book reflection / JOHN H. STUBBS

Observations on Pacific heritage conservation practice

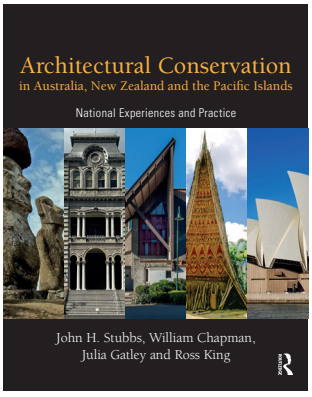

Fig. 1 *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice* [New York: Routledge, 2024].

Twenty years of conservation project management work for the World Monuments Fund (New York) and the associated travel exposed me to numerous ideas about architectural conservation around the world and triggered a series of books published under the banner, "Time Honored."[1] The first book, which took those words as its main title, was a global history and overview of the subject.[2] The second explored Europe and the Americas in greater detail, and the third, Asia.[3] The fourth, titled *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice*, co-authored with William Chapman, Julia Gatley, Ross King and another 59 expert contributors, has recently been published by Routledge.[4] All four volumes have been amazing odysseys of discovery of interesting and useful information pertaining to the growing international field of cultural heritage protection. This short article reflects on some of the findings from the new book.

The Pacific Ocean covers more than a third of the Earth's surface and contains over 30,000 islands. The often vast distances between island groupings and their climatic and geographic variations have resulted in diverse Indigenous cultures—each with their own distinctive heritage. But there are continuities and recurrent themes. In many Pacific Islands, natural, built, and intangible wonders and traditions are interconnected, and enduring cultural practices are highly valued. Strong oral traditions, music and dance, art and craft, tattooing, and the making of vernacular buildings all involve the transfer of Indigenous knowledge from generation to generation, while also making the past significant to the present for individuals and for communities.

Oceania's built heritage also includes evidence of its colonial past. Some Pacific Islanders see the preservation of Western-style colonial heritage as a hindrance to their own cultural expression. On the other hand, continued political ties with former colonisers have strengthened heritage protection in some Pacific countries and territories.

The book's seven chapters address Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai'i, Micronesia, Melanesia, South Pacific Polynesia, and the Pacific Polar Regions. The pages that follow highlight some of the special heritage resources and protection initiatives underway.

Australia

Australia has emerged as an international leader in the field of architectural conservation and is often looked to for guidance. This really started with the publication of the Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance in 1979. The charter was both based upon, and developed in reaction to, European and North American precedents.[5] It introduced the "values-based" assessment of heritage as the basis for conservation decision making, and was followed by the formulation of conservation planning as a means to realise the charter's aims and objectives. Australia came to be seen as a model for inclusive heritage policies, applicable to all forms of heritage, as well as integrated natural and cultural conservation. Still today, Australia ICOMOS is probably the strongest of all the state members of the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

Australia's early heritage conservation initiatives were focused on the nation's colonial past. The ways in which such sites are interpreted and presented to the public have changed with time. Australian heritage professionals are doing an excellent job with their forthright and honest presentations of the "difficult" heritage sites associated with the country's penal history, colonisation's displacement, and the destruction of much of the nation's Indigenous heritage.

There is increasing interest in and respect for the Indigenous heritage sites that remain extant. An example is the extensive Budj Bim cultural landscape in the state of Victoria, where lava flows provided the basis for a complex system of channels, weirs, and dams that were developed by the Gunditjmara people to trap, store, and harvest aquatic animals, leaving archaeological evidence representing a period of at least 32,000 years.

Fig. 2 UNESCO World Heritage-listed Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney (1818–19), restored by Museums of History, NSW. [Photograph: Ross King]

Fig. 3 The meagre sleeping quarters of the Hyde Park Barracks are confronting. [Photograph: John H. Stubbs]

Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand has also led in international heritage practice. In particular, over many years, it has been innovative in the ways it has recognised and cared for its Māori heritage. In the book, Ellen Andersen explains that the national heritage agency, formerly the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and now Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, had Māori representation on its Board of Trustees from the time of its formation in the 1950s, and, as early as the 1970s, developed many of the strategies its staff continue to use today for working with iwi and hapū (tribes and subtribes) on heritage matters, premised on respecting iwi and hapū agency in relation to their own heritage buildings and sites.[6] When first published in 1993, the ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value then accommodated Indigenous heritage and practices even more overtly than the Burra Charter, and this continues with the charter's 2010 edition.[7]

New Zealand achieved a world-first in 1993 when Tongariro National Park was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as an associative cultural landscape. The category of cultural landscape aligns well with the spiritual and ancestral significance that Māori attach to land. New Zealand's most significant sites also include the Treaty House at Waitangi (1833–34), where the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi was first signed on 6 February 1840, while its most significant challenges are not limited to the extreme weather events and sea-level rise of climate change, but also include unpredictable seismic activity.

