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HERITAGE AND THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS

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The Australian Institution of Engineers has in recent years taken an increasing interest in heritage activities, mainly through its National Panel on Engineering Heritage

The Aim of the Institution's heritage activities is:

'To enhance the public image of the profession by drawing to its attention the benefits Engineers have provided to mankind and on which modern society depends - for example, water supply, power supply, transport, communications, sanitation, buildings, fuel and mineral supplies etc.'

Heritage activities, like most others of the Institution, are organised by panels representing its nine regional divisions: ACT, Newcastle, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Sydney, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. These panels meet four to eight times a year.

A National Panel consisting of the Chairpersons of the regional panels plus expert supernumeraries meets twice a year and provides a forum for national planning and information exchange.

The major activities are as follows:

1. Placing plaques on National Engineering Landmarks. So far three have been placed - Sydney Harbour Bridge, Busby's Bore and the Coolgardie Water Supply Scheme.
2. Placing Historic Engineering Markers commemorating other engineering achievements. Eight had been placed by June 1988, the Stump Jump plough being one example.

3. Arranging Heritage Conferences every two years, sometimes in collaboration with kindred organisations. The next will be in Perth in 1990, and provisionally in Hobart in 1992.
4. Inviting eminent speakers to Australia. The 1988 speaker, for example, was Dr. Neil Cossens, Director of the Science Museum, London.
5. Publishing books and papers. Three divisions have completed books recording the engineering heritage of their areas, and another book and various papers have been published on specialised aspects.
6. Maintaining links with kindred organisations such as the National Trust, museums, the Royal Australian Historical Society, the Australian Institute of Metallurgy and Mining and the Australian Post Office.

Lobbying for the preservation of threatened engineering works such as Pymont Bridge and Busby's Bore.

Providing for the reporting of the nature and location of engineering heritage items and the systematic retention of information on reported items.

The Institution's heritage organisation is also alert for new opportunities such as the promotion of cultural tourism in the engineering field.

It would be good to report that the Institution's enthusiasts are also heavily involved in a large number of preservation projects. The reality is that our scope for such projects is limited: a pump is being restored here, a sawmill there. The basic problem is simply the high cost of restoring, and thereafter maintaining, major works such as the early examples of electric cranes at Newcastle.

However, even if money could be found for all the projects which heritage enthusiasts would like to undertake, the Institution faces the perennial problem of finding, from the ranks of its professional engineers, most of whom are still working, sufficient volunteer effort for its many activities in the heritage field and elsewhere.

Included for the information of members of the Society is a sample of the Institution's Engineering Heritage Report Form and the contact details of the current members of the National Panel on Engineering Heritage.

(This information was presented in a short address to the Eighth Annual ASHA Conference, September 1988 by Geoff Feasey of the Canberra Division of the Australian Institution of Engineers. - Eds)

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