

From Prehistory to History: Shared Perspectives in Australian Heritage Interpretation



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Abstract

It has long been established that in Australia contemporary (post-contact) Aboriginal history has suffered as a result of the colonisation process. Aboriginal history was seen as belonging in the realm of prehistory, rather than in contemporary historical discourses. Attempts have now been made to reinstate Indigenous history into local, regional and national historical narratives. The field of heritage interpretation however still largely relegates Aboriginal heritage to prehistory. Aboriginal heritage is seen as being a separate interpretive field from ‘historic heritage’, and is often linked to ‘natural heritage’.

This thesis investigates the ways in which Aboriginal history can be incorporated into the interpretation of contemporary or post-contact history at heritage sites. The thesis uses the principle of ‘shared history’ as outlined by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, as a starting point in these discussions. However the ultimate aim is to go beyond this definition. By investigating a variety of heritage sites (examples are taken from monuments, museums and historic sites Australia wide), and in particular those that are attempting to incorporate both Indigenous and non-indigenous history in their interpretive programs, this thesis argues for effective ways to create ‘shared histories’ in practice, whilst also analysing the problems that can be encountered when trying to establish these programs. The resulting discussion provides insights, particularly for those working in the field of interpretation, as to how heritage interpreters in Australia can adopt a more inclusive approach, that is, an approach that allows for multiple voices both from and about the past, to be heard.

Certificate of Authenticity

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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