**Abstract**

This paper presents the implications for conservation of an analysis showing that houses are preserved as museums for distinctive reasons, which impact on the ways in which they are subsequently conserved, presented and interpreted. For example, the houses of cultural heroes (sometimes referred to as ‘personality’ or ‘celebrity’ houses) possess the aura of sacred places, and hence the author argues that their conservation should be oriented to retention of the magical character of all original elements. By contrast, houses museumised for their design qualities (interior and/or exterior) are more similar to artworks (walk-through artworks) and here the author suggests it is appropriate to clean and restore them to conventional museum standards of integrity in order to display the rationale of their preservation. In another contrast, the multi-generational accretion of contents, building and landscape typical of British country houses requires the modulation of historical judgment in restoration and conservation decisions. This kind of decision-making is even more called for in the modern genre of historic process or social history houses, which may be all or part re-created for interpretive purposes. Thus the spectrum of conservation intervention in historic house museums stretches from maintenance of as-found

**House Museums Are Not All the Same! Understanding Motivation to Guide Conservation**

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**Introduction**

The conjunction offered by a conference on historic houses and conservation of cultural heritage gives me a platform to demonstrate the practical application of a project I have been working on for some years. It is the history of historic houses as a species of museum, which I problematise with the simple question, ‘why?’ Why does western culture museumise houses? A brief answer is framed by the perspective that the social function of museums and heritage is to focus ideological projections of cultural identity. Museums and heritage are particularly efficacious as national identity representations, or in microcosm, local identity representations. House museums are a subset of museums with the notable characteristic of bringing the domestic domain of private life into the public sphere of attention and discourse. This is not a benevolent act of inclusiveness (though some house museums stress this approach today). Rather, I read house museums as a deliberate channelling of the culture of private life into the grand narratives of nation to demonstrate and enhance national imagery in the interest of national prestige and power. House museums have proved to be popular vehicles of symbolic national culture, not least because the rhetoric of ‘home’ so effectively presents the museum’s message in a familiar, homely tone. Even a palace can be presented as a home, but it is a home almost always depicted in the context of national heritage.

For the purposes of conserving historic houses, my work is relevant not so much for its big-picture-connection of house museums to nationalist agendas, as for the history of houses becoming museums. Each story of house museumisation occurs in a specific time and circumstance. This specificity is what generates the particular meanings attributed to the house: why it was deemed important enough to extract from regular use and conserve as an item of heritage. Times and circumstances change,
condition to replacement or reinvention of a significant portion of contents and building. Despite this logic, understanding the motivation to transform a house into a museum and undertake appropriate conservation treatments can be, and often is, over-ridden by contemporary needs. This paper calls for conscious consideration of the initial purpose of the house, its cultural significance, in heritage management terms, in coming to appropriate conservation decisions.

*Keywords*

House museum, Historic house museum, Conservation in house museums

and so do house museums. The process of change is what history documents, by tracking the social, political and economic contexts that reorder meanings. The conservation of museumised houses needs to understand both the original and the shifting meanings, in order to develop an informed management plan that will protect and maintain the cultural significance of the house. This is the message of the Getty Conservation Institute’s (GCI) ‘Values of Heritage’ research projects of 1998-2005, one of whose sources was the Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter* process for heritage conservation. The *Burra Charter* asserts: ‘understand significance ahead of all other issues that bear on the place, and aim to protect and maintain significance in all the stages of preserving the place’.

It might be said that the significance of a house museum is simple and generic: houses are valuable manifestations of particular historical and design heritage that should be preserved to inform and delight the public with their authentic character, essentially the ICOM view of museum purpose. It is a sincere and worthy summary, but it avoids stating what is the magical substance of heritage, and why the public should learn from it and enjoy it. Let me illustrate the problem with the story of an architectural historian colleague in Melbourne, who is interested in the problem of modernist architecture as heritage. She found that house curators believe collections and interpretive displays are necessary to interest visitors in the house, but she thought objects and interpretation interferes with seeing the design, which is what she perceived as the real significance. She concluded that the discrepancy makes house museums uncomfortable, *unheimlich*, uncanny, which is a post-modernist take on the persistent critique of house museums as frozen, static, or dead [Lewi, 2013, 62-74]. I think both the researcher and the curators she cites would find it helpful to look for heritage significance in each house’s history of museumisation, not just the history of building and living in the house, but why it was considered important enough to detach from inhabitation and transform into a museum.

