

Investigating heritage significance

A guide to identifying and examining heritage items in NSW



Ku-ring-gai High School Hall

Photo: Ku-ring-gai High School, Department of Education

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- *Investigating history*
- *History and heritage*
- *Investigating fabric.*

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1. Managing heritage in NSW

The NSW Government is responsible for the management of our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural and natural heritage in partnership with local councils and communities. The NSW [Heritage Act, 1977](#) (Act) is the main legislation that governs statutory heritage protection in NSW. The Heritage Council of NSW is established through this Act; Heritage NSW administers the Act.

The Act covers places, buildings, works, relics, moveable objects, precincts and landscapes and heritage items of local or State significance to Aboriginal and other communities.

In NSW, the steps to managing heritage are:

- investigate significance
- assess significance
- manage significance.

Each step has standard procedures that can be applied to all kinds of heritage items and apply to any level of significance, local, state, national or world. See Appendix A for the full procedure.

1.1 Standard procedures to investigate, assess and manage heritage in NSW

Heritage practitioners investigating, assessing and managing heritage significant items in NSW should work in accordance with the procedures described in this guide and other relevant Heritage Council of NSW or Heritage NSW guidelines so that the significance process is:

- accountable
- can be tested
- comparable
- consistent (because the same criteria are used in every case across the State)
- applicable to all categories of heritage items.

Refer the Heritage NSW website for the steps to managing heritage in NSW and guidance publications on investigating, assessing and managing heritage significant items.

1.2 Statutory heritage listing in NSW

Only heritage items listed on statutory heritage lists are protected under NSW legislation. These lists include:

- Aboriginal Places
- State Heritage Register places
- Interim Heritage Orders
- state agencies' heritage and conservation registers (Section 170 registers)
- heritage items and conservation areas listed under Local Environmental Plans

As well as the Act, these lists are given affect through the [National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974](#) and the [Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979](#).

Heritage items in NSW are mostly identified and assessed via local heritage studies and reviews, and managed through local planning instruments, such as Local Environmental Plans, which vary in terms of coverage. The State Heritage Register is not comprehensive and continues to evolve.

Most items on statutory heritage lists in NSW can be searched on the [State Heritage Inventory](#).

2. Heritage criteria and categories

Our heritage consists of the places and objects we have inherited from past generation which we desire to keep and pass on to future generations.

For simplicity, this publication refers to heritage items. However, it is important to understand that a heritage item can refer to, or include, any of the following:

- landscapes
- buildings
- structures
- relics
- objects
- places
- works.

Heritage is often categorised as Indigenous, natural or historic and can exist in terrestrial and underwater contexts. It can be observed in physical evidence (known as tangible heritage), in non-physical evidence, such as stories and cultural practices (known as intangible heritage), or in a combination of both.

2.1 Heritage criteria

There are seven common criteria used to assign significance to heritage items in Australia. Refer to the publication [Assessing Heritage Significance](#) for the precise wording of the criteria.

The last two are comparative criteria that assist in determining the relative significance of items:

Historic – relates to the distant or recent history of an item and its importance in the course of NSW's history.

Associational – relates to the associations of the item with the life or works of an important person or group of persons

Aesthetic – relates to the aesthetic characteristics and creative achievement of the item including its architecture, interiors, landscape and other designed or natural elements

Social – relates to strong or special associations with communities or cultural groups

Research – relates to the potential of the item to reveal new information of scientific, technical or cultural nature

Rarity – relates to the ability of the item to be an exceptional example or rare survivor of its kind

Representativeness – relates to the ability of the item to demonstrate characteristics common to a type or class of places, and to fit within the NSW historical themes.

When identifying significance, some criteria may only be obvious to experts. For this reason, it is important to engage with a variety of stakeholders to consider all potential significance.

2.2 Aboriginal cultural heritage

Aboriginal cultural heritage consists of places, traditions, beliefs, customs, values and objects that represent the history of Aboriginal generations past and continuing and are of important cultural and heritage significance to Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal cultural knowledge provides crucial links between the past and present and represents an essential part of the identities of Aboriginal people and all Australians.

Heritage NSW can provide advice on identifying, documenting, assessing, protecting, conserving and managing Aboriginal places and objects in NSW.

2.3 Built environments and cultural landscapes

Built environments are the physical evidence of cultural development in places. They are made by humans, mostly from brick, plaster, wood, metal and stone. Built environments can include any type of building or structure as well as areas, precincts, gardens and streetscapes. The heritage of built environments helps us to understand our shared history. Heritage NSW has a range of resources to assist with investigating, assessing and managing built heritage.

