

HOWARD TANNER

ARCHITECT

32 HENRY STREET QUEENS PARK NSW AUSTRALIA 2022

The Honourable Peter Poulos MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Poulos

Inquiry into the Heritage Act 1977 - Response to Supplementary Question

The question asked, is as follows:

1. Mr Tanner your submission mentions “Dr James Kerr perfected the concise model [of the Conservation Plan] in the 1980s and it hasn’t been bettered.”

Could you elaborate on Dr James Kerr’s model?

Reply:

Dr James Semple Kerr (1932-2014) was an eminent architectural historian and heritage practitioner. One can find several worthy entries on James Kerr via Google.

James Kerr and his wife Joan Kerr were highly educated and great researchers, and James, in particular, was a pioneer in understanding the theory and principles of heritage. Kerr worked at various times in a senior role at the Australian Heritage Commission and the National Trust of Australia (NSW). James Kerr’s analysis of how heritage should be evaluated found expression in what is known as ‘*The Burra Charter*’, (the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance). This document has been widely accepted by government and other agencies within Australia and internationally as providing a vital framework for heritage management, and has influenced heritage work world-wide.

The Conservation Plan

James Kerr effectively invented and perfected a process and related document known as *The Conservation Plan*, in recent times often titled a Conservation Management Plan. Kerr detailed the Conservation Plan method in 1982, and proceeded to produce and publish a number of Conservation Plan reports, of which important examples include:

- Fort Denison 1986
- Admiralty House 1987
- Sydney Opera House 1993
- Sydney Observatory 1997

In these reports Kerr analysed the history and significance of the heritage item, and thus long-term considerations for preservation and conservation. Kerr’s approach recognised the importance of achieving practical, viable outcomes, while retaining the important heritage values of these places.

Kerr's reports articulate with great clarity how the care of such special places can be achieved. Clear-eyed, concise, well-illustrated and well edited...his reports are an exemplar of thoughtful reportage and guidance. They have proven highly effective in practice.

Unfortunately, many who subsequently followed Kerr's system lacked his skills, and an average heritage consultant often produced vast and quite expensive Conservation Plans with excessive and repetitive verbiage. Such documents tended to be very formulaic, not to the point, and often relatively unreadable. While satisfying an authority requirement, large and unwieldy tomes, in my experience, are rarely consulted by those involved in any subsequent construction works. This, in part, relates to the inability of Heritage NSW and other authorities to understand properly the product they had required and approved. and its related usage. Such authorities also generally fail to properly surveil any resulting construction works.

It would be timely to require such reports to have a truly effective and readable basis. In essence a summary document of limited pages, which could refer to appendices and other key documents where further information could be found.

The Kerr methodology as set out in *The Conservation Plan* has proven the test of time and continues to offer the best approach to well-informed decision making for important heritage places.

Howard Tanner

16 September 2021