Bearing in mind that houses are museumised in order to inscribe and celebrate particular kinds of ideas, the histories of museumization reveal a range of motivations. These motivations characterise house museums as certain types of mentality, which can be analysed as a typology [Young, 2007, 59-77]. Now, I am constantly aware of the reductionist tendency of typologies, which appear to simplify complex cultural products into tick-the-box categories. With that risk in mind, it is still helpful to be aware that house museums are not all the same, and that therefore they require distinctive modes of management, specially in conservation interventions.

The years of investigation into house museum history have revealed many fascinating stories and patterns. This paper introduces a suite of rationales that inform the transformation of historic houses into museums.
Heroes’ houses

I use this term in the anthropological sense of culture heroes, the real or mythical figures who are claimed to embody some aspect of a society’s ideals. The first hero’s house museum in the UK was Abbotsford, the home of the poet and novelist Sir Walter Scott, located in the Border country of Scotland [Brown, 2003; Kelly, 2011]. It was opened some months after his death, in 1833, by his family, to accommodate the fans and tourists who had visited during his life and continued to visit. The house remained a family business for 170 years, but has been managed by a trust since 2005. Typical of items identified as prototypes, there is a certain fuzzy character in judging Abbotsford a museum, as opposed to a shrine, and that comparison is an important indicator about the origins and survival of heroes’ houses.

The second British hero’s house was Shakespeare’s Birthplace in Stratford, which had also been something of a shrine in its previous eighteenth century manifestation as a pub. It was purchased in 1840 by a committee of gentlemen who expected that the national government would take it over, which never eventuated; it took thirty years to pay off the original loan that had secured the house [Fox, 1997, Part 1]. The pattern of a committee forming a trust to manage a house museum emerged this way, and it is still the predominant mode of house museum management.

In the USA, Hasbrouck House, in Newburgh, New York state, became the first American house museum in 1850; it was a farmhouse used by George Washington as headquarters during the 1782-83 winter of the American Revolutionary War. It was rather unwittingly acquired by the state of New York in payment of a debt, valued for the sake of its links to the first President [Hosmer, 1965, 36]. It initiated a string of Washington house museums, most of them further War headquarters. Another strand of Washington house museums comprises places where the ‘Father of His Country’ had personal links, among them the second house museum in the US: Washington’s own plantation, Mount Vernon. It was museumised by a committee of patriotic women in 1858, thus establishing a particularly American practice of house museum formation and management [West, 1999, ch.1.]. That the first two house museums in Britain and the US focus respectively on writers and presidents is not just chance: these two kinds of hero came to define the genre of heroes’ houses as symbols of their nations, from which further kinds of hero houses followed [Young, 2012, 143-58; Young, 2011, 26-30].

How does this knowledge impact on the conservation and management of heroes’ houses? As suggested by names like Shakespeare and Washington, the types of figures commemorated are creation figures, founding heroes, saviours or redeemers; they are mythic embodiments of nation, or sometimes on a smaller scale, of the local or topical. Museumisation effected a modern parallel of sanctification, as recognised in the theory of civil religion, where patriotism is presented in the forms of godly faith [Bellah, 1967, 1-21]. The house parallels the shrine; its furnishings parallel relics; traces of the hero’s physical presence inspire loyalty to his or her cause, or so it is hoped by those who initiate and shape the museumisation, who are the true believers. The obverse of the true believers is the visitors who neither know nor care about the subject-hero; their responses range from vague awe to boredom, and their disinterest in irrelevant great men’s houses feeds the popular critique. Recognising that culture heroes may drift into obscurity and redundancy proves the importance of shared knowledge and belief in appreciating a hero’s house museum. This problematic situation can sometimes be addressed through site interpretation, and sometimes via re-orientation of the house’s purpose. An example of a now-little-valued hero is the early twentieth century dramatist and litterateur George Bernard Shaw (GBS). His house in Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire, has been reported as today having more visitors come to inspect an inter-war domestic interior than to celebrate GBS [Forrest, 2008].

When a house was museumised essentially as a shrine, I suggest its conservation turns on the magic of the inhabitant’s onetime presence and use of furnishings. Assuming there is reliable evidence of authentic presence
and use (sometimes a highly attenuated condition), conservation planning demands a minimal degree of intervention and a maximum of stabilisation, as is. In reality, relatively few heroes’ houses survive with large intact collections, but where they exist, they are of extreme significance to the meaning of the house.

