



GET THE FACTS - HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

24. HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The selection and valuation of heritage generally starts off as a process of campaigning interest groups, notably conservationists driven by a reaction to incipient development that encroaches on buildings and sites or amounts to actual physical displacement of social groups. In urban areas, heritage protection is a response to 'progress' and modernisation which threatens the representations of the past. Today, heritage legislation is entrenched to protect fragile places that retain sufficient original fabric warranting conservation

and preservation. Unfortunately, to breathe life back into these places, they must become commercially viable to operators interested in exploiting tourist dollars. The so-called globalisation of populated tourist space is a phenomenon common to major cities, historic towns and urban heritage sites around the world. Places are now conceived not as nuclei of cultural belonging, 'foci of attachment or concern', but as tourist destinations. In Sydney, The Rocks area has become a major tourist destination in Australia. Its charming sandstone buildings, narrow lanes

and hilly terrain bespeaks a time going back to the very earliest settlement of our nation. Compared to its squalid origins, The Rocks has today become thoroughly gentrified. Whole rows of terrace houses have become converted into chic café's and boutique shops. As we move through the place today, we glean very little sense of the extreme poverty, suffering and squalor that prevailed back in its history. Its beautiful sandstone walls and quaint narrow lanes have become merely a backdrop to a themed retail precinct – a tenuous link to an imagined past.