

Understanding Significance in Assessing Heritage Assets

The IHBC North West Branch Day Conference in October 2010 was on the topic of Understanding Significance.

Significance is defined in Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS 5) (Annex 2) as: *“The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.”*

PPS 5 was published in March 2010 and the term significance is a key word. Despite being a brief policy document: the word significance appears 38 times. The day conference was organised in order to help practitioners explore the idea of significance more fully and consider how it differed from what we used to call architectural or historic interest.

The first part of the day was devoted to setting the scene, by looking at Conservation Principles and PPS 5. The first speaker was Steven Bee, Director of Planning & Development at English Heritage. His presentation was entitled: The significance of “significance”. The aim the talk was to define the terms we use and the importance of using them consistently.

Defining our terms is necessary not least in terms of legal definitions and public enquires, but also because the terms are vital in managing places and avoiding future objections. Even where there is agreement on the terms being used, Bee insisted, there can still be divergence later.

By way of an example, Bee cited the case of Smithfields Market in London. English Heritage had not been able to come to an agreement with the Local Authority and the developer with respect to the place’s significance. The case went to a public enquiry and the proposals were eventually turned down by the inspector. The process took three years and expenditure had run into millions of pounds. Agreed understanding had to be a better way forward in such cases.

Bee provided some definitions of significance, a dictionary definition, the PPS 5 definition (see above) and a quote from the accompanying Practice Guide: *“...a heritage asset holds meaning for society over and above its functional utility. It is this heritage significance that justifies a degree of protection in planning decisions.”*

Bee highlighted what PPS 5 said about significance and its importance in planning decisions. He pointed out that it was the applicant’s responsibility to describe the significance and the Local Authority’s responsibility to take significance into account: to consider the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets. (PPS 5 HE7.4) The greater the significance of the heritage asset the more the presumption should be in favour of its conservation (HE9.1); Local Authorities should consider the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the World Heritage Site or Conservation as a whole (HE9.5); and the greater the negative impact on the significance of the heritage asset, the stronger the justification would have to be (HE10.1).

Although PPS 5 is the current policy document and it focuses on the term significance, other terms are in use and at this point Bee turned his attention to these terms. Bee considered that 'importance' was the same as significance and that 'values' and 'interests' were synonymous. Values - whether they were intrinsic, heritage or instrumental values - were the means by which we defined significance, although Bee pointed out that heritage value - i.e., the value of a place - was different to intrinsic and instrumental values.

Bee made reference to Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, published by English Heritage in 2008, which "looked forward" to the more integrated approach that the Heritage Protection Bill promised to introduce. Although the Bill was shelved the EH Conservation Principles still provide a useful framework for discussions about significance. Bee identified three main points: first the historic environment is a shared resource; second everyone should be able to participate in sustaining it; and third understanding the significance of places is vital.

In discussing the values of a heritage asset and in describing its significance we should be asking ourselves two questions: whose values are we discussing? And to whom is the heritage asset significant?

It is commonly accepted in the conservation community that the importance and interest of an asset is derived from professional interest: from archaeologists, architects, historians and/or art historians. The problem is that this view promotes a 'top-down' approach, whereas things have moved on and become more inclusive; i.e., it is essential that there is a wider recognition of historic significance. This is all underpinned by what Bee described as a 'community of interest'.

Bee explained that retaining recognised significance has a public benefit: it is important in terms of public wealth, welfare, inclusion and sense of identity. This is a very important point to make in times of cuts in public spending, Bee suggested. It is so important to articulate the significance in ways that the wider community can understand.

The basis of the heritage values that underpinned the EH Conservation Principles were: evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal. These values reflect the diversity of ways in which people relate to heritage assets. It is perhaps worth noting that these values are similar, but not identical, to the interests suggested in the PPS 5 (see definition above): i.e., archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.

