

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

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Introduction

- I have been asked today to give a very brief overview of industrial archaeology (of the dirt digging kind) in an archaeology practice.
- I'm not sure of what people may need to know, or want to know about this, but it occurred to me that some discussion about 'underground' industrial archaeology and 'normal' largely 'above ground' industrial archaeology and the differing approaches and the skills set each demands, and the similarities with them, would be a start.
- It then occurred to me that the occurrence of 'underground dirt digging' industrial archaeology projects in practice is much less than 'normal' industrial archaeology and that that may be something to explore.
- I'll touch on both these today.

What is Industrial Archaeology and what does it need in practice

- Industrial archaeology in NSW is generally understood to mean the study of largely above ground old industrial places such as factories, railway workshops and mine surface workings.
- It usually includes survey and recording, assessment and management recommendations, and can include some identification of likely 'underground' archaeological remains of that industry at that place.
- It usually does not include the identification and assessment of previous unrelated industrial or otherwise activities on the site or archaeological relics (but can do).
- While I cannot speak for all consultant practices, I believe I would not be wrong in saying that the majority of industrial archaeology undertaken in NSW falls into the 'above ground' type.
- I understand this morning, however that we are looking at those industrial sites of prior occupations which do not have any, or very little above ground remains that tell the story of their history, development, change and function.
- These sites are made up of relics rather than extant structures, machinery and workings and require different

approaches to their research, investigation, recording and significance assessment.

- The relics are often in disturbed contexts or only represent a small surviving part of a once possibly extensive industrial site or complex (for various deposit creation and survival reasons).
- Importantly, for an archaeological practice, underground archaeological investigation demands the mixed skills set of a 'normal' industrial archaeologist and a dirt digging archaeologist to approach how the site should be investigated, documented and managed. The combination of these skills is invaluable.
- While they may be different types of industrial sites, however, and different skills sets, and research approaches for them, both types of industrial sites can be characterised by an overriding feature in common:
- If they are important, they are largely important because of they have surviving fabric (structures, machinery, works, objects and archives and/or relics and archaeological deposits) that can embody, interpret, illustrate, demonstrate or provide otherwise unknown information about their '**function**'.
- In crude terms, and there are exceptions to this, if an industrial site of any kind does not have significant fabric that reflects or illustrates what it did, made, extracted, or processed etc, then it is unlikely to be of very much heritage value (they may have historical, social or landscape or other values, however, but these are usually secondary except in the case of mines where social significance can be primary).
- Investigating, recording and assessing them then, usually means finding out what happened on the site, how that changed over time, and whether there is surviving fabric of that. This in turn, usually means establishing a industrial or working assessment context largely based on themes and comparative analysis of similar sites as well as a local or place based historical geographical context
- This poses enormous problems because records of industrial places are traditionally scratchy - partly because approvals to establish industries was surprisingly not as regulated as urban development (there is a rumour that BHP submitted its first DA for its Wollongong site in the 1980s) and because processes and chattels, and detailed industrial site plans are rarely kept in archives (minute books and financial information tend to be the primary archives of industry).
- Successive, often overseas ownership, can also dissipate records and make research prohibitive.

- All this adds up to the need in an archaeological practice to make sure that projects about industrial sites appropriately resource research and investigation into function based information unless the site is known for other reasons. Tons of material about the London based financiers isn't much help, if gathering it has been at the expense of pursuing plans, catalogues and accounts of what the site did.

Why don't dirt digging industrial sites come up often?

- The historical geography of Australia's population and economic growth is reflected in its disproportionately large coastal cities and a few key regional centres, which have always, and still do, contain the vast majority of its population and economic activity.
- It is the most highly urbanised country in the world and has been since the 1890s.
- The highly urbanised nature of Australia is now being amplified because of accelerated rural-urban drift and the tendency for immigrants to concentrate in cities—the very same cities that were established as colonial, trading, industrial and military centres during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and into the immediate past century.
- These cities and centres still contain many places that reflect important aspects Australia's history but rarely are below ground archaeological sites investigated in cities and major centres because it may be that many just haven't survived (there are exceptions like some sites Darling Harbour and Pymont) .
- These sites haven't survived much for very simple reasons - the historical geography of increasing urban population and service provision, has resulted in an urban history of the successive re-use of under-capitalised, often industrial land, close to the (historic) city centres.
- Many colonial or mid nineteenth century industrial sites close to the main urban centres were redeveloped in the late nineteenth century and again during the early twentieth century so it is very unlikely that archaeological resources that potentially could reflect their previous industrial use, spatial and functional arrangements, has survived these successive development episodes.
- However, as the urban fringe expands and satellite cities and suburbs grow as a result of tree or sea change investment, or decentralisation, or simply more competitive land and labour

prices, some below ground industrial sites are popping up in places like Mittagong, Coffs Harbour, the Hunter, Newcastle and some locations in the Illawarra (Dapto).

- This is because these places have not been subject to the degree of successive land uses that have characterised the city and major regional centres, so remains of previous industrial activities, especially large industry, have survived.
- They are however, usually quite rare sites because they can survive in remarkable condition and tell us a lot about what they did (which is rarely found elsewhere) and because large or complex high investment based industry outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong didn't actually occur much, except mining or some primary industry processing (wool washes, silos ad some flour etc) milling.
- While this little historical aside does not relate directly to archaeological practice, it does indicate that industrial archaeological practice may need to turn its focus to growing regional centres and become part of any opportunity for strategically identifying where these sites may be so that they can be appropriately managed.

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