

14 February 2019

The Chair
Independent Planning Commission

GBA
Heritage

VARROVILLE PROPOSED EXPANDED SHR REVIEW OF HIGH QUALITY VERSION OPP 2016 CURTILAGE STUDY

This Response has been prepared following my approved inspection of the high quality reproduction version of the Orwell and Peter Phillips Varroville Curtilage Study, May 2016 (OPP 2016), undertaken on 5 February 2019 at the IPC Offices.

The copy held by IPC presents as a direct print from the original software, or a very high quality copy of a very high quality original printing.

My inspection focussed on comparing the version of the OPP 2016 report that is before the IPC with an incomplete version of the study which is of very poor quality and integrity that I and other expert advisors have had access to since December 2018. Having made enquiries with CMCT, I am assured that the source version of the study to which I have had previous access for the purposes of review and critique was itself incomplete and of low quality.

The second aspect of my inspection focussed on an assessment of the ability of a reader to gain a clear understanding of the information and analysis contained in the version of the study to which I and other expert advisors have had access since December 2018, in comparison of the same with respect to the OPP 2016 report that is before the IPC, and to then review the recommendations contained in that report.

The time available for the inspection of the copy that is before the IPC was extremely limited and only made available at short notice. In order to properly consider and digest the totality of the new information revealed by that copy would have required more time than was possible, especially when it was only available for inspection at the IPC offices, under supervision, and any form of reproduction, except by making hand written notes, banned.

New Information revealed by the Inspection of the IPC Copy

Nevertheless, in the short time available, the inspection of the high quality copy of the OPP 2016 Curtilage Study that is before the IPC revealed new information, primarily from several pages that I had not seen before this inspection, and from information now revealed that was obscured by the poor quality of the study available to me, which made it difficult to appreciate due to a number of pages that were out of sequence but which did not carry legible page numbers.

Charles Sturt, who owned Varroville between 1836 and 1839, has been attributed in the Statement of Significance as being largely responsible for the construction of the so-called "Sturt dams and modified watercourses" to the north-west of the 1859

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Varroville House. His association and contribution have been cited as being of “exceptional” heritage significance to the development of Varroville.

The new pages included expanded references to Sturt’s writings, published in 1849, when he stated that he had “inherited at least some of his water tanks from Thomas Willis”, the previous owner of Varroville. It also included the following speculation by the OPP 2016 author:

*Sturt **may** have added to the existing water storage on Varroville and there is no reason to doubt his claims, but the numbers of ‘ponds’ mentioned in Meehan’s 1809 survey show that he was building on an existing farming asset.*

The comment about of Meehan’s 1809 survey is curious, given that the original grantee did not commence his development of the land until c1813.

The above speculation is in marked contrast to the absolute certitude expressed in the OPP 2016 Statement of Significance, as subsequently promoted by the Heritage Council submission:

Through its documentary and largely intact physical evidence, the Varroville cultural landscape also demonstrates one of the earliest systematic attempts at water conservation in Australia (OPP 2016 pp 108). Varroville, through the Sturt dams and modified watercourses from the Sturt period and the large underground water tank c1858 that extends westward from the end of the wings of the house illustrates early recognition of the importance of water conservation to the colonists in NSW.

This extract from the Statement of Significance defies other documentary information that has previously been indiscernible in the study previously available to the CMCT – extracts from a series of historic topographical maps that showed a variety of water dams but not any to the north-west of the house, in the early decades of the 20th century. Other historic plans also reveal the extent of works along the western boundary of the Townson grant for the construction in the late 19th century of St Andrews Road, which appear to have affected the pre-existing topography upstream of the so-called Sturt dams.

The inclusion of the 1859 underground tank as evidence of “one of the earliest systematic attempts at water conservation in Australia” is curious as it implies that for the first 190 years of the Colony, no one else thought of conserving water on their estates. It also makes no attempt to recognise the Busby’s Bore infrastructure that was constructed to serve the growing water demands of Metropolitan Sydney.

When taken in conjunction with quotations from Mrs Cherry Jackaman that significant construction work was done to the dam network in the Post WW2 period, confirms my earlier concerns about the veracity and rigour of the Statement of Significance formulated by the Heritage Council.

Such extravagant claims cannot be used as the basis of extending the SHR curtilage at Varroville.

A second section of text now made discernible from the disorderly layout of the pages in the version previously accessed by CMCT provided more information about Townson’s vineyards. The various extracts from the 1830s publications by James Busby, discussed Townson’s vineyards in the context of the grape varieties he planted in comparison with other major growers in the Colony. There was no information about the scale or the location of Townson’s vineyards.