There were several benefits in establishing significance, in Bee's view. It would stimulate a thorough understanding of an asset and provided a common baseline understanding for all. In this way the historic elements that required investment could be identified. The scope for adaptation could also be identified and the form of adaptation or addition could be informed by the process. Establishing significance also meant that an objective basis for assessing impact could be developed: to determine whether the impact would harm, be neutral or enhance the asset in question. Establishing significance would also establish standards of design and help secure a new layer of heritage to pass on to future generations.

In conclusion Bee reminded the delegates that there were both statutory and non statutory terms in use and there needed to be a common understanding. Clinging to our own preferences was not an option, he said. We needed to resolve the inconsistencies and settle the arguments in order to work together.

He finished with what he called the “so what?” test. The whole purpose was to use our knowledge and understanding of places for the long term. We had to keep buildings in use, i.e., adapt them as appropriate. We needed to have greater confidence in changing places without losing their significance.

The next speaker was Derek Worthington, Principal Lecturer at the University of West of England and co-author of the book *Managing Built Heritage: The role of Cultural Significance*. He has had experience as a Building Surveyor working on historic buildings and his research area is building maintenance.

In his talk Worthing considered different approaches to assessing cultural significance. He began by making a similar point to Stephen Bee: that assessing the values that are attributed to heritage is a very important activity in conservation work, since these values heavily influenced and shape the decisions that are made. He reinforced the point with a quote from Bernard Fielden: *“Conservation is an artistic activity aided by scientific and historical knowledge.”*

Worthing explained that values based management is based on the production of a conservation plan to be used to manage a building. This is underpinned by the principle that if a place is to be protected and managed, it is vital to know why the place is important, and what elements contribute to that importance. In addition Worthing explained that the importance of the site needed to be demonstrated through understanding the place and by assessing its significance. The importance could not simply be inferred or assumed, rather its significance needed to be assessed through a rigorous, transparent and objective process. We need to be clear in our knowledge, evidence and the validity of that evidence and be clear what we have not found out, Worthing said.

Worthing discussed the process of producing the conservation plan and the management plan and explained that they were like two sides of the same coin: neither made sense without the other.

The first stage was the conservation plan; this spelt out why the place was important. Worthing broke this down into four steps: first understanding the site; second assessing the site’s significance; third defining issues (i.e., assessing the site’s vulnerability to what he called ‘deleterious change’); and fourth writing a conservation statement.

The second stage was the management plan, which underlined the need to engage with the institutions and the people working on a building. Worthing broke this stage down into three further steps: the next step was developing conservation policies; then applying the conservation policies and processes, which needed to be applied at all levels of the organisation; and finally developing and implementing policies and processes for the purposes of monitoring, reviewing and readjusting the management plan.

Worthing moved on to discuss different value typologies or categories that had been offered over the years, some being more extensive than others. He started with Riegal's 1902 typology and considered contributions from Bernard Fielden (and Fielden & Jokilehto), English Heritage (from 1997 and the 2008 Conservation Principles that Bee had discussed), Mason (2002) and the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999). The typologies are set out on the presentation slides (see the IHBC NW Branch web pages) and they are also set out and discussed in the book: *Managing Built Heritage*.

Although the typologies of different scholars and disciplines vary they each provide a framework for examining very complex issues of cultural significance. It is important to have stated a range of values as opposed to simply relying on value judgments without proper discussion and debate. In this way typologies can increase issues of accountability, both in terms of identifying places that are worthy of protection and in respect of managing them, because it can allow for more openness and transparency about decision making. Value typologies provide a reference point for debate and engagement. The debate needs to be as wide and inclusive as possible, Worthing believed, but this did raise the question of what the focus should be, in each case.

In order to engage communities, we need to consider aspects of intangible heritage, like memory, bringing this together with objective decisions of what is important. Professionals should not be telling people what is significant, they should ask and find out. Historic places do not have just one fixed value, they have multiple overlapping values. Different people have different perspectives.

This approach reinforced the points that Bee made about the community of interest and inclusion and moving away from top-down approaches. The problem, as Worthing saw it, was embedding all this in management plans.

Even where the value or significance of a place has been identified situations can arise where different groups see the same thing as important but for different reasons and this can cause problems in terms of management and protection.