Fig. 4 The Tongariro Crossing, between Mts Ngāuruhoe (pictured) and Tongariro in Tongariro National Park. [Photograph: Julia Gatley]

Fig. 5 Warren and Mahoney (1966–72; 2015–19). The Christchurch Town Hall following the repair of damage suffered in the 2010–11 Canterbury earthquake sequence and complete refurbishment. [Photograph: Julia Gatley]

Hawai'i

The Hawaiian Islands archipelago, at the northern edge of Polynesia, was annexed as a United States territory in 1900, and became the country's 50th state in 1959. Since statehood, heritage protection in Hawai'i has been guided by the US Department of the Interior, and since 1966 by the State Historic Preservation Office in Honolulu. Numerous structures have been recorded to the standards of the Historic Building Survey and currently 340 Hawaiian buildings and historic districts are listed on the US National Register of Historic Places.

Aspects of Hawai'i's Indigenous culture have been at the forefront of heritage conservation efforts since the mid-nineteenth century, when both Native Hawaiians and Euro-American settlers began to organise advocacy groups, promote the preservation of Hawai'i's past, and collect examples of Native Hawaiian material culture. Indigenous cultural sites include heiau (ceremonial stone platforms) and other sacred spaces, vernacular buildings, and fishing sites. Among the many buildings erected in the past two centuries are some outstanding landmarks of architectural modernism. Hawai'i also served a crucial role during World War II and has a distinct military heritage, notably the museums comprising the Pearl Harbor National Memorial.

Fig. 6 Wai'oli Mission Hall in Hanalei, Kaua'i, was listed on the US National Register of Historic Places in 1973 and is open to the public. [Photograph: Joel Bradshaw, Wikimedia Commons]

Hawaiian built heritage made international headlines in August 2023 when disastrous grassfires almost completely destroyed the historic buildings of the ancient capital of Lāhainā. US and local Hawaiian conservation capacity is being put to the test in the current efforts to rebuild it, a major project in which the Lahaina Restoration Foundation is playing a key role.

Micronesia

Micronesia spans the Central and Western Pacific, comprising US territories such as Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, former US Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands (TTPI)—the Federated States of

Fig. 7 The cultural and seascape ruins of Nan Madol, Pohnpei, in the Federated States of Micronesia, developed around 1180–1200 CE. [Photograph: John H. Stubbs]

Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands—and the independent countries of Kiribati and Nauru. Settled in the second millennium BCE by Austronesian voyagers, the region's most celebrated cultural heritage resources include the remains of megalithic stone structures on Pohnpei and Kosrae, in the Federated States of Micronesia. The vast seascape ruins of Nan Madol, seat of the Saudeleur dynasty until about 1628, are particularly impressive. In addition, ancient stone pillars are found throughout Guam and the Mariana Islands, and the island of Yap is famous for its stone "money"—a historic form of cultural currency. Much of the region's material history is embedded in its archaeological sites, many of which are only recently being studied.

Like other parts of the Pacific, Micronesia has strong traditions of song, dance, crafts, and canoeing. Its cultural resources range from the impressive prehistoric structures through to perishable residences and meeting houses to colonial buildings and structures. The colonial architecture speaks of many years of immigration and colonisation. Micronesia was the site of important battles during World War II. The runways and bomb pits associated with the American use of the atomic bomb on Japan speak powerfully to that conflict, which had a huge impact on the Indigenous people. The region was subsequently the site of US nuclear testing, a legacy now recognised as part of the region's "heritage" as well as a continuing health concern.

Melanesia

Melanesia comprises Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Fiji. Parts of it have had a human presence for 50,000 years, with the populations increasing from about 1600 BCE when Lapita people arrived from Southeast Asia. It is a region with a high degree of cultural diversity, apparent in the fact that hundreds of languages are spoken. Its Indigenous building practices are rich with ancestral and cultural meanings. Traditional buildings

Fig. 8 Dancers at Kamindabit, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea. [Photograph: Martin Fowler, 2011]

have generally been made from plant-based materials. Such buildings are necessarily replaced from time to time. In large parts of the region, the continuity of the cultural practices associated with the making of such buildings is more important than the material authenticity of the extant examples, and a degree of loss is accepted.

New Caledonia and Fiji are distinct in the region in having recognised and protected key colonial buildings. New Caledonia was used as a French penal colony from 1864 to 1924. It remains a French collectivity, and French processes have influenced its heritage protection systems. Initiatives to recognise the heritage value of former penitentiary sites are underway. In Fiji, the colonial port town of Levuka was UNESCO World Heritage listed in 2013. It was Fiji's first capital, but was superseded as such because, squeezed between the sea and the mountains, its geography did not allow for its expansion. This explains why the nineteenth-century buildings survived.

South Pacific Polynesia

The vast region of Polynesia stretches from Hawai'i, to Aotearoa New Zealand, to Rapa Nui. The book's chapter on South Pacific Polynesia explores Wallis ('Uvea) and Futuna, Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, Niue, the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, the Pitcairn Islands, and Rapa Nui. These islands and atolls were settled in two main waves—West Polynesia from around 900 BCE and East Polynesia from around 770–800 CE.

