

PART 2
Commentaries
and Vignettes

The case for World Heritage Listing of the
Mount Lofty Ranges Agrarian Landscape

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I do not claim that the world system which was developed during the nineteenth century has been conspicuously successful in ensuring human progress and happiness; but I am at least sure that Australia and New Zealand have made a better start in social organization than Cuba or Paraguay, and that they owe that better start to the fact that Wakefield and his followers forced the British Government in the critical years of 1830 to 1845 to awake from its absence of mind.

– Graham Wallas, Fabian and co-founder of the London School of Economics (Mills 1915: xiii)

The Mount Lofty Ranges agrarian landscape is the tangible product of a radical shift in emigration within an expanding British Empire, from shipments of convicts and poor people to a model of 'systematic colonisation' involving the settlement of a free working- and middle-class.

South Australia was the first place in the world to apply the principles of systematic colonisation developed in the early nineteenth century by Edward Gibbon Wakefield, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham and members of the British-based 'National Colonization Society'. The surviving pattern of rural and township settlement in the contemporary landscape is its most enduring expression.

The universal significance and utopian ideals of this unique philosophical movement form the basis of the Mount Lofty Ranges Agrarian Landscape World Heritage nomination. Six local councils and a regional development authority – spanning the world-renowned food, wine and tourism regions of the Barossa Valley, the Adelaide Hills, McLaren Vale and the Fleurieu Peninsula – are managing the nomination.

The theory of systematic colonisation aimed for the long-term sustainability and resilience of the South Australian colony, rather than the short-term profit of its founders. In tandem with the town surveys of the National Heritage-listed Adelaide City Layout, the rural surveys of the 1830s signify a turning point in the colonisation of Australia, and, indeed, the world.



Figure 1: Dorrit Black, Australia, 1891 - 1951, *The Olive Plantation*, 1946, Magill, Adelaide; Bequest Of The Artist 1951. (Source: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide)

According to Wakefield (1838), it was ‘the first attempt since the time of the ancient Greeks to colonise systematically’. Nineteenth-century philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill concurred:

Before the adoption of the Wakefield system, the early years of all new colonies were full of hardship and difficulty: the last colony founded on the old principle, the Swan River settlement, being one of the most characteristic instances. In all subsequent colonisation, the Wakefield principle has been acted upon, though imperfectly . . . yet wherever it has been introduced at all, as in South Australia, Victoria, and New Zealand, the restraint put upon the dispersion of the settlers, and the influx of capital caused by the assurance of being able to obtain hired labor, has, in spite of many difficulties and much mismanagement, produced a suddenness and rapidity of prosperity more like fable than reality. (Mill 1891: 123)

Like the Australian Convict Sites World Heritage serial property, the Mount Lofty Ranges Agrarian Landscape will be nominated under criterion (iv) for its significance as an important stage of human history and criterion (vi) as an extraordinary example of global ideas and developments during the Age of Enlightenment and the modern era. Criterion (v) refers to an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or human interaction with the environment (vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change) and may also come into play in the context of the threat of urban expansion into the highly valuable agricultural land.

Because there are currently only around a dozen agricultural landscapes listed by the World Heritage Committee, only a few of which are categorised as organically evolved landscapes, it is necessary to demonstrate that there is room on the World Heritage List for the Mount Lofty Ranges landscape using other agricultural sites. A review of the records of discussions by the World Heritage Committee on the Australian Convict Sites property, Val D’Orcia in Tuscany, and the Alto Douro wine region in Portugal indicates that the history of planned settlement of the Mount Lofty Ranges provides a feasible basis for nomination.

In the case of Val D’Orcia, the nomination was based on how the cultivated aesthetics of that landscape reflect an idealised model of good governance. In the case of the Brickendon and Woolmers Convict site in Tasmania, the listed values discuss the manner in which the farm landscapes and associated properties represent one aspect of the history of convict settlement. A similar analysis will be applied to the representation of systematic free settlement in the original surveys and subsequent settlement patterns of the Mount Lofty Ranges, where contemporaneous German and British settlement, and an intensity of cultivation over generations of family-owned farms have created distinctive evolving mosaic patterns in the cultural landscape. Extensive documentation of the foundation of the South Australian colony will be a key strength of the case for World Heritage nomination, as the city-state was founded on ‘a set of instructions’ from the South Australian Colonization Commission to start with.

While the core case for Outstanding Universal Value of the Mount Lofty Ranges is based on the historic heritage values associated with the nineteenth-century systematic colonisation model, other values, such as aesthetics, ecology, Aboriginal culture and agricultural production help build the case for nomination.

The proponents of the bid aim to use it as an innovative regional development tool, and believe the value of pursuing World Heritage listing will be unlocked not only by the designation itself, but also through the motivation and coordinated action of numerous stakeholders, and the integration of systems of governance marshaled to make the bid work. The nomination process promotes the economic, environmental and cultural contributions of agriculture and agricultural landscapes at a time when – for the first time in human history – more people live in urban areas than on the land.

References

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