Cultural landscapes are the result of people's long-term relationships with an environment. They can include any area where human activity has occurred. It can be witnessed through human effects on vegetation or landscape as well as archaeological resources, built structures or intangible heritage such as stories.

When investigating, assessing and managing cultural landscapes refer to [Cultural landscapes: A practical guide for park management](#).

2.4 Natural heritage

Scientific significance is particularly important in the conservation of species' habitats, ecosystems or geological sites. Cultural significance will be more relevant in areas where there has been a long or varied interaction between humans and the natural environment. Given Australia's long occupation by Aboriginal people, sites often have both natural and cultural heritage significance.

When investigating, assessing and managing natural heritage, use the Heritage Council's Natural Heritage Principles.

2.5 Historic archaeological heritage

Heritage items may hold archaeological significance. The Act defines archaeological objects as 'relics' and gives them special protections. As such, archaeological investigations should be carried out by qualified historical archaeologists. Heritage NSW has a range of resources to assist with identifying, assessing and managing the conservation of historic archaeology.

The NSW Maritime Heritage Database has records of over 3000 maritime heritage sites along the coast, inland lakes and rivers of NSW. Underwater archaeological sites include aircraft and the structural and deposited material associated with wharves, jetties, other infrastructure sites and sites inundated beneath dam waters. Investigations of shipwrecks and other underwater sites should be prepared by suitably qualified and experienced maritime archaeologists. Heritage NSW has a range of resources to assist with identifying, assessing and managing the conservation of maritime heritage.

2.6 Moveable heritage

Moveable heritage is any natural or manufactured object of heritage significance. It includes items that do not appear 'portable', such as fittings in heritage places, garden ornaments or collections.

Moveable heritage collections are often:

- associated with a significant heritage place
- associated with a community, family or individual
- associated with an organisation
- conserved in collecting institutions, such as museums, archives, and historical societies.

Moveable heritage items may have heritage significance individually or collectively.

The Heritage NSW website has a range of resources to assist with identifying, assessing and managing the conservation of moveable heritage.

3. Identifying items of heritage significance

Potential items of heritage significance can be identified by anyone, although most local and state heritage items in NSW are identified and assessed via:

- heritage studies, or heritage study reviews, of:
 - a local government area or region
 - the assets of a state government agency
 - an organisation
- thematic studies, which focus on historical processes or themes, examples include:
 - the Aboriginal land rights movement
 - rural homestead gardens
 - post-war migration
- community heritage identification studies or projects
- non-statutory registers, produced by organisations, such as:
 - the National Trust
 - DOCOMOMO Australia
 - the Australian Institute of Engineering
 - the Australian Institute of Architects.

Guidelines for conducting a Heritage study are available from Heritage NSW.

Heritage is also identified when threatened with change or loss, such as through development applications, neglect, sale or change of use. In such cases, time available to assess significance and undertake comparative analysis is often short and temporary protection via an Interim Heritage Order may be implemented.

4. Investigating and assessing significance

4.1 Effectively gathering evidence matters

Gathering evidence is the first step to effectively investigate and assess heritage significance.

Gathering all available information and evidence on an item allows its significance to be properly investigated and assessed against relevant criteria.

When gathering evidence, it is important to note that:

- evidence can be:
 - in any form – verbal, audio, written, graphic, archival, documentary, tangible, intangible
 - from a range of sources – individuals, communities, stakeholders, collections
 - primary in nature (original documents or objects that directly relate to the item, for example, architectural plans or part of the item’s fabric)
 - secondary in nature (documents or items whose information is drawn from analysing a primary source, for example, a journal article about the heritage building’s architect).
- research will be needed to identify and verify evidence
- asking an expert with specialised knowledge in the item’s class will help to identify the likely scope of research into its potential significance
- potential significance may only emerge after research is undertaken, so the process should remain flexible in order to accommodate emerging evidence.

4.2 Investigate significance to determine if an item has heritage significance

Investigating heritage significance may identify the potential heritage significance of an item and the likely level of its significance.

The heritage significance and likely levels of significance identified will determine the criteria that it will be assessed against.

Investigate heritage significance before assessing heritage significance.

4.3 Assess an item against criteria to understand its heritage significance

Before making decisions about the future of a heritage item it is necessary to understand its heritage significance. Understanding significance leads to informed decisions about how to manage and conserve an item’s heritage significance.

Assessing the heritage significance and level of significance hypothesised during the investigation process allows us to determine the item’s heritage significance.

