

Submission on built heritage tourism in Tasmania

Tourism development in Tasmania is a dominant topic in our news media, but there is one sector of our built heritage tourism that is generally neglected and needs to be addressed.

There is a rich history contained in Tasmania's many old churches, and their cemeteries, and these links go back to the very founding of Tasmania – yet the list of church deconsecrations and closures continues to grow. The loss of numerous old Anglican churches is particularly upsetting for those who care about such built heritage history (declining congregations and the costs of building maintenance are main excuses offered for closures).

The closures also mean an uncertain fate for the items the churches hold, such as Roll of Honour boards to parishioners who died fighting for their country, notably the boards honouring those who fell in World War One. I know that military historian Reg Watson is another who is concerned about the removal of these boards from old churches and halls. Where does the RSL stand on this?

Churches are important to Tasmanian tourism – many visitors want to see them – but not enough is being done to protect, restore, preserve and promote them: a Heritage Church Trail perhaps?

As Dianne Snowden, in a recent Mercury feature article after serving as head of the Tasmanian Heritage Council wrote: significant churches and cemeteries, especially those which are redundant, need special assistance.

Money has been provided for some.

The previous Labor Government gave very generously to help renovations at Hobart's Anglican St David's Cathedral and the Roman Catholic St Mary's Cathedral. However, the suggestion that there might also be monetary help for churches apart from cathedrals was rejected. Labor voted down a motion by the Greens, backed by the Liberals, in State Parliament in 2007, to save North Hobart's Anglican Holy Trinity Church, long a Tasmanian landmark, with the excuse that if you give to one then others will put their hands out.

There is a solution. Dianne Snowden also wrote that there is a need to investigate creative ways for heritage funding, including the possibility of a heritage lottery.

This idea has been raised several times before but has failed to gain traction. When Paul Lennon was Premier there was talk of establishing a state heritage lottery like Britain's national lottery to help pay for church restorations – and that lottery has certainly seen the retention and rejuvenation of many old British churches, boosting them as tourist attractions.

In Europe as a whole venerable churches of various religious denominations have long been a huge tourist drawcard. It would be a sad day indeed if in Tasmania decades hence we have visitors leaving disappointed after discovering that many of our lovely old churches they had come to see had gone.

Footnote: in the initial consideration of the heritage lottery idea I understand it did not find acceptance with the State Treasury; given the fluctuating and, indeed, parlous condition of Tasmania's financial situation this is, perhaps, understandable. And so there has been the viewpoint

of various local notables that this heritage lottery should be something embraced by our leaders in Canberra – a national heritage lottery, for preserving churches and other buildings precious to the nation. Still, couldn't our state leaders get the ball rolling on this?

After all, Tatts started here.

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Individual submission from:

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