This leads into the discussion of comparative significance. A place can have cultural significance that can be described as: exceptional, considerable, some, limited, unknown, none or negative (i.e., detracting). Worthing made the point that deciding whether a place had unknown significance rather than no significance might be difficult to prove in practice. The point is that when it comes to decisions regarding the distribution of resources, the resources required for the management and protection of a place can be considerable.

As such, decisions relating to comparative significance depends on the information sources about the value of a place and the credibility of those information sources. This is where the sources of the evidence we use become important and the standard sources include: documentary evidence, the place itself - its fabric and its spaces - and community values.

The Burra Charter provides a list of the information that should be collected about a place. Item 'g' in that list echoes the third source of evidence (above) by suggesting that the significance of the place to people who use or have used the place, or descendants of such people is part of the information that should be collected.

Investigating the community values leads us into the field of social values. The Burra Charter states that: *social value embraces the qualities for which a place has become a focus of spiritual, political, national or other cultural sentiment to a majority or minority group.*

Worthing pointed out that one of the heritage values that underpinned the EH Conservation Principles was communal value and this was helpful because EH defined it as: *“relating to the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, and whose collective experience or memory it holds. Communal values are closely bound up with historical (particularly associational) and aesthetic values, but tend to have additional and specific aspects.”*

So in establishing the social values of a place we need to decide who the stakeholders are and how they can be identified. This is not necessarily as straightforward as it sounds. Worthing ended his presentation with some examples, to illustrate the inherent complexities in establishing social values as part of the process of assessing cultural significance.

The first example was the Rotunda building in Birmingham, which Worthing described as “the bit left from the Bullring” and a landmark in the city. It was the site of an IRA bombing and this had personal resonance for Worthing on two counts: on the one hand he had been working in the vicinity of the GPO tower in London at the time the IRA bomb there and on the other hand his mother was Irish. The example illustrated the way in which people’s experiences inform the significance they attribute to a place.

The next example was Port Arthur, in Australia. This place had been the site of a random shooting incident and this incident had obviously had an important impact on the community and it retained a high profile in their communal memory. Understandably, this had informed and influenced the management plan for the place. With the passing of time, memories would begin to fade and the distance between the place and the shooting would increase. So Worthing asked the question: how important (or significant) will the shooting be in thirty years’ time? Social values can change over time, therefore.

He also cited the example of a former asylum, outside Bristol. This establishment has now become part of the campus of the University of West England. Here the users and neighbours might be easy to identify, but identifying the community would be more problematic: who are/were they?

Although community values are important, there can often be problems of competing (or conflicting?) memories. There is also the issue of how reliable, or otherwise, memories actually are.

The final example was the People's Palace in Berlin. A castle/palace had stood on the site in East Berlin, but it had been demolished during the Communist era and a modernist GDR civic building had been built in its place. After re-unification there was a debate about whether to build a replica of the castle that once stood on the site. Subsequently, the GDR building was demolished, despite protests from some former East Germans, and the fact that their views were overruled had left them feeling disenfranchised.

Worthing's final quote seems apposite as an end piece: *"Memories can of course be distorted and 'the truth' filtered through nostalgia, which can cause problems of verification and 'authenticity'."* But, as Worthing also said, it is important to remember that, despite the difficulties: *"In many cases the community insights that are added to significance assessments are related to the 'intangible' aspects of the atmosphere and 'the spirit' of the place."* The spirit of the place might be intangible but it is a vital element in its protection and management. This is obviously a broader framework than simply architectural and historic interest, which was the focus of PPG 15.

The second part of the morning was on the theme of understanding significance in practice. The next speaker was Marion Barter of the Architectural History Practice and her title was significance in context: some things matter more than others.

Barter explained that you cannot assess significance in isolation; you need the bigger picture. The (EH) Conservation Principles provide the context and they defined how the relationship between one place and other places can be intellectual. As appropriate to a talk about understanding in practice, Barter used examples to make her points.

