

**One minute to midnight: The Brighton By-pass.  
and The Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy (STRLUS)**

Sue Neales' article in *The Mercury* 11 December just about sums up the current situation in respect of Tasmania's vast heritage fabric, whether it's aboriginal heritage of thousands of years, or its European /English heritage of the last 200 years+. Neales writes,

One would expect amazement, awe and pride to be overwhelming sentiment and feeling of all Tasmanians at the discovery of such ancient evidence of early man existing on Hobart's rural doorstep.

She continues,

Instead the reaction has largely been antagonistic and abhorrently racist...

She informs her readers that comments on website blogs and so bloggers overwhelmingly – want DIER to get on with building the four lane highway.

All of which says much about a particular cohort of Tasmanian people, about their attitudes to, and perception of, historical significance, in this case specifically of aboriginal history. But it is much more than these concepts, these perceptions, or particular held attitudes; it really is about our understanding (or lack of it) of the evolution of “place” in our lives. And of meaning and associations concerned with place and whether we think that's important.

It's perhaps controversial to state that – in my view – successive governments in the recent past, and Labour governments in particular have successfully ignored heritage and heritage landscape in Tasmania.

Consequently we have arrived at a one minute-to-midnight scenario where a very new cabinet minister sworn in last week, will be responsible for an incredibly complex, difficult and far reaching heritage decision about a road and an Aboriginal 41,000 year old, 14 hectare, ancient landscape area.

And one asks – in the last week – who has briefed Mr. Wightman on this issue since he has so recently become the Minister for Heritage in Tasmania?

It's something of a tragedy that we don't have a Julian Assange in Tasmania.

There is a deafening silence when it comes to Tasmania's heritage and to its landscape.

I was approached by DIER in July this year to prepare a report on the controversial 41,000 year old site. I refused the commission. On ABC TV.Stateline (6 August) I was interviewed about the ability to ‘read the landscape’ in respect of the proposed clover leaf development further up the By-Pass road, near Pontville. A Report for Pitt and Sherry on the historic property Parkholm in connection with the By-Pass, was also completed in late 2008. Other TT posts (Insights) related to heritage landscape planning (or lack of it) have appeared on TT earlier this year.

Monumental infrastructure development works such as major roads, major rail lines, large dams etc are in the planning pipeline for something in the order of 15 years or more. Decisions reflecting integrity and wisdom, informed knowledge and understanding of the issue, should not – in my opinion – be made at the one minute-to-midnight time by a Minister very inexperienced in heritage matters, simply because the planning “process” stuffed itself up long ago. While the controversy has raged onwards, the road has continued to be built, heavy machinery everywhere in evidence, both adjacent to the Jordan River area where the Aboriginal artefacts have been found, but also at the Pontville end. Somewhat like a giant octopus reaching out across the landscape, spreading its massive tentacles, its fairly blunt ‘message’ appears to be whatever the community think about this road, it’s being placed into the landscape regardless of the heritage loss, or of anything else.

It’s my professional opinion, Mr. McIlpatrick this simply won’t do.

Mr. Wightman this is a critical decision and in my view not one to be made without a thorough knowledge and understanding of both the evolved history of, and heritage significance landscape value of, the area.

And to Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Hodgman why have we waited 7 years for another Heritage Act, one that will bring Tasmanian heritage into the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Including a well considered definition of place (as per area) and heritage landscape? With still nothing placed before parliament at the end of 2010?

And Mr Foster as the Mayor of Brighton, your Council has my PIA accredited work on Brighton<sup>1</sup> completed in 1999, 2000, so will you not acknowledge the enormous heritage significance value of Heritage-Evolved Landscape-Place-Brighton?

For example, the currently constructed By-Pass has managed to slice its way through the land area shown on the original plan (c1821) of the Brighton township on the banks of the Strathallan Rivulet. This plan emerged from Governor Macquarie’s edict that a town should be built at this site, one of four along the then route from Launceston to Hobart. The By-Pass has similarly managed to slice its way through the area, shown on a subsequent plan of the township of Brighton (c1825) of John Helder Wedge, that micro landscape, still very evident on a Google Earth image. The By-Pass has managed to eradicate any landscape ‘reading’ of the Bell’s Line of Road through these early projected townships in the 1820s, before it continued up the eastern side of Pony Hill, and onwards towards the Bagdad Valley.

So-what you might ask? Who cares?

