australia. This history, which includes the pre white settlement era and the displacement of the Aboriginal peoples, as well as the white colonisation and settlement, is expressed by the surviving physical environment and buildings of the past..

History as the foundation of a nation's identity

These buildings and places are AUSTRALIA'S LIVING HISTORY.

In our cities most of the buildings that define Australia, were built by the Anglo-Celtic settlers. They should be respected not only for their architectural uniqueness but BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD. They are the expression of the first hundred years of white Australian history. They are unique and irreplaceable and have all contributed to the creation of the Australian dream and the myth of Australia that has swept the world.

The Anglo-Celtic foundations of modern Australia

It is this Anglo-Celtic origin that has shaped Australia's values, has created its justice system, democracy, political structure, codes of behaviour, education system etc. It has laid the core values of the democratic society we now live in. Admittedly post WWII and post Vietnam war immigration have widened the tastes and interests of Australians but it is the historical Anglo-Celtic core of values that forms this country's HERITAGE, which every immigrant who chooses to live in Australia should accept, respect and embrace. It represents the strong foundations necessary for building this Nation's future.

Preserving Australian identity

By continually erasing the visual expression and reminder of this heritage we are undermining the foundations of this great nation. With no foundations our future is likely to be very messy indeed: A house of cards that may collapse at the first strong gust of wind.

Respect for the past

It is very sad to see the children of the 50s migrants show total disregard for the buildings that have stood over 100 years. It breaks my heart, and the heart of so many people in the community, to see developers knocking down perfectly good buildings and houses and bulldoze their beautiful gardens, only to replace them with crowded, often substandard, “medium or high density” developments that return enormous amount of money. We strongly feel that WE DO NOT OWN THE PAST and have no right to destroy what previous generations have built. Without this RESPECT for Australian History this country is very much at risk of losing its identity.

A government’s responsibility

The Conservation of historical heritage buildings therefor **MUST NOT BE LEFT TO THE WHIMS** and interests of the owners who seem to have **PROFIT** as their only guide and objective. Should a very small percentage of individuals decide to dispose of our children’s and grandchildren’s inheritance? Governments are there to protect the **GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY**, not to cow-tow to the pressures of business interests.

Other countries’ best practice

It would be useful if the Commissioners studied how heritage preservation is achieved in Europe and the UK as well as in Canada and even in the USA. Their concept of heritage is much wider and the restrictions much stricter. Let us remember that Paris, as we know it, was only built in the early 1800s by General Lafayette. It is not much older than our Australian cities. However **HERITAGE** in Europe is **NOT LIMITED TO LISTED BUILDINGS**. It is the whole historical city, that is, a whole area within a certain radius from the city centre. Not a building here and there, listed and stuffed among skyscrapers like we do here.

Heritage is for the future

Let us not forget the meaning of “heritage”. Heritage is not just “property” nor “what is defined by the Heritage Act”, it is, according to the Mcquary dictionary: “ that which comes or belongs to one by reason of birth” and “ that which has been or may be inherited by legal descent or succession”. National heritage is something material and of value passed on from a generation to another in order to be passed on again. Are our children going to be deprived of the right to inherit our beautiful, uniquely Australian, old buildings that make up the heart and the character of our cities? This is legalised theft and disenfranchisement.

Dealing with opposition to listing

While we believe that listing should be mandatory we suggest the Canadian model of having a Tribunal to hear grievances and to negotiate financial support. Financial support should be coming from a central Federal pool for the specific purpose of protecting the history and character of our built environment. In Italy the Ministero delle Belle Arti has both financial resources and incredible powers. In addition many

private and charitable organisations or N.G.Os, like Italia Nostra, have been formed to raise funds for the protection and restoration of the national patrimony. Grants for restorations should be available to applicants on a merit basis.

Responsibility of heritage buildings owners

Unfortunately all over Australia many owners of listed properties deliberately allow their properties to be run down so as to reduce Councils' objections to their demolition. This is highly immoral. If an owner does not want to maintain a heritage property properly he/she should be forced by the government to sell it to others who will be prepared to do it up. At the same time restoration of listed buildings should be referred to a central competent body so as not to hold up repairs unnecessarily.

The sad lesson of Fernilee Lodge in Adelaide

It was obvious from the Commissioners' comments that they were unaware of the tragedy that befell Adelaide in the year 2003: the demolition of a wonderful Victorian mansion, Fernilee Lodge, premier wedding receptions venue to generations of South Australians. (See attached photo). It was demolished because its new owner revoked its VOLUNTARY Local Heritage listing in order to be able to demolish the building and replace it with a very dense residential estate. Adelaide mourned that day. Our children have been robbed of the opportunity to hold their wedding receptions in an exquisitely elegant, historical, Victorian mansion. (See attached photo)

Bias in the Commission inquiry

It was also obvious from the remarks of the two Commissioners that they had been hearing a lot of noise about "fairness" and "costs" of heritage listing properties from the less than 2% of the people who object to their properties being heritage listed. (See submission by Simon Molesworth on behalf of the Australian Councils of National Trusts)

Developers' clout

It is a well known fact that developers have a strong input in both the Development and Heritage legislation and that governments are pressured by very few but very vocal and financially powerful lobbyists. Peter Temple in "Bad debts" puts it like this:

" I think you are out of touch. You're stuck in the days when the Melbourne Club ran this town.. All those pompous arseholes who owned factories and insurance companies and played the market. All went to Melbourne Grammar or similar and were basically silly buggers who didn't like Jews or Ities or other kind of wogs. Otherwise, reasonably harmless twerps. Their day's gone.....They woke up one day and found the real money was in property development. Residential subdivisions. Hotels. Shopping Centres. Office blocks. And most of the people making the money didn't give a shit about joining the Club..... I am talking about people like X..... Came out here with two pounds and holes in his socks. Got a job as a brickie, didn't know a brick from a banjo. Some old bloke.....gave him a crash course for ten bob. Next thing he's the gun brickie, the union's telling him to slow down or a wall's going to fall on him. So bugger the union, he borrows a few quids, goes off concreting over backyards, putting up brick veneer houses. That was the beginning. The next thing people like him were employing hundreds, doing million dollars deals, putting up buildings overnight, building whole fucking suburbs out there in the fringes. And on the way they found out how to make sure government gave them the decisions they

wanted, how to get the unions on side.”.....” These people don’t think bribery is a crime.....It’s just an alternative way to get things done. Blackmail? Well, some people won’t cooperate. Rough stuff, murder maybe? Well, accidents happen. .Some of the smarter ones even take the long view. They’ve gone into politics, stacking party branches, getting the right people into Parliament.”

The above fictional passage illustrates well the colonial/immigrant culture where the making of money is the measure of success and “bugger the history, heritage and future generations. And above all, bugger the neighbours”.

We have governments to make sure that these attitudes do not prevail.

Yours sincerely

Laura Pieraccini

Co-ordinator of **Residents for Environment and Character Conservation** Action Group, Parkside, SA 5063



Fernilee Lodge: wedding reception 2000