The first example was the Whitworth Art Gallery, in Manchester. The context was Victorian/Edwardian philanthropy; the building had been built by Sir Joseph Whitworth an armaments manufacturer.

In the 1960s Richard Bickerdike was commissioned to remodel the interior and this was completed in two phases. The work done to the galleries focused on curatorial aspects for water colours: i.e., they were not top-lit. The timber interiors betrayed a Scandinavian influence and are now more significant than the original Edwardian interiors.

Brammal Hall was cited as another example. Pevsner considered this building to be one of the four best 'timber framed mansion houses' in England. It was originally a courtyard building. Brammal Hall dates from the 15th century and was built for the Davenport family. It was an Elizabethan House with evidence of the influence of European Renaissance ideas. The glazing is a notable feature, influenced by a pattern book from 1615 and ideas from the Netherlands.

In the 19th century the hall was remodelled in line with Victorian ideas about the past. Georgian features such as the sash windows were swept away and speculative features were added which are now regarded as being very significant; e.g., an octagonal bay - copied from an original that survived at Little Moreton Hall - was added in 1880.

Barton talked about farm buildings and the stories they told about farms merging absent landlords and changing farming practice to meet demand - for example the rise in demand for milk as Manchester grew in the boom years of the 19th century.

She also discussed social housing and made reference to the work of the historian John Walton in investigating the changes and development in Blackpool. This led onto a discussion about mapping significance and how value judgements were often used by Local Authorities when faced with an 'over supply' of housing. The process involved identifying some middle class housing and some working class housing which was considered to be of significance.

Barton also discussed cases where the context was not always apparent locally. Within the medieval street pattern of Lancaster Swan Court was a rare survivor. In terms of context it was like the courts off Long Millgate - the old thoroughfare running near Chetham's School in Manchester.

Similarly, with Roman Catholic Churches it was often necessary to look for other examples in the area or by the same architect/ architectural practice. With places of worship it was often important to look at the internal layout, features and furnishing – like pews and preaching boxes in order to compare other places – and Barton cited examples from different places such as Halifax and Wales.

She ended her presentation with some 'tips for assessing significance': first research the evolution of the building or place; second understand all the factors that shaped the place; third use comparative analysis and look for similar examples - locally, regionally or nationally; and finally use a hierarchy to assess the place in comparison with other examples.

The next speaker was consultant Christopher Pound whose topic was assessing significance; from the left field. This talk focused more on the philosophical issues but again relied on a range of examples to make the points.

Pound said that there was not very much philosophy relating to heritage, whereas with landscape there was much more established philosophy. In terms of significance, if we looked at Bath for example, much of the significance depended on buildings, activities and history now gone. The significance was, therefore, abstract or rooted in memory.

He cited the example of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul: a monument with spiritual significance to two faiths, having been a former church and a former mosque, as well as being an iconic landmark in the city.

He pointed out how in New Zealand the cultural significance of landscape was very important and this was used as an introduction to models of philosophy of landscape/aesthetics.

The sentient model referred to all places and to seeing and feeling. A waterfall might seem awesome, but that would be influenced by your past experience. This model could equally be applied to places and St Peters basilica was cited as an example.

The concept of arousal referred to the idea that what you see arouses you, i.e., the so called wow factor. Examples that illustrate this model might include Stonehenge and Telford's aqueduct at Pontcysyllte on the Llangollen canal.

The Epiphany model referred to the preconception that a place will be important, i.e., it will lead to an epiphany. Wordsworth had felt this way about Tintern Abbey and Henry Miller had about Epidaurus, Pound said.

The cognitive model referred to understanding place. Pound gave an example referring to Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, in which Catherine Morland learns to love hyacinths, whereas the cognitive landscape model would involve reading the geology and/or ecology of a place.

During the Enlightenment ideas about the landscape changed. Many people began to see landscape as a picture or as scenery and of course this was the age of the landscape painters. Pound identified various sensibilities that played a part in people's ideas. People saw beauty and place as the work of God, as per the poetry of Henry Vaughan, although industrial landscapes were not viewed in this light. Beauty was a key word in this discourse. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten was a philosopher who developed aesthetics to mean the study of good and bad 'taste' and linked good taste with beauty. He posed the question: does beauty exist, or is it something in the mind?