For the record, as a small child, I stood with my family on the top of Mount York, near Mount Victoria in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Pointed out to me, at the time was the first road constructed down the steep slope of Mount York known as Cox’s Road (c1814). On bare rock faces, I was shown the pickaxe marks made by convicts, and a small child’s imagination was stirred for all time. Neglected for a very long time, this linear route has come to life, having been restored by NSW

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<sup>1</sup> Number of reports. Also reports on the Mangalore and Bagdad areas, 2006, 2010. The 2000 Reports won an award at the Planning Institute of Australia’s Town Planning awards.

Heritage and the New South Wales National Parks authorities, so can now be visited and walked by numbers of tourists. Similarly the Great North Road, from Wiseman's Ferry north of Sydney has become a walking track. But in Tasmania it seems we are oblivious to the potential that history might offer the interested tourist, and so we continue to trash it, one way or another.

Tasmania it seems is simply un-engaged with its heritage or its landscape. Perhaps it isn't sexy enough, or perhaps most people don't simply care sufficiently what happens on their patch. Or to quote an earlier post on TT,

We will stagger ever onwards, destroying our heritage (indigenous and colonial), failing to properly protect what is left of it, trashing our forests, polluting and plundering our waterways, inadequately protecting our agricultural land, extinguishing our wildlife and generally eliminating much of what it is that makes Tasmania unique. Apathy appears congenital among our rulers. And developers, with no sense of history or aesthetics, continue to wriggle their way into approvals for environmentally damaging and ugly constructions.

We might then have looked to the recently released Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy [STRLUS] for some enlightenment.

When the STRLUS is reviewed, missing from it, are the important chapters on Heritage and on Landscape. Missing too, is the background documentation that sits behind the chapter on heritage and the one on landscape. No lead is being given to local government on these issues.

It seems heritage and heritage landscape is to remain consigned to no-man's land. We can then expect to have further future stuff-ups such as the Brighton By-Pass.

At pp. 25, of the Strategy it notes 'landscape and cultural heritage (p. 20) gives this region [ie southern region ] a competitive advantage. " And that seems to be that.

At Section 9 of the Strategy on Cultural Values of the Strategy,

While most known European heritage values are adequately managed through existing statutory processes, the system is not proactive in the identification and protection of assets such as cultural landscapes.

Even European heritage values are NOT MANAGED ADEQUATELY... This is a nonsense statement. Tasmania has a huge tapestry of significant heritage values, a large measure of which is blank... in other words, hasn't been researched. Few Tasmanian councils have cultural heritage officers, no cultural landscape officers, and few planners I suggest, equipped to deal adequately with, heritage /landscape issues. STRLUS continues,

Protection of landscape values is however a broad issue. Not only do we have landscapes that are representative of the region's European heritage, but also there are landscapes significant to the Aboriginal community as well as landscapes that have broader natural and scenic value.

This kind of 'speak' is going nowhere fast. STRLUS, notes too, at CV-A5 (p. 114 Table 6) that the completion of the Heritage Act Review was to be afforded only medium priority. Another 7 year wait perhaps?

It's been a motherhood-type approach such as this for decades. Why? We've got to stop peddling out the mantra of the too-hard-basket approach, head-in-the-sand response, simply because at some level, heritage and landscape is seen as 'elitist', or isn't understood, or is too controversial, or its real significance isn't appreciated. That's the problem. At high levels of operation there appears to be an inability to grasp any understanding of heritage, its interconnection to planning and landscape, with those interrelationships vital to Tasmania's tourism. This is despite some past high level heritage/planning advice.

The Productivity Commission Report 2006, *Conservation of Australia's Heritage Places*<sup>2</sup> made an important recommendation for Tasmania at 11.4,<sup>3</sup>

State Heritage Acts should not contain powers to proclaim heritage zones or areas. Heritage zones and areas should only be imposed under the state's planning laws and regulations.

And the international body, Australia ICOMOS also had some thoughts, this in response to the Government's Position Paper on Heritage in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

Australia ICOMOS is pleased that the State Government recognises the importance of cultural landscapes, movable heritage and archaeology and in the light of this:

(i.) The State Government should determine an approach to cultural landscape identification and introduce additional statutory processes to identify, assess and manage significant cultural landscapes, especially across local government boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

It's not just a question of pretty views... it's developing a tool for the future and management of that future. One tool is called Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) [see Appendix below].