Despite this lack of documentary evidence regarding Townson, other evidence about vineyard planting continuing well into the 19th century, and despite the fact that there seems to be similar contour plantings on the adjoining St Andrews to the west, which was at one stage in the early 19th century under joint ownership with Varroville, the certitude of the Statement of Significance concludes:

Varroville’s remnant vineyard trenching, directly linked to the original grantee Dr Robert Townson, is rare in Australia on account of its unusually extended area, its very early period, its unusual trenching patterns relative to the topography and its dual function as a means of intercepting rainfall and runoff for water conservation (it is also possibly unique in an Australian context as a vineyard apparently inspired directly from ancient Roman writer on agriculture).

Confirmation of my previous analysis and concerns

In my earlier submission to the IPC, I commented at great length on the weakness of the links between the discussion contained in OPP 2016 Section 6, *Reconciliation of Archival and Physical Evidence* and the *Assessment of Cultural Significance* contained in Section 7.0. The analysis in Section 6 is characterised by selective quotation of isolated facts, speculative links, untested assumptions, historical events provided without any comparative analysis or context, an absence of firm expert opinion and a complete lack of academic rigour.

By contrast, the conclusions set out in the Assessment and Statement of Cultural Significance universally exclaim that all of the Heritage values must be rated as being “Exceptional”, at either a local or state level.

My earlier analysis heavily criticised the poorly founded claims of Significance, and went on to express concern that the Statement of Heritage Significance put forward by the NSW Heritage Council relies to an almost exclusive degree on the extravagant OPP 2016 conclusions.

The Heritage Council submission made no mention of the fact that NONE of the formal heritage values of the Varroville House SHR listing ascribe any with an “Exceptional” level. How then can the surrounding agricultural landscape have significantly higher values than the main house?

My great concern, that the Statement of Heritage Significance adopted by OEH does not provide a sound basis for the management of the Varroville landscape setting, has only been reinforced by my inspection of the high quality copy of the OPP 2016 report which is before the IPC.

I repeat my earlier recommendation, that IPC do not accept the current Statement of Significance as sufficiently rigorous, accurate or adequate as the basis for the heritage management of the subject land over the next 100 years, or as the basis for the development of a sustainable new use as proposed by the Catholic Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.

I respectfully suggest that the IPC call for the preparation of a new Statement of Significance, based on ALL of the research and analysis that has been prepared by a variety of consultants on behalf of both the Varroville owners and CMCT over recent years.

Yours faithfully
GBA HERITAGE PTY LTD



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GRAHAM BROOKS

Managing Director, GBA Heritage Pty Ltd

Positions Held

Managing Director, GBA Heritage Pty Ltd, 2015 -
Managing Director, Graham Brooks & Associates Pty Ltd, 1996 – 2015
Director, Schwager Brooks and Associates Pty Ltd, 1984 – 1996
Associate Director, Travis Partners, 1977 – 1984
Architect, Pollard Thomas & Edwards, London, 1975 – 1977
Architect, Commonwealth Department of Works, 1972 – 1975

Professional Qualifications

Bachelor of Architecture (Hons), Sydney University, 1972
Master of the Built Environment (B Cons) UNSW 1984
Australian Institute of Architects, 1974
Associate Royal Institute of British Architects, 1975
Registered Architect, New South Wales
Member, Australia ICOMOS

Professional Associations

President ICOMOS International Committee on Cultural Tourism, 2001 – 2011
Chairman, AusHeritage Ltd, 1999-2001
Chairman, National Trust (NSW) Historic Buildings Committee, 1996-1999
Former Heritage Adviser, Liverpool City Council c1995-2005
Member, Senior Advisory Panel, Global Heritage Fund 2010-
Member, National Trust of Australia (NSW) 1973-
Member Australia ICOMOS, 1980-
UNESCO Monitoring Mission to World Heritage Site of Borobudur, 2003, 2006, 2007
World Heritage Centre Monitoring Mission to Ajanta & Ellora Caves, India, 2004-2010
Visiting Professor, Institute of Tourism Studies, Macao, 2006
Former Executive Committee Member, Australia ICOMOS, 1990-1992
Former Member Heritage Council Technical Advisory Committee on Materials Conservation, RAI Heritage Committee & RAHS Historic Buildings Committee

CAREER SUMMARY

I have worked in the fields of Architectural Design, Heritage Conservation and Cultural Tourism Management for some 40 years, in Australia, the United Kingdom and more recently for UNESCO in Asia. During that period I have conducted heritage assessments and developed heritage management protocols for hundreds of historic buildings and places. My office has conducted hundreds more under my supervision.

I have lectured widely to business, heritage, professional and student groups on heritage assessments, heritage management, conservation practice, preparing heritage sites for cultural tourism and the methodologies of heritage asset management. I have participated in many appeals before the Land & Environment Court, acting on behalf of both Respondents and Applicants, and have also acted as a Court Appointed Heritage Expert.