The point Pound was making is that these ways of thinking about things have been passed down through the generations in Europe and the UK. Ideas like 'the picture postcard view' stem from this way of thinking, which is perhaps why we find it harder to appreciate industrial buildings.

We are dealing with complex values, which Pound referred to as narrative values, when we consider the story of a place. Pound discussed a model which he represented using a venn diagram with three overlapping circles. Two circles represented the features and the qualities of a place, respectively. Features and qualities are measurable, he said, but the problem came with the third element of the venn diagram which represented intangible experiences. These were not measurable, since they related to what people had experienced or felt; they might be visual or may be learnt.

Pound ended his talk by highlighting another way of looking at the significance of place as a combination of visual values, fabric values and narrative values.

The final talk of the morning session was by Stephen Dean, a Staffordshire County Archaeologist. His talk was entitled: Assessing the Unknown: Significance of the Staffordshire Hoard.

Dean pointed out that according to PPS 5 the significance of a heritage asset may be through archaeological interest, architectural interest, artistic interest or historic interest. The Staffordshire Hoard was certainly significant in terms of archaeological interest and possibly also in terms of artistic and historic interest.

Archaeology is defined in the dictionary as: the study of man's past; scientific analysis of material remains of his culture. Archaeological excavations, Dean said, were destructive because all traces were removed.

Dean described historical significance as being related to kinetic energy and/or physics. It was measurable, he said., and by contrast archaeology was intangible. The Stafford Hoard included six pieces of snake jewellery, for which there was no context: nothing else like it was known.

The site had been identified as a site of single deposition and this was the start of conferring significance. Most Saxon sites were burial sites with 10 to 20 pieces of gold, whereas 3940 artefacts had been found in the Staffordshire Hoard, including gold and silver pieces. Normally there were no swords, coins or feminine items found at sites. The Staffordshire Hoard was different in this aspect too. The Hoard was probably booty, collected from battles all over and it contained martial finds.

In England, the Dark Ages was a period of craftsmen and traders with trading links to faraway places: in fact the gold that was found in the Staffordshire Hoard originally came from Byzantium and the garnets were mined in India. Unfortunately though the Mercians had been written out of history, since they were pagans they did not feature in the Christian Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. This was similar to the way in which the Gauls had been written out of Roman history. The Dark Ages was a period of pitched battles related in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and Kings collected gold, in battles, to pay their armies.

The Hoard had been excavated and removed and the site had been destroyed and there were no archaeological features remaining, Dean said. Did that mean the site itself was not significant?

The landscape context included the route of the Roman Road: Watling Street. There was also place name evidence. Hammerwich means civil settlement. "Wich" in Cheshire refers to salt, on the South coast it means beach and in the West Midlands it refers to a place of production. Hammerwich is an early Saxon centre of gold production and was linked to the Staffordshire Hoard.

Cannock Chase was a waste, i.e., a no man's land, sometimes a place of access to the gods. There were no Saxon settlements, just the Roman road passing through. Dean said this raised questions about whether the Hoard was about tribal lands. Perhaps the Hoard was a legitimization of space.

Gold signifies access to the gods and in artistic terms the finds had tripled the Saxon examples in existence. Gold had been used to make swords and since gold was such a precious material and hard won a gold sword was a seal of honour.

Decoration on some of the pieces showed hawks grappling with fish; the hawks represented pagans and the fish Christians.

To county archaeologists and English Heritage etcetera, on the one hand, the values inherent in the Staffordshire Hoard were professional. The values to the general public are apparent in the way it captured their imagination. The statistics tell the

story. £3.2m was raised from people in a period between January and April, which was unprecedented, and there were record attendance levels when the Hoard was put on display: 43,000 people visited the Birmingham exhibition over a 19 day period while 53,000 visited the Potteries Museum over 23 days.