The main aim in assessing significance is to produce a succinct statement of significance.

4.4 The statement of heritage significance is important

A statement of heritage significance summarises an item’s heritage significance in context.

The statement of heritage significance becomes the basis on which policies for conservation and management of heritage significance are based, and on which decisions and actions that will affect the item are taken. The statement informs:

- decisions about conserving the item’s significance
- if changes to the item are possible, desirable, or neither
- how to manage conflicting priorities and ideas about the management of an item and its setting
- how to manage conflicting priorities and ideas about potential changes to an item or its setting.

For this reason, it is important that the statement of significance is:

- informed by comprehensive, objective and robust investigation and assessment processes
- is clear and concise.

Often a paragraph will suffice, although state-significant items may require a longer statement.

4.5 When to investigate and assess heritage significance

The five main situations when heritage significance needs to be investigated and assessed is when:

- a. preparing a heritage study
- b. preparing a conservation management plan or heritage asset action plan
- c. considering an item for listing on the State Heritage Register or on a Local Environmental Plan
- d. making decisions about changing or retaining a heritage item or potential item
- e. preparing a statement of environmental effects, an environmental impact statement or a heritage impact statement as part of a development approval process.

4.6 Skills required

Heritage investigations and assessments can be carried out by anybody who understands NSW heritage management processes and who has training and experience in the area. What matters is:

- openness and objectivity when investigating an item's potential significance
- ability to recognise, assess and articulate that significance.

It is important to note that heritage is a multidisciplinary pursuit. There are a range of professional services, such as local history librarians and heritage advisors, that should be used to ensure appropriate skills during the investigation process.

Engaging or consulting heritage professionals with expertise that are relevant to the item type:

- is good practice for investigating, assessing and managing significance
- may be required to fully understand the depth of significance
- may be required to prioritise the significance of evidence against criteria.

The heritage expertise required will closely relate to the potential heritage significance of the item. Example of expertise related to investigating and assessing significance include:

Aesthetic – expertise might include archaeology/rock art, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture and fine arts.

Historic – the obvious expertise is history, however there are specialities within history that may be most appropriate (Indigenous history, mining history, labour history, social history and architectural history). In addition, the field of natural history, which includes the full range of sciences related to the natural environment, may be relevant.

Scientific – expertise might include archaeology, and there are specialities such as Indigenous, historic and industrial archaeology.

Social – expertise might include community-based research skills based in human geography, sociology and anthropology.

Spiritual – expertise might include anthropology.

Items that are (or could be) of Aboriginal cultural heritage significance should only be identified, investigated and assessed in consultation with the relevant Aboriginal stakeholders and communities.

Heritage NSW, local council officers and heritage advisors can offer valuable advice about the types of heritage professionals to consult when investigating heritage of your item.

The Heritage NSW heritage consultants directory is also a source for identifying relevant services.

4.7 Engaging with communities and stakeholders

The aim of investigating, assessing and managing heritage items is to identify and conserve important items so that they can be appreciated and enjoyed now and by future generations. It is therefore important to consider the knowledge of and values held by communities and stakeholders throughout each step of the investigation process.

Community and stakeholder consultation should:

- have a clear focus
- commence as early as possible
- be open to documenting differing, and sometimes conflicting, significance.

Effective consultation helps communities and stakeholders to understand and support the need to investigate, assess and conserve heritage places and objects. When people understand these processes, they are more likely to support:

- investigation and assessment findings
- future conservation and management actions.

Community members may be able to provide documents and photographs, stories and informed judgments, all of which can be useful in making comparative analyses.

4.8 Historical context and historical themes

The historical context provides background about the historical period and region of an item's creation or use. Historical context should form the background for any type or number of items subject to significance processes. For example, a historical context report is usually prepared as the first part of extensive significance processes, including:

- single items or a heritage place that are subject of a conservation management document
- thematic studies of item types, such as maritime or railway heritage items
- large or small geographic areas, such as in the first stage of a heritage study for a local council or state government agency.

Aboriginal cultural heritage is part of a continuous living culture and Aboriginal culture should be considered in all its aspects of history in NSW. Where an item is, or could be, of Aboriginal cultural heritage significance, relevant Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders should be consulted. Matters that may inform historical context or themes include:

- the Country in which the item is located
- the history of communities on Country
- understanding the item's significance for Aboriginal people
- how the item has been used by Aboriginal people.

Without historical context, an item's significance cannot be assessed against comparable places. For example, a