**Collectors’ houses**

A house belonging to a collector – usually of art or antiquities, though other fields also exist – is essentially the collector’s private museum. Some such houses become publicly museumised, usually after the collector’s death, and usually because the collector bequeaths a sufficient endowment to keep it going. The house museum fulfils one of the more narcissistic motivations of collecting by creating an enduring, public self [Pearce, 1992, 48-66]. Not many people can afford the kind of collecting that is considered worth maintaining intact and in-situ as a permanent museum (though the number is growing in our affluent times), and few can resist the claims of their heirs. (In fact, a high proportion of houses preserved as museums, for whatever motivation, belonged to childless owners, and a further significant proportion were summer or holiday homes, evidently regarded by heirs as more expendable than the family dwelling).

Collections widely regarded as important enough to museumise tend to focus on artworks and antiquities, the most valuable registers of objects in the western cultural economy. The first was Sir John Soane’s Museum in London, bequeathed to the nation in 1833 and opened to the public in 1837. It is the model of an eighteenth century-style antiquarian collection, motivated by scholarly research, used in formal and informal teaching, but also incorporating the collector’s interest in contemporary art; both wings of the collection were regarded at the time as appropriate and laudable to convert to the public sphere.

The high status of art objects, enhanced by the patina of noble taste and the aura of scholarship, made collecting particularly attractive to the nouveaux riches of the later nineteenth-early twentieth century period in both the UK and the USA (and still today). The houses of collectors emerged as museum self-memorials. Of this genre, the first was Isabella Stewart Gardner’s Venetian Gothic palazzo in Boston, opened in 1903. In the UK, the first of this modern kind of bourgeois collector’s house museum was the Russell-Coates Art Gallery and Museum in Bournemouth, gifted to the people of the town in 1908, though opening in 1922. The Gardner and Russell-Coates collections were funded by commercial fortunes, and typify how great wealth can enable the acquisition of the cultural capital that confirms elite status in modern, non-feudal societies.

Non-art collectors’ house museums are comparatively fewer. Probably the oldest is the Mercer Museum, where Henry Mercer’s collection of early American crafts and industries decorated his remarkable concrete castle, Fonthill, near Philadelphia; it opened in 1913. This was an early museumisation of what came to be called Americana. Interest in Americana surged in the twentieth century, manifest in vernacular forms as folk art and in elite forms as American-made art and decorative arts. Notable collectors’ houses were gradually museumised from the mid-twentieth century, starting with Henry Francis du Pont’s Winterthur, which took the route of period room installations. Something similar had been the project of Frank Green, an English industrialist scion, whose historical art and decorative arts collecting was realised in the medieval Treasurer’s house in York, made over to the National Trust in 1930.

The role of collectors’ house museums in the constellation of nationalist expressions is less obvious than for heroes’ houses. But the shift of private resources into the public sphere is such a counter-intuitive move, even by the most egotistical personalities, that it is worth understanding in a large-scale context. It is most fully expressed in the American ethic of public philanthropy, of the wealthy offering back to the community, which is a much more prominent act in the USA than the UK. The cycle of public recognition generates its rewards in esteem, a very powerful form of symbolic capital for its moral dimension, which validates the persona and his
or her influence, often on a national scale.

Many collectors specify that the layout of their houses should not be altered, an egocentric demand bequeathed to many collectors’ houses. It may be regarded as an idiosyncratic strength of the genre, but it is also a severe managerial and conservation constraint. Even where it is not specified, the rationale of the collector’s house museum implies a mandate to conserve the founder’s taste, similar to the significance accorded a hero’s relics, but tempered with an understanding of the founder’s aesthetic. Hence original display arrangements, techniques and materials are significant determinants of conservation interventions in collectors’ house museums.