After lunch three walking tours/site visits had been organised, so that delegates could assess "significance in the flesh" in some nearby historic places. One group went to visit the Metropolitan (Roman Catholic) Cathedral, led by Peter de Figueiredo: assessing the levels of significance of the archaeological remains of the workhouse, the Lutyens crypt, the Gibbert cathedral and the later approach steps and art works. A second group went to Pembroke Place, led by Glynn Marsden: assessing the relative significance of the buildings as an early Jewish butchers and the last surviving fragment in Liverpool of a court dwelling. The third group went to the Crown Street area, led by the Friends of Williamson's Tunnels: assessing the significance of the currently under-valued and under-protected early railway structures.

The final part of the afternoon was devoted to two case studies. The first case study focussed on the procedural and practical aspects of managing the historic environment from the perspective of the Local Authority; and the second was an in-depth case study of the process of listing a group of eighteenth century buildings in Liverpool.

The first presentation, by Ian Bond, Heritage and Environment Manager, West Lancashire Borough Council, was entitled: The Local Authority Approach: putting PPS5 into perspective and practice.

Bond reminded the delegates that PPS 5 stated that: *"The Government's overarching aim is that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations."*

Bond provided the West Lancs. context: the number of listed buildings, conservation areas and scheduled monument. He went on to outline the role of a Local Planning Authority with respect to providing the framework for managing the historic environment: through determining planning applications, heritage designation, intervention & enforcement and providing grants.

Bond looked at significance and what it meant. He explained how Section 3 of the PPS 5 Practice Guide used significance as: a catch all term to "sum up the qualities" that make up a heritage asset: 'the sum' of a heritage asset's architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest; the 'special interest' (which listed buildings & conservation areas etc. have) be it historic or architectural. He also explained that: the 'significance' or 'interest' of a building should be material to the LPA's decisions and that applications have a greater chance of success when applicants and LPA's assess and understand the 'significance' of the heritage asset.

The application and practicalities can be broken down into 5 stages in which 'significance' needs to be considered: the pre-application discussions; the application

submission; assessment of the merits of the application; the decision process; and the post decision compliance with conditions/obligations.

For pre-application discussions to be worthwhile the balance of the LPA's resources need to be front-loaded. These discussions constitute the best opportunity to identify the likely impact of development proposals on a heritage asset and influence the proposals, as appropriate. Front-loading resources was more efficient than trying to influence proposals later in the application process, but it was 'resource greedy', Bond said.

Bond outlined 'the pressures', making reference to the guidance documents and the validation requirements contained in them (see slide 8 of the presentation on the IHBC NW Branch web pages). In summary PPS 5 (HE 7.2) states that in assessing the impact on significance: *"Local Authorities should take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds for this and future generations."*

In order to take delegates through the remaining stages of the application process, Bond discussed four applications as examples.

The first example was an unlisted heritage asset called Lathom Charity Farm. The application was pre PPS 5 and since the site was unlisted no conservation statement was required. However, after discussions with Lancashire County Council Archaeological staff regarding the significance of the building and the impact of the works a planning condition for recording the building was applied to the planning permission.

The second example was 29 Swan Park Lane, a farm house in Augton. An application had been submitted to demolish the building and replace it with two new dwellings. The property was a non-designated heritage asset and the application was post PPS 5. No information had been provided with respect to significance and a site visit identified that the building did have some (unknown) heritage value and consultations with a local heritage group highlighted the farm house's had historic value. Under PPS 5 significance became a material consideration and a significance report was required in order that the value of the farm house could be properly assessed.

The third example was Bath lodge, in Ormskirk. This was a designated heritage asset. In this case there had been a lengthy pre-application discussion phase, i.e., nine years long. These discussions had provided the opportunity to influence the scheme and the assessment of the impact the works would have on the significance of the building.

