

Legislative Council Enquiry Into Built Heritage Tourism in Tasmania

Submission

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I wish to comment on the state of built heritage in Tasmania and the implications for this built heritage as a result of our current action or lack of action to ensure the continuing value of these assets, as tourism assets as well as community assets.

One of the reasons people travel to Tasmania and enjoy their visits to this state, is because of the amount and quality of built heritage still enjoyed in our cities, towns and countryside. I worked in tourism in Launceston for a number of years, and one of the most common comments visitors to Launceston said to me, was how amazing the buildings are in Launceston in particular, and Tasmania in general.

A number of factors have resulted in the built heritage of Launceston being relatively intact, including the economic issues faced by the city and the state, and until now, a strong and determined organisation contributing to the protection of this built heritage, ie. The National Trust.

I am grateful to the National Trust and organisations such as the Battery Point Progress Association and their later incarnations for the work they put in to ensuring as much of our built heritage is protected as possible.

I am concerned however, that this has also resulted in some decisions that retrospectively were probably not appropriate.

I grew up in Battery Point. I think the way the planning schemes have been interpreted is problematic. Several examples come to mind, the first being one of the first extensions built to one of the older houses in Colville St on the corner of Francis St. The extension built next to the house is an eyesore, as is the extension being made to 16 Waterloo Cres. These extensions are required to be “obviously” not heritage built. This however results in very unsympathetic additions to what are rather charming 19th Century buildings. These extensions could have been made in a style more sympathetic to the original building as well as being able to be read as a later addition, which was the reason why they were not supposed to mimic the original style of the building.

People do need to be able to change and add to their homes, they need to be able to personalise them and be comfortable and bring these homes up to date. Buildings so protected that they can't be changed help no one, and can result in the falling into disrepair and then people losing the will to protect them, as being seen at 6 Boland St Launceston and the cordial factory building behind the CH Smith building also in Launceston.

It does not help our built heritage that there are a number of issues regarding protection, including that the protection is largely toothless, unless, someone chooses to prosecute. I remember the person who

bought Eurella in High St Launceston was taken to court by the Launceston City Council because he changed the roof from slate – which was leaking and causing damage to the structure of the building – to slate coloured colourbond. This seems a nonsense. Even if the original roof had been slate, the cost of slate and the difficulty of replacing the roof would surely have lead to a compromise in the amount of money that could be spent in fixing the structure of the building.

The house I grew up in, in Battery Point, was built in about 1845 and is a sandstone cottage. It currently has a slate roof, which was put on in the early 1970s. The roof had been galvernised iron, and when this was removed to put the slate roof on, the original wooden shingle roof was under the galvernised iron. When school children are taken on tours of Battery Point, they are told the slate roof is the orignal roof, which it is not.

The type of roof a building has, has some importance, however it is much more important that it is watertight so as to protect the fabric of the building.

The owners of our built heritage, particularly of the buildings heritage listed, are left to ensure the buildings are maintained with little help, unless they are eligible for some assistance through the few grants programs available.

St George's Church in Battery Point is one of the iconic buildings in Hobart, visible to people who enter Hobart by sea, and at night, because of the floodlighting, visible from many parts of the city. This church has ongoing issues with maintenance due to the age of the building and the material it is built from. Sandstone, as anyone who has a sandstone building can testify, has a limited life and needs regular maintenance. At the moment, parts of the grounds of the church are cordoned off due to instability of the stonework in the tower. My understanding is that a vast sum of money (over \$1million) is required and urgently to make the necessary repairs to ensure this icon is still standing and safe for the next 100 years.

The scattergun approach we currently have does not do our built heritage any favours. Some owners are allowed to let their buildings slide into disrepair and then need demolishing, others are allowed, it seems, to update them anyway they want, while others are required to meet stringent requirements when making any changes.

Surely the best outcome for any building is that it is owned and looked after and used for a purpose that allows it to continue in use and maintenance for as long as possible.

We need to be very diligent to protect in appropriate ways such areas as Battery Point, Richmond and Evandale. They are valuable tourism assets, which people visit and admire and interact with.

We need protection that is sensible, practical and appropriate and has teeth which it uses as needed and funding to help with the high costs some building owners face to keep their properties in good repair. Heritage organisations such as the Tasmanian Heritage Commission and the National Trust (Tasmania) need to be proactive in ensuring that appropriate levels of protection are afforded to the buildings that need it. One of the things I saw in the UK was the way buildings there, some of which are centuries older than anything here in Tasmania, have been altered through time. So long as those alterations are sympathetic to the previous structure(s), they add to the story of the building. Surely, the story is the history we all want. The Governments, local, state and federal, have a clear role in the protection of

our built heritage as only they have the power to legislate and require the protections required to both protect and maintain these buildings.

I am a proud Tasmanian, I want our built heritage to still be visible and appreciated and protected in 100, 200 and more years. For this to happen, we all need to commit to protecting what remains. The centres of our cities are particularly in peril, especially Hobart. Modern needs for parking etc, do not excuse the wanton destruction of our older buildings. What we leave for future generations will determine how they will judge our successes.