In Polynesia, the belief that the land and geographic features have ancestral, mythological, and cultural meanings is recurrent. Heritage sites include prehistoric constructions built in stone and open to the air—star mounds in Samoa; langi in Tonga; marae in French Polynesia and the Cook Islands; and moai in Rapa Nui. While stone is permanent and enduring, fale, fare, or are (houses/buildings), made from natural materials, are not, and as is the case in Melanesia, it is the making of such buildings that is highly prized. Colonial and modern buildings in South Pacific Polynesia have generally received less recognition than the region's Indigenous sites, although Christian churches abound, and there is overseas interest in places once inhabited by famous Western expatriates.

Fig. 9 Église de la Sainte-Famille (Church of the Holy Family) on the island of Moʻorea in French Polynesia, built in 1891. [Photograph: Julia Gatley]

The region's heritage protection systems vary from well-established in French Polynesia and American Samoa, to developing in the Cook Islands, Samoa, and Tonga, to non-existent in Niue and Pitcairn. International partnerships have helped to ensure the preservation of Rapa Nui's highly significant moai. Futures for Tokelau and Tuvalu, less than 5 metres above sea level at their highest, are seriously threatened by the sea-level rise that is resulting from human-induced climate change.

The Pacific Polar Regions

The polar regions of the Pacific—the Aleutian Islands in the north and Antarctica in the south—have in common the challenges of extreme cold, wide variations in daylight during the year, and relative isolation. For these reasons, they were some of the last places to be explored by Europeans during the Age of Sail. Caretakers of cultural and built heritage still contend with these challenges today, preserving prehistoric sites, nineteenth-century churches, and vestiges of World War II in the Aleutian Islands, and the huts that survive from humanity's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century quest to reach the South Pole in Antarctica.

Chris Cochran's account of the huts in the Ross Sea region is completely fascinating.[8] They were erected from 1899 to 1917 by parties led by well-known explorers such as Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton. They were abandoned for several decades, with interest in their preservation growing from the 1960s, and New Zealand leading international efforts to document and preserve the buildings and their contents since the 1980s. Likewise, Australia has led those to preserve the Mawson Huts at Cape Denison in the Australian Antarctic Territory. These preservation initiatives are especially challenging because of the extreme environment in which they are carried out, while also navigating the complex international governance framework in which Antarctica and its resources are managed.

Fig. 10 Ernest Shackleton's Hut at Cape Royds (1908), where the landscape is dominated by Mt Erebus. [Photograph by Mike Gillies, 2018–19, Antarctic Heritage Trust]

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Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands has been such a pleasure to research and produce. It shows that cultural heritage protection, including architectural conservation, is a robust and highly effective discipline in Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i as a result of over a half-century of attention paid to it by the respective governments and an ever-increasing number of heritage institutions and practitioners. Other places in the region, including American Samoa and French Polynesia, also have long-standing heritage protection systems. In many Pacific Islands, there is less emphasis on the retention of heritage building fabric and more on the continuity of cultural practices, including the art and craft of making traditional buildings from plant-based materials. Colonisation, World War II, and atomic testing all left complicated legacies in the Pacific, apparent to varied extents in heritage listings, museums, and interpretive materials. The challenges are many, from cyclones and sea-level rise to earthquakes, tsunamis, limited resources, external development pressures, and often distance from professional expertise, but as Pacific Islands hone their individual approaches to heritage protection, the emphasis on intangible heritage value has the potential to influence the heritage sector internationally. This means that while an ICOMOS Pasifika Charter is promised, it is also highly anticipated.

NOTES

1. "The Time Honored Architectural Conservation Documentation Project: Understanding Cultural Heritage Conservation," www.conservebuiltworld.com (accessed 2 October 2023).

2. John H. Stubbs, *Time Honored, A Global View of Architectural Conservation: Parameters, Theory and Evolution of an Ethos* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

3. John H. Stubbs and Emily G. Makaš, *Architectural Conservation in Europe and the Americas* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), and John H. Stubbs and Robert G. Thomson, *Architectural Conservation in Asia: National Experiences and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

4. John H. Stubbs, William Chapman, Julia Gatley, and Ross King, *Architectural Conservation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands: National Experiences and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

5. Australia ICOMOS, *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* ("*Burra Charter*"), 1979, with many subsequent revisions, the latest being 2013.

6. Ellen Andersen, "Conservation of Māori Architecture," in Stubbs, Chapman, Gatley, and King, *Architectural Conservation*, 270–82.

7. ICOMOS New Zealand, *ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural* Heritage Value, 2nd ed., 2010 [1993].

8. Chris Cochran, "The Ross Sea Region, Antarctica," in Stubbs, Chapman, Gatley, and King, *Architectural Conservation*, 545–57.