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978-0-521-89808-9 - Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature

Paul Eggert

Frontmatter

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SECURING THE PAST

We all have a stake in the past and in its tangible preservation, and we trust professionals to preserve our cultural heritage for the future. However, the concept and practice of restoration in all its forms are entangled in many contemporary theoretical debates and problems. This book is the first concerted effort to examine together the linked philosophies of the different arts of preserving and uncovering the past: the restoration of buildings, conservation of works of art, and editing of literary works to retrieve their original or intended texts. By investigating a series of recent crises in each of these areas, *Securing the Past* shows how their underlying justifications relate closely to one another. Paul Eggert demonstrates that they have been philosophically undermined by postmodern theories, and finally points the way to a new future for the past.

PAUL EGGERT is Professor of English at the University of New South Wales at ADFA. He has published a number of books and articles on English literature and textual studies, and has edited scholarly editions of D. H. Lawrence and Rolf Boldrewood.

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Preface

This book has been brewing, and periodically bubbling, in my mind for quite some time. I first gave a talk in 1992 comparing the restoration of paintings to the scholarly editing of classic literary works. That was the beginning of an alertness to the problems, in both practice and theory, of what is involved when professional practitioners try to secure the past, whether in tangible three-dimensional form in museums, art galleries and historic houses or in the recovery by scholarly editors of the corrupted texts of literary works and historical documents from the past.

For many years, my main field as an academic has been scholarly editing. But I have frequently found myself looking over my shoulder, wondering whether or how the methods and ideas that I found to be second nature mapped to the other restoration arts. Could they all be understood in terms of one another? Posing that question was the genesis of this book.

I had some success in bringing representatives of the various areas together to discuss some of the issues they had in common at a conference at the Humanities Research Centre in Canberra in 1994. That occasion resulted in a collection of essays called *The Editorial Gaze* (1998). Naturally enough, the contributors tended not to stray too far from their specialist areas. So, although the volume contains some excellent essays, I still felt that my question had not been sufficiently answered.

Crises and the odd disaster in restoration energise this book. Less spectacularly, conservators and editors have repeatedly found their approach to their work being subtly undermined by paradigm shifts in wider cultural thinking as they laboured at their very long-term projects. Witnessing this happen during the 1990s and having occasion, in 2000 as a visiting professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, to give public lectures on the topic, I finally realised that I *had* to write this book.

I could not have done it alone. An important stimulus for my thinking about art and its presentation has been the conversations on these matters that I have been having with my artist-wife Anna Eggert for nearly twenty

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years now. I have many other people to thank as well, including: Michael Bogle, Curator, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney; James Broadbent, formerly Senior Curator, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales; Lynn Collins, Curator, Hyde Park Barracks; Scott Carlin, Curator, Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney; David Evans, Property Manager at Uppark, Petersfield, Hampshire; Bob Griffin, History Curator, Royal British Columbia Museum; and Megan Martin, Librarian, Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 'Lyndhurst', Glebe.

I am grateful to those friends of mine who read and commented on the evolving parts of this book or who in other ways have contributed to its ideas, especially Trevor Howard-Hill, John Jowett and the two anonymous readers of the manuscript for Cambridge, and also Virginia Blain, Andrew Brown, David Greetham, Colin Hearfield, †Harold Love, Roger Osborne, Philip Pettit, Peter Shillingsburg, Chris Tiffin, Elizabeth Webby, Thérèse Weber and James L. W. West, III.

My postgraduate and honours students at my home institution in Canberra have, over the years, sharpened my appreciation of the ideas presented here. I thank them. I also thank the graduate students in the Textual Theory class at the University of Washington in 2000, and my colleagues there, especially, Raimonda Modiano, Fritz Levy, Leroy Searle, and Sandra Kroupa at the Allen Library. The Centre for Textual Studies at De Montfort University in Leicester, where I had visiting appointments in 2006 and 2007, provided a welcoming environment to the thinking in this book. I thank its director at the time, Peter Shillingsburg, for his hospitality; and I wish to recognise publicly his intellectual generosity and unflagging enthusiasm for the common endeavour, qualities that have helped and sustained many scholars in the field, including me. And lastly I have learnt from the various editorial projects (and friendships) that I have been involved in since the 1980s: I thank those many collaborators who have stimulated my thinking in ways, perhaps, of which they have not been aware. They may see some of the fruits of the encounter in the final chapters here.

In Canberra, I would like to thank my academic colleagues for their encouragement and support, and Tessa Wooldridge and Susan Cowan for research assistance. At Cambridge University Press, Linda Bree championed the project, Maartje Scheltens and Joanna Breeze shepherded it through production, and my copy-editor Frances Brown eliminated a range of tiny errors and inconsistencies: I thank all four. I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support for the project provided by the Australian Research Council and the periods of study leave extended to me by the University

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of New South Wales, without which this book could not have been written.

Only Chapter 10 has appeared previously in much the same form: in a special issue of *Library Trends* in 2007 on preservation and conservation, although it is expanded here. In other places in the book, material has been adapted from other of my essays, listed in the Bibliography. I thank the editors of the various publications. Every effort has been made to seek permission from the appropriate parties to reproduce the illustrations in this book. In a few cases efforts to identify or contact them have failed; such owners are invited to contact the Press.