The final example was one in which landscape significance was a key feature. Landscapes can change dramatically over time and so the question is how should they be identified and what significance do they have? Assessing landscape significance is part of the Local Development Framework process. The impact on the landscape is a key issue in decisions regarding the location and installation of wind turbines in West Lancs. at the moment. Under case law, landscape significance and/or the setting of a listed building (or conservation area) is not

enough to overturn an application for wind turbines, without a specific landscape designation, Bond said.

In conclusion Bond discussed the need for training, for people involved in the decision making process, that had arisen as a result of the changes in the system. There had been changes in validation which had led to a need to front-load resources. The changes in phraseology meant there was a need for consistency – e.g., *significance* and *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing significance through making a positive contribution* etc. Bond pointed out that this training was not just required for LPA staff, but there was a need for training for people in other groups, if ‘shared understanding’ was ever going to be achieved.

And finally, (as stated in PPS 5 HE 12.3) he said, that in order to secure significance, in the post-application phase, planning conditions would be needed, requiring developers to record and advance the understanding of significance before it is lost.

The second case study and final presentation of the day conference was by Garry Miller, an architectural historian and it was entitled: Assessing Significance: some contentious case studies.

Miller focused on a group of eighteenth century buildings that formed the last serving fragments of court buildings in Liverpool. Houses were built in courts at the rear of terraced properties fronting the street. Each court consisted of two short terraces facing one another across a narrow space and was accessed through a tunnel like passage under two adjacent frontage properties. Examples of this sort of insanitary high density housing were constructed from the late 18th century to the mid 19th century in many northern industrial towns to accommodate the rapidly increasing population.

The location of the group of surviving buildings in question was Pembroke Place, in Liverpool. This location had been one of the three walking tours/site visits, earlier in the afternoon.

Miller told the story of how the significance of these buildings was assessed and how they came to be listed. There was an initial inspection of buildings in 2000 and an external inspection by EH in 2004. Whilst no recommendation was made to list the buildings at this stage, EH’s initial comments did include suggestions that the buildings were an important part of Liverpool’s development and that one in particular should be retained but not in isolation.

The buildings were inspected in more detail in 2005 and a request for spot listing was submitted by the Head of Planning.

The inspection/survey report was loaded onto a power point presentation for the Day Conference. The report gave the detail of what survived of these buildings and highlighted their condition. (For further information the presentation can be accessed on the IHBC North West Branch webpage.)

Miller continued with the story, as told in the report, bringing it up to date. A decision was not made until 2007, when it was announced that one of the buildings, 29

Pembroke Place, would be added to the statutory list, but the other seven buildings were rejected.

The Head of Planning appealed, under the new guidelines/procedures introduced as part of the Heritage Protection Review. Later in 2007, the properties were re-inspected by EH. Subsequently, it was announced in 2009 that 35, 37 & 39 Pembroke Place were also awarded listed building status.

The case study showed how it can take time to form a thorough understanding of the significance of a heritage asset and equally it can take time for a shared understanding to be developed, even within the conservation community.

There was a short question and answer/discussion session to conclude the day Conference.

The point was made that there was no model Heritage Impact Statement, although there was guidance in the PPS 5 Practice Guide and EH had promised that further guidance would follow. Delegates expressed their view that guidance should identify the 'norm' for a Heritage Impact Statement, rather than prescribe a one size fits all model.

Various suggestions were made. One suggestion was that county archaeologists should write the statements and this would then provide a model. It was suggested that it would be better to develop templates for statements for specific building types, rather than a generic template. The process should start from first principles, e.g., the Burra Charter.

Derbyshire Dales already insisted that statements of significance were incorporated in design and access statements. It had been included in their validation criteria, which were available on their web site. Another delegate pointed out that, under PPS 5, if the impact of works was 'uncertain' permission should be refused, regardless of validation criteria.

An EH document on "setting" was available in draft. This was thought to be good at advising on assessing significance, but it did not give good advice on what should be done with the assessment. It was pointed out that the purpose of identifying significance was not to inhibit development, but to inform the process.

The Day Conference finished with the thought that: the key was the quality of reasoning in deciding what should be done with significance.

Keith Parsons, Principal Lecturer, University of Central Lancashire.