

The following reflections on Jim Kerr have been compiled from the thoughtful words of Joan Domicelj and Meredith Walker (which also included thoughts from others) which were said at his funeral on Friday 24 October. I have only made some minor changes, and added some information about dates, awards and publications – with thanks to Tamsin Kerr and Bronwyn Hanna for these. I hope that others like me who could not attend the funeral will enjoy these reflections.

Elizabeth Vines, President, Australia ICOMOS

Marriage: The long marriage of the Queenslanders Eleanor Joan (Lyndon, 1938 – 2004) and William James Semple Kerr from 1960 – 2004, created “two halves of a very complete whole - drawing strength from each other and developing complementary professional expertise” (Peter Watts). Just as Joan was a true public intellectual in art and architectural history, so was Jim on conservation planning - both were erudite, authoritative, generous and inspiring. After visiting their home in Cremorne shortly before Joan’s death in 2004, Susan Macdonald commented on how honoured she felt to have met these “two pillars of Australian cultural life”.

Europe and early working life with Qantas: - In the 1960s, Jim worked for QANTAS first in Geneva in 1963, and then London, where they both enrolled in a history of art course run by Nikolaus Pevsner at Birkbeck College. They returned to Australia in 1968 settling in Cremorne, and Jim chose to leave Qantas in 1972, changing his professional direction towards issues of the built heritage. Jim undertook a doctorate at the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, at the University of York in 1974 and they later returned intermittently to York, and were much influenced by the intellectual stimulus they had found in Europe.

1970s Australia Back in Australia : The 1970s bore the fruits of the ‘It’s Time’ Whitlam government - new energy was directed towards protecting the national estate. There were union Green Bans, the National Trust flourished, the Australian Heritage Commission was established in 1977 and the NSW Heritage Council in 1978. Jim became Deputy Director of the National Trust and later - after an academic sojourn in York – and a Deputy Director of the Australian Heritage Commission. From 1982, he practised as a pre-eminent heritage adviser.

The National Trust was a joyful place under John Morris, director, and Jim Kerr, deputy director, with strong collaboration between volunteers and specialists and with members ranging from conservative blue rinsers to wild haired greenies. The Trust was to continue as Jim’s trusted publisher for decades.

The **Australian Heritage Commission**, similarly, was a happily innovative and vigorous body under the chairmanship of David Yencken and the directorship of Max Bourke and Jim. However, developers and government entities sometimes resented the newly legislated heritage requirements..

Jim the diplomat – an example: In 1978, Australia Post proposed major alterations to Sydney’s nineteenth century Barnet-designed General Post Office. Joan Domicelj and Jim were charged with presenting the approval process to hostile Commonwealth officers. En route to the meeting, Jim stopped at a café to buy a huge family sized block of chocolate. They entered the meeting room to find 17 hostile figures around the table. Jim, avuncular in

manner, slowly and deliberately unwrapped the chocolate, broke it into pieces and said: *Chocolate anyone? As Joan tells the story: They melted - and then we could talk.*

Jim was precise - particularly as to timing – an example - One Friday at the Australian Heritage Commission, Jim unexpectedly announced: *I'm off then.* Everyone was shocked - what on earth was wrong? Nothing. He had enjoyed the role and they had appreciated him. What then? He said (apparently): *I told you I would come for two years - today is the second anniversary. Goodbye and best wishes.*

His work and contribution to Australia ICOMOS: Jim had a major role as convenor of the working group that developed the Burra charter, and convenor of the 'Co-ordination of papers working group (COPWOG)' that prepared the Guidelines to the charter. In recalling the early history of the Burra Charter in an article written in 1983, Jim underplayed his role. But Bronwyn Hanna, who conducted an oral history of the Burra charter in recent years, recounts that Jim took pride in his ability to manage committees and explained his role in some detail. The charter and the guidelines are testimony to his skill in bringing out the best of the committee members in an atmosphere of good will.

In the field of caring for significant places - what is it that Jim did to make us, his colleagues, admire and respect him so deeply? Most notable is his authorship of **The Conservation Plan**, which outlines processes for managing change in places of cultural significance. It is a guide written with great clarity following the intentions of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter. The Introduction explains that *'Conservation and development are not mutually exclusive objectives; they should, and can, be part of a single planning process. Developments do not take place in a vacuum but at an existing place, in existing surroundings.'* The Plan begins with 'understanding the place' and the policies flow from that understanding. His conservation plans for major heritage sites around Australia remain exemplary while The Conservation Plan is nationally and internationally admired and used.

Jim was generous. A recent example - The National Trust of Australia (NSW) first published the Conservation Plan in 1982. Last year, after six earlier editions, Jim authorized Australia ICOMOS to present the seventh in a free-of-charge download-able format from the Australia ICOMOS website, for all to use, anywhere in the world. An earlier example: When Peter Marquis-Kyle (conservation architect in Brisbane) started out on his own, Jim sent the latest version of The Conservation Plan. Peter recalls "There's still a Post-it stuck inside, on which he has written that he was sending it 'for the education of future staff' -- a typical touch, politely removing any suggestion that I needed instruction from it."

Jim was analytical - an example. Perhaps the most complex of his many conservation plans is the much loved but somewhat challenging Sydney Opera House. Jim's *'A Plan for the Sydney Opera House and its Site'* first appeared in 1993 and in revised edition ten years later. Jim states that *'most of the difficult issues concerned the appropriate treatment of the work of Utzon and Hall'*. His solution to those complex, sometimes passionate, tensions was critical to the successful case made for World Heritage listing of the property in 2007. He considered his conservation plan for the Sydney Opera House to be 'probably about as good as I got'.

Jim and Technology - Jim chose not to engage with some forms of technology. For over 30 years Jim produced drafts in freehand, which were word-processed, then typeset under

his supervision by Lynda Howlett. Jim had a great graphic sense, producing clear diagrams from observation and re-drawing old maps that were difficult to reproduce. Every page of a conservation plan had graphic interest. In meetings, Jim's imagination -combined with the vibe of the meeting- generated some wonderfully creative, and convoluted images, which were sometimes presented to colleagues with a humorous remark.

His publications and records- there are reputedly 40 titles in the National Library - amongst them *'Out of Sight, Out of Mind'*; *'Design for Convicts'* and *'Joan Kerr, a Pictorial Biography'*. His personal papers, and those of his wife, and records of his family history have been deposited, in bound volumes, in the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Awards - Jim was awarded the NSW National Trust Heritage Award with his wife Joan in 1995, and their lifetime achievement award in 2007, and he was made an ICOMOS Honorary Member in 2011. He was also made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1999, "...for service to heritage conservation through organisations including the Australian ICOMOS, and The New South Wales Branch Of The National Trust Of Australia".

Jim died on Wednesday 15 October 2014 at Elizabeth Lodge nursing home, Willoughby, New South Wales. Our heartfelt thanks go to him for all the gifts he has given all of us associated with Australia ICOMOS and we send our condolences to his family in their time of loss.