Leo Schofield's article in *The Mercury*, October 30, 2010 was most insightful. Leo noted for example that,

people love gardens as well as houses. Monet's garden at Giverny draws 400,000 visitors annually and it is only open between April and November.

The lack of any heritage planning is very evident in the STRLUS. It could move in the other direction. If there was a willingness to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Government. Productivity Commission. *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places*. No 37. April 2006. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra. 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. xxxvi

<sup>4</sup> Tasmanian Government. Dept. of Tourism, Arts and the Environment. *Managing our Heritage. A Position Paper supporting the final consultation on the reform of the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*.

<sup>5</sup> Australia ICOMOS. Response to *Position Paper. Managing our Heritage*. October 2007. 1-2.

While there has been some more localised work on skylines and landscapes within some areas in Southern Tasmania, a comprehensive analysis and documentation of landscape values is still to occur and *will potentially be fraught with difficulty, arising from inherent subjectivity* [Sheridan's emphasis].

Notwithstanding this there should be some beginnings towards understanding the region's landscapes, their importance to all or part of the community's sense of place, and their culture as well as their contribution to economic development and ecological values.

If the UK has been able to embrace landscape character assessment using tools, (both subjective and objective) with its population size, its conflicting land use pressures and enormous heritage fabric, its huge development realities, what does the statement 'will potentially be fraught with difficulty ... and some beginnings' etc. tell us about the writers?

What the eye sees, and how the mind perceives and interprets what the eye sees, the attitudes we bring with us, are critical to how landscape is evaluated.

There are Aboriginal landscape and European /English patterns in the landscape. *There is an evolved series of Tasmanian landscapes across millennia.* It's their patterns and heritage significance value that is the issue. Landscape is rarely static in its presentation. Now though, the speed and scale of development change, its monumental capacity for eradication of what was there previously, the meaning of that change, the loud clanger for removal of the past is what is never openly and transparently publicly discussed.

A voice from the past is John Ruskin.<sup>6</sup>

To assess truth requires some understanding of motives and intentions – an artificial rose is not a false rose... it is not a rose at all. The falseness is in the person who states or induces the belief that it is a rose.

**Gwenda Sheridan.**

## **Appendix 1. Historic Landscape Characterisation.**

The English have developed an overlay tool called Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC). It works in partnership with local government. English Heritage<sup>7</sup> describes this 'as a powerful tool that provides a framework for broadening our understanding of the whole landscape and contributes to decisions affecting tomorrow's landscape,' [Sheridan's emphasis]. English Heritage further noted that England's rural landscape was 'one of the jewels of our national heritage.' Additional comments from English Heritage<sup>8</sup> were that, 'it is too easily overlooked when we

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<sup>6</sup> Taken from *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, 1856, quoted in E Relph. *Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography*. Croom Helm. London. 1981.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> Further details of the English Heritage and Historic Landscape Characterisation can be found on the Internet site of English heritage, particularly *Using Historic Landscape Characterisation* and *Historic Landscape Characterisation: Taking Stock of Method*, (2003).

concentrate on individual buildings or archaeological monuments and its historic dimension can be too easily missed if landscape is admired as beautiful scenery.’

The English Historic Landscape Characterisation is in line with the European Landscape Convention which came into force in 11 ratifying countries on 4 March 2004. It was signed by the U.K. in February 2006 and ratified on 21 November 2006. It came into force on 1 March 2007.

We might take a quantum leap and suggest that Tasmania’s rural landscape(s), its historic towns and villages are one of the jewels in Australia’s national heritage, none of which is adequately researched, nor protected. In the southern region, there are very historic places, and towns and villages in all of the local government areas. But STRLUS is not going – in its present format – to protect these in any way, shape or form.

As Jim Gardner (Assistant Director-Strategic Support, Heritage Victoria) wrote in 2006, of Historic Landscape Characterisation, (HLC),

Historic landscape characterization is a big picture approach, rather than being about individual heritage sites, buildings or trees. It is primarily about the present rather than the past. .... [It] is a way of defining context rather than a full assessment of significance in its wider sense. .. [it] is a tool to help manage change not halt change.<sup>9</sup> [Sheridan emphasis].

If the [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) website is accessed and Historic Landscape Characterisation is put into the search, there are over 3,000 hits for what is happening on the other side of the world.

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<sup>9</sup> Heritage Victoria. *Historic Towns in the Landscape Forum*. Forum Report. 28 April 2006. Held at Buninyong. Victoria. Jim Gardner. Characterisation: new ways of valuing the historic environment.