The Surveyor's Role in Heritage

Bill Evans
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Bill Evans is currently an Engineering Surveyor with the Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW.

He is a keen historian with an interest in colonial history and the United States of Americas' role in the Pacific War. He is Vice President of the Blue Mountains Branch of the National Trust, a member of Blue Mountains Historical Society and also has qualifications in tourism. His *real* claim to fame is that he once had lunch with Dr Robert Ballard (the man who found the "Titanic").

BACKGROUND

The Roads & Traffic Authority has certain statutory obligations under both Federal and State legislation to protect items of natural and historical significance. These statutory obligations can only be fulfilled if the Authority is aware of such items prior to the commencement of roadworks. The Heritage Act also requires the establishment of a Heritage Register to accommodate information pertaining to heritage sites.

Local communities are often passionate about the history of their immediate area, particularly where that history is significant in the development of Australia. The RTA's roadworks are sometimes seen as being at odds with this passion; and credibility, so quickly destroyed, is not easy to recover.

OPPORTUNITY

It was during his work as construction surveyor on Authority's roadworks in the Blue Mountains that Bill Evans was concerned about the apparent high risk to the Authority associated with not knowing the location of items of historical significance in the vicinity of roadworks. Unfortunately Bill's concerns came to fruition when, during road reconstruction works, the Authority inadvertently destroyed a significant heritage site in the lower Blue Mountains. These remains had not been identified in the environmental impact assessment and the Authority was unaware of their existence. All road construction work stopped while an archaeologist examined the site and a report was written.

Bill realised that an accurate and *complete* identification of all heritage items during the investigation stage of a project would permit those items to be taken into account in the design of the road and hence avoid community displeasure and the ultimate significant costs in either halting construction or redesign to avoid such features.

Through investigations at the Authority's Parramatta Survey Office, Bill found that the Authority possessed information on heritage items not readily available to the general public, in the form of old survey fieldbooks. By supplementing information from these books with readily available heritage data, a more complete heritage record of an area could be obtained.

Research in the area of the destroyed heritage site in the lower Blue Mountains led to Bill's inclusion in community consultation evenings. His expertise in heritage issues convinced the local community that it was a genuine mistake on the part of the Authority and that the RTA was vitally concerned about the preservation of Australia's heritage. Bill conducted - and continues to conduct in his own time - heritage walks for the local community and interest groups over sections of Cox's Road in the lower Blue Mountains.

RESULT

Through the application of his private interest to his public work, Bill Evans has assured the community that the Authority takes its heritage obligations seriously and restored the

Authority's lost credibility in the lower Blue Mountains. Bill's work also provides savings to the Authority in terms of risk management and project time.

In 1996 Bill formed a small Unit for surveyors and archaeology students which provides the location of items of heritage significance to the Authority's project managers. To present this information in "user friendly" form, Bill and his work colleague John Dwyer have developed a computer "heritage database" which shows details of each site, including a site map, locational coordinates, photograph and archaeological assessment, on a single page. The establishment of this database means that heritage information is always readily accessible by the RTA's planners, project managers and property personnel. The database is also made available to the RTA maintenance engineers and contractors and is in a form that is easily understood by members of the public.

The location of buried archaeologically-significant remains has been made easier by using the "non-destructive" technique of Ground Penetrating Radar. Bill and his team have adapted this process to find buried sites such as convict graves and aboriginal shell middens.

COMMUNITY REACTION

The Heritage Database developed by Bill Evans and John Dwyer received a Commendation in the 1997 National Trust Heritage Awards.

In a letter to the Authority's Chief Executive regarding inspection of Cox's Road, the Institution of Engineers referred to *"an excellent inspection ... by your Heritage Surveyor Bill Evans"* and concluded *"I think we both appreciate how much public authorities rely on the enthusiasm and personal concern of people like Bill, to conserve heritage assets in their care like Cox's Road, and to establish and maintain their image as good corporate citizens"*.

Although the Authority was not successful in winning a major Award at the National Trust 1999 ceremony, the Authority received the only Special Commendation, being awarded for a body of work entered in various categories. These works included:

- Discovery of Convict graves using Ground Penetrating Radar
- Mapping of the Great North Road
- Photo-interpretation of the Mount Victoria Convict Stockade

The judges' opinion was that *"The RTA is to be commended for their broad range of participation and for the initiatives and scope of their heritage work as demonstrated by these entries. The entries demonstrate the use of new technology and innovation, and an awareness of social responsibility for heritage items, which fall within the scope of their work and an acceptance of broader responsibilities, not just of their core business"*.

Such comments are directly attributable to the efforts of Bill Evans and the RTA Geomatics Branch at Parramatta, and brings great credit to the profession.