**The country houses of Britain**

I treat the country houses as a distinct species of house museum because they are the product of specifically British circumstances. The key is the law of primogeniture, by which aristocratic titles and estates were inherited by the eldest son, and thus not sub-divided each generation. Over time, this vast intergenerational project of patronage developed into magnificent houses with exceptional furnishings and decoration. When the National Trust’s first rescue list of country houses ‘of undoubted merit’ was compiled in 1936, it was found very hard to limit the list to 230, and that was thirty more than the aim [Lees-Milne, 1992, 7]. A further reason to treat the country houses as a class unto themselves is that they manifest practically the whole of my typology of house museums. Not only are they often important collectors’ houses, but they frequently housed heroes of the British kingdom, for the aristocracy was the historical source of its military and political leaders. And sometimes country houses are also specimens of the kind of exceptional design, exterior, interior and garden, discussed below.

My final reason for considering the country houses as a specific genre of house museum is the enormous impact they have generated on the rest of the world, as the cynosure, the very model, of what a house museum ought to be. Unfortunately, the image of the country house has deformed the development of house museums in the new world, and arguably in the UK too, via a vision of museumising the great, high style house, inhabited by the ruling class and exemplifying wealth and taste: a statement of their power. Such conditions could hardly be met outside the aristocracy, let alone in the colonies, yet when ex-colonials adopted the house museum genre, aside from local culture heroes, they looked for stately homes, and if they could not find much, they manufactured them.

I need here to backtrack a little: I referred to the country houses as a specific genre of house museum. I acknowledge that far from all British country houses are museums; many are privately owned and inhabited and a few are not open to the public at all. But museumisation in the interest of tourism emerged as one of few viable uses for enormous old houses full of valuable goods. The history of, as one author puts it, ‘the fall and rise of the English country house’, is now well-documented, including the intervention of the National Trust [Mandler, 1997, 401-3].

The reinvention of the country house as a national heritage was a much more recent product. It is hard to believe how such buildings could become practically worthless, but country houses were abandoned because they were just too expensive to maintain. The consequences were documented in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1974, ‘The Destruction of the English Country House’, a show of photographs of stately shells and ruins. It made graphic the conclusions of several government reports since 1950, arguing that the owners of country houses needed government support to keep the houses going. One report justified the need by pitching the country houses as ‘England’s greatest contribution to western civilization, the purest expression of national genius’ [Mandler, 1997, 401-3]. This line frames the reconceptualisation of the houses of the elite.
as the heritage of all Britons.

British country house visiting peaked in the 1990s, but remains a magnet of international tourism to Britain. One of the themes that sustains interest is the continuing connection of hereditary owners to the houses. This sometimes-tenuous claim follows the taste of the pre-Second World War National Trust Country Houses Committee, asserting that 'families not only made the best caretakers but also breathed that ineffable spirit essential to the legendary purpose of country houses' [Lees-Milne, 1992, 16]. This view persists in some country house circles, with the conviction that a museum is melancholy, and a resident custodian deadens the atmosphere. The resonance with the aura of heroes in their domestic shrines is suggestive, if anachronistic.

In conservation terms, the dilapidated state of many country houses when they embarked on museumisation encouraged an interventionist approach, controlled only by the availability of funds, which was not challenged until the 1980s. By then, experience and theory began to indicate that the intricate complex of building, interior decorative scheme, collection, and historic association might be more appropriately addressed by stabilisation rather than restoration. Meanwhile, the perceived needs of tourism seem to dictate the cliché of restoration ‘to former glory’.

**Artwork houses**

I have come to this term to describe the type of house museumised for essentially aesthetic reasons. It encompasses style specimens assessed as either outstanding or typically representative, both exterior and/or interior designs, by famous or anonymous artists. Style in this sense embraces both elite artistry and vernacular expression, and acknowledges the significance of technique as well as beauty. Simultaneously, the justification of artwork house museums converts them into indices of national character: evidence of the aesthetic distinctiveness and distinction of the imagined community of the nation [Vale, 2008, 55-59].

This is clearest in the first generation of artwork house museums, which were late medieval vernacular. The first house acquired by the (English) National Trust, in 1896, was the heavy-timbered, thatch-roofed Clergy House at Alfriston, East Sussex. Looking back on fifty years of Trust acquisitions, a commentator described the house and a cohort of further vernacular cottages as specimens of pure Englishness manifested in architecture: ‘they look, and are, indigenous’ [Oliver, 1945, 78]. A parallel vision of the power of the style of buildings to express the spirit of nation developed with the foundation of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA; since 2004, Historic New England) in 1910 [Lindgren, 1995, 154-5]. By 1915 it had acquired four properties, exemplified by the Boardman House in Saugus MA. Built about 1687 by a not very important local carpenter, in which nothing of great import ever happened, the Boardman House was described by William Sumner Appleton as ‘a magnificent specimen of our early architecture which has come down to us practically unchanged’ [Hosmer, 1965, 244]. Of style it has little, but its construction reveals the carpentry systems of the old world coming into contact with new world materials and techniques, an architectural essence that justified collecting it for posterity.

High style house museumisation took different forms on either side of the Atlantic. Aesthetic masterpieces were a significant dimension of the post Second World War avalanche of country houses that came to the National Trust. Houses such as Knole, remarkable for its seventeenth century integrity (acquired by the Trust in 1946), and Robert Adam’s interior and exterior remodelling of Osterley Park, Middlesex (acquired 1949) brought important sites to the public knowledge of English design. The neoclassical colonial legacy of the US inspired museumisations less for the sake of style than for historical associations, but American agencies and individuals recognised the aesthetic potential of Victorian styles well before English eyes could see it. In 1941, the fine Italianate Morse-Libby house in Portland ME was rescued and preserved under the name Victoria
Mansion; richly decorated and furnished by Herter Brothers of New York, it was preserved as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total artwork. Not until 1980 was an equivalent Victorian house museumised in Britain: the 1870s Linley Sambourne house in Chelsea.

Likewise it was in the USA that houses designed by modern architects were first museumised as artworks. The archetype is Frank Lloyd Wright (FLW), museumised earliest in Fallingwater, designed in 1937, made public in 1966. Today, more than twenty FLW houses, representing his life’s oeuvre, have been transformed into house museums from coast to coast. The only English design hero equivalent to the great creative of America would have to be William Morris. His furnishing designs, while widely present in aesthetic and arts-and-crafts house museums, were not museumised in situ until a private group managed to secure the Emery Walker House interior, located in west London, in 2000.

These examples demonstrate the characteristic mode of presenting artwork houses, literally as walk-through artworks. In this perspective, the condition or integrity of an artwork house is a major element of its importance, and determines a conservation approach based on the value of the original worked fabric as the product of inspired vision.

**Historic process house museums**

By this, I mean houses where historically significant activities of ordinary life happened: once-off or regular events, particular or generic, but usually without involving anyone or anything famous. Today we can call them social history houses. Their genealogy can be traced to the open-air folk museums inspired by Artur Hazelius in Scandinavia in the 1890s. In the absence of anthropologically-defined cultures in the UK and the USA, outdoor museums of historically-inspired structures developed in the inter-war period, displaying numerous museumised houses. Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield Village (now ‘The Henry Ford’), Old Sturbridge Village and Historic Deerfield all opened in the 1930s [Hosmer, 1981]. In Britain, the originator was the Welsh Folk Museum, now titled the National Museum of Wales; its name change demonstrates the conscription of the vernacular to define the nation. Reshaping ‘colonial’ or ‘folk’ houses as national history was facilitated by the great 1960s-70s heuristic shift to history-from-the-bottom-up, which trickled readily into house museum practice.

The oldest specimen of a historic process house museum appears to be the Old Merchant’s House in New York City, museumised in 1936. It would have been a hero’s house if anyone famous had ever lived there, but the Tredwells were merely a well-off merchant family. Much of the house’s significance arises from unusually long inhabitation by two generations, during which little was modernised or thrown out. The product was recognised by a descendent as a time capsule representing the 1840s, and the rescuer struggled to establish and keep it going as a museum in the by-then insalubrious Lower East Side. It is still struggling, and today presents itself more as an artwork house, ‘New York City's prime example of a Greek Revival home’ [1]. The Old Merchant’s House constitutes what is today acknowledged as a very rare item: the unusually complete contents of a middle class household, in situ. Several examples survive in the US of intact house collections preserved as monuments to non-elite writer-heroes like John Greenleaf Whittier and Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, but it would have seemed impious to view their relics as everyday, representative furnishings. The social history perspective motivates and justifies this kind of interest today. It was slow to emerge in the UK, where the first example seems to have been the Tenement House apartment in Glasgow, inhabited from 1911-65, kept more or less intact by a sympathetic soul, and acquired by the National Trust for Scotland in 1982.

The rarity of non-elite household collections generated the category of re-created historic process or social history house museums. A relevant house, sometimes relocated, is furnished according to plans of variable
reliability with material purchased, donated or manufactured for the purpose. That purpose is essentially to interpret themes of daily life in a more-or-less significant house. The presentation might be expressed generically, or in the names of one-time occupants. This kind of re-created house museum is probably the most numerous type in both the UK and the USA.

The conservation approach to historic process house museums is governed by the degree of original material exhibited. The scarcity of historic non-elite furnishing assemblages demands the utmost sensitivity, which should nonetheless be tempered by good sense as to the fitness of extreme conservation processes applied to humble objects. I have seen a laundry stick (for hoisting wet washing in and out of the tub) displayed with such exaggerated care that the display is laughable; let us remember that many domestic goods are intrinsically sturdy. In cases of major internal re-creation, the house structure is often presented as the most important artefact, even though it may have been extensively treated to make it a suitable museum, at the expense of collection objects. Objects acquired to furnish a house museum are likely to have some degree of significance in themselves (and it may grow as the re-creation ages), but a critical eye for heritage significance is a healthy guide to appropriate conservation intervention in this scenario.

Not-very-important house museums

I usually refer to this final type of house museum as sentimental, because it sounds kinder. In my generous moments, I mean ‘sentimental’ in the sense of engendering positive spiritual or communal feeling for the place, usually focusing on a sense of non-specific antiquity (contrasted to structured history). But in my more ruthless mode, I mean houses whose significance is not very great in any comparative sense, even though possibly worth preserving within local frameworks. They are the lumpen-class of house museums, and while they are often described in the same elevated language as more convincing specimens, they may be sub-threshold in the age of professional heritage management. They tend overwhelmingly to be large, high style houses, often lavishly decorated and furnished with antiques, expressing ‘the romance of a grand past’ [Herbst, 1989, 101]. Such houses can often be found to have been museumised for no very particular reason: perhaps their relative grandeur fulfilled a dim vision of the English country house as house museum, or perhaps it just seemed like a good idea at the time. The social history revolution appeared to offer a way to modernise some such houses, by refocusing on humble life in the house, specially on the contemporary interest in servants or slaves. But it is not a very ruthless judgement to suggest that an uncomfortable proportion of house museums developed reactively or opportunistically, without much substance or significance.

Concluding Remarks

These are the kind of houses that undoubtedly inspired Richard Moe, then chairman of the US National Trust, in 2002 to put the disheartening question, ‘are there too many historic house museums?’ American preservationists have now bitten this bullet, and ask frankly, ‘Does America need another house museum?’ They point out that, despite the best intentions, museumisation can condemn a historic house to poverty and deterioration rather than reinvigoration [Moe, 2002, 1; Stapp and Turino, 2004, 7; Barrientos, 2008]. A number of studies have investigated non-traditional management structures and more active uses for historic houses than traditional display [Harris, 2007].

It might be argued that as old houses, even not-very-important examples contain some intrinsic historic value. Well, yes, for the dividing line between the categories of history and sentiment is a threshold of perceived significance, and that is inevitably a matter of decision, that is, of management. But thus I return to my initial proposal that the conservation management of house museums needs to be informed by systematic assessment.
of the heritage significance of each case, not by the need to restore or furnish a grand house to a certain time period. The standards of significance change over time, exemplified by the case of redundant heroes, and arguably, house museum management should reflect changes, even if it means closing a house after a period of public display and returning it to domestic use. Since house museums are largely managed as unique specimens by individual trusts, it is hard to envisage a broad regime of selection to control the spread of museumised historic houses. However, this degree of control is practised with determination by the large organisations that manage networks of houses; in fact, they’ve become infamously unwilling to add acquisitions to their portfolios. Unfortunately, the wisdom of experience is not obvious to advocates of new house museums.

The many sites I have referred to in this paper demonstrate the enthusiasm of advocates to establish house museums, over a long period of time. They have been so effective, that today it seems a normal and natural thing to pay honour to the past by museumising an important house. A few new house museums open every year, and even more are proposed: a house once occupied by someone famous comes onto the market, and a journalist or commentator or local interest group makes a TV story about its museum potential. The staff of heritage management agencies grimace; they are already dealing with the thinly stretched resources available to maintain existing houses. So I conclude with the call to acknowledge that the other side of the coin of significance assessment in heritage preservation is the acknowledgement of insignificance. We need to recognise it and act accordingly.

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