

Keeping It Public Forum Better Models for Managing Cultural and Natural Heritage

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Principles of Heritage Management

The reuse of existing buildings and places either for a variation on their existing use or for totally new uses is becoming increasingly common. Whether because their inherent characteristics are being recognised, because of planning controls or because of economic necessity is a moot and often debated point.

In parallel to built conservation philosophy an increased awareness in nature conservancy has raised issues relating to the morality and ethics of architecture and development and the overall ethic of 'stewardship' which underpins a number of the concepts in both built and natural conservation.

When we look at the North Head Quarantine Station we have both natural and built fabric of great renown as well as a site in state ownership. The basic questions of what it means to be 'publicly owned' and what accessibility means are difficult at the best of times. It is not uncommon in National Parks the world over to have visitation restricted because of the inherent nature of the place under protection of the state. Publicly owned does not necessarily mean that it should be 100% accessible nor that visitation should be continually increased. But I am not here to talk specifically about that but rather the principles of Heritage Management as they apply to this fragile and important place. Visitation however does play a part in those discussions.

It is essential before we go very much further in our deliberations about the future of the site that its carrying capacity is recognised. There is no point in debating the economic return of one scheme over another if the place is destroyed in the process. The 'economic reality' that we discuss

endlessly in relation to the Mawland's scheme is based on a quite obvious, and not unreasonable, expectation that a private developer requires a return on his or her investment. The carrying capacity however must be determined by what is the most fragile piece of this complex puzzle – the weakest link as it were. It is likely that that will be the endangered bandicoot population or the little penguins, rather than the buildings which were designed for continuous as well as peak/surge/ binge? occupation even though lack of maintenance has made some buildings more fragile than they might otherwise have been. The recent fire in H1 is an obvious case in point.

As soon as you start talking about people on the site then the effect of those people needs to be recognised.

Perhaps the most similar site to this one internationally is Grosse Île, an island in the St Lawrence River, Québec, Canada. It has a very similar history to North Head although it wasn't in use quite as long. A brief history of Grosse Île is perhaps in order and I'm sure you will notice a number of parallels to the development of North Head Quarantine Station but also a number of differences.

The large number of immigrants to the North American colonies from the British Isles and Europe after the Napoleonic Wars led colonial authorities in Canada to set up a quarantine station at Grosse Île. It was chosen because the island had the important geographical advantages of close proximity to the port of Québec, distance from local population, and location along a sea lane. Much the same reasons that made North Head ideal.

Once a cholera hospital was built in 1832, other buildings in the vicinity followed. The proximity of the living quarters of the sick to those of the healthy, the haphazard way people were accommodated as well as lack of scientific knowledge of the treatment of the sick are some of the striking features of the first decades of the quarantine at Grosse Île.

After the Irish Potato Famine, 1845-1849, a great part of Ireland's population was forced to emigrate. In 1847 an unprecedented number of immigrants, the large majority being Irish, left for Québec. The resulting situation was tragic. The immigrants, weakened by malnutrition and famine, arrived in a deplorable state. Typhus quickly took on epidemic proportions. Personnel were overwhelmed and Grosse Île could no longer support everyone. In 1847 alone thousands died at sea and were buried at Grosse Île. Thousands more died in Québec, Montréal and Kingston.

After 1847 authorities changed the way immigrants were accommodated. From then on Grosse Île was divided into three sections. The sick were confined to the east section, healthy immigrants to the west and administration to the centre. Barriers, checkpoints and guards separated these areas. The immigrants experienced the harsh realities of quarantine.

After confederation in 1867 the Canadian government developed an immigration policy that demanded that quarantine services be effective and efficient. The then medical superintendent [Dr Frederick Montizambert] reorganised the station in accord with new discoveries in bacteriology. He subjected ships and immigrants to strict efficient health controls. He then modernised reception facilities and living quarters for immigrants and through his actions Grosse Île came to fulfil the three main roles of a quarantine station: disinfection, ship inspection and the detention of the sick and healthy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the first world war and the crash of 1929 led to a considerable drop in immigration, which up until then had been phenomenal. The station was deemed obsolete in 1937. After that it went through a chequered career as an experimental research station for bacteriological warfare for the Department of National Defence during the second world war and then a veterinary pathology station in 1956 under the

control of Agriculture Canada. In 1965, the Department built a quarantine station for animals. Finally in 1984 Grosse Île was officially recognised as a National Historic Site which brings us to our current comparison. 1984 was also the year in which North Head Quarantine Station was transferred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service

The site now contains two memorials to the Irish and others, including one built in 1998, a monument to physicians built in 1853, the Irish cemetery, First, Second and third class hotels, wash house, disinfection building, plumbing and carpentry workshop, bakery, electrician's house, Vaccination and Medical Examination Office, Guard post, sailor's quarters, Anglican chapel, catholic chapel and presbytery, artillery battery, telegraph office, residences for physicians, medical bacteriologists and nurses as well as a school. A residence for healthy immigrants called the Lazaretto is the only remaining evidence of Grosse Île's role as a hospital in 1847.

The site is a national historic site administered by Parks Canada under the *Parks Canada Agency Act (1998)*. Unlike the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Parks Canada is a national or Federal body. Parks Canada is also responsible for the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office which provides custodial departments with assistance and review of proposed interventions that might affect the character of designated buildings. Parks Canada administers the largest number of federal heritage buildings in Canada.

A visit to Grosse Île involves a guide greeting you at the wharf and inviting you to visit the disinfection building. 'The exhibits here will immerse you in the historical context of the quarantine station' their web-site says. You then have a choice of taking a one-hour guided tour or wandering on your own. You can buy a guide book to help you on your way for \$4.00 Canadian. There is a trolley that can take you around on the tour, equivalent to the 'people mover' discussed by Mawlands.

Rather than the ‘visitor experience’ described by Mawlands and NPWS Parks Canada say in their website that ‘Grosse Île has witnessed some moving moments in history, and it provides visitors with a peaceful setting for quiet contemplation.’

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* (1998) has given Parks Canada ‘the tools and flexibility it needs for the effective contemporary stewardship of our system of special heritage places.’ The real significance of the *Parks Canada Agency Act* was the inclusion of two-year rolling budgets along with a new human resources framework to allow them to administer appropriately. Government commitment to important places.

Stewardship and the role as a public entity is something taken very seriously. Parks Canada talk about ‘ecological integrity’ and ‘commemorative integrity’. Their aim is to raise awareness of Canadians to the value and benefits to them of ‘heritage places’ be they natural or built. The notion of ‘commemorative integrity’ is a good one and is perhaps more expressive of our aims than many terms in common use here. It is the place’s ability to ‘be’ and to tell its own story.

The impact of human use and conservation works at Grosse Île is of concern even at the relatively low level of intervention. Wildlife of concern is not bandicoots but little brown bats. Four large colonies have been identified on the island along with four other species of bat, long eared, red, big brown and hoary bats. In 1998 a significant drop in the population of the little brown bat was noticed and the most likely cause is considered to be the restoration work to one of the buildings in the attic of which bats were known to roost. A number of solutions have been investigated including building separate artificial roosts and a monitoring programme has begun. Work to the remaining buildings may need to be modified to take account of roosting habits.

In all the documentation, reports and the like there is no real distinction between their responsibilities for the natural and built environment. In concurrence with the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* the national historic sites programme is assuming a role of support, education, co-operation and collaboration within the larger family of historic sites. These activities which have both formal and informal aspects, affirm Parks Canada's broad role within the national historic sites across Canada, regardless of ownership. This is quite a different role than our own NPWS.

The goal of the national historic sites programme is to illustrate the full range and diversity of Canadian history through a system of sites, persons and events considered significant to the nation. They also give assistance to sites owned by others through the National Cost-Sharing Program, i.e., support partners in ensuring the integrity of Canada's national historic sites. Work includes restoration and preservation as well as emergency stabilisation. Parks Canada administers 144 national historic sites. Grosse Île has over 30 nationally significant buildings whose condition ranges from good to poor. Remedial actions are planned or underway, with due consideration for the bats.

It is interesting to note in a recent report about the effectiveness of their programmes and initiatives that the discussion is about 'engaging Canadians' not capturing the tourist market. It is about measuring the awareness among Canadians of the value and benefits to them of the systems of heritage places in order to 'ensure the long term ecological and commemorative integrity'. Although Parks Canada do acknowledge the role of Heritage Tourism and note that it is a primary catalyst of domestic and international travel. To quote from the *State of Protected Heritage Areas 1999 Report*: 'Heritage tourism must be sustainable. For Parks Canada, sustainability means access to the heritage places in its care that does not diminish their ecological and commemorative integrity, their *raison d'être* and

the character that gives them value. It is a delicate balance' When all is said and done what it comes down to is **respect** and **integrity**. All the words and explanations in the world will not alter that basic concept.

In short the management structure at Grosse Île is testament to the commitment of government to places that tell the story of the nation. Continued research is essential for making wise visitor decisions and ensuring long term eco-system health. There is no distinction made between the natural and the cultural in discussions of importance and a strong commitment is made to indigenous heritage and continued participation. Grosse Île may not be ideal in some ways. It can probably be argued that more evidence of later occupation would be an advantage and the importance of the little bats versus the cultural importance of the buildings will no doubt be continued to be debated but in the end the slow and steady approach with strong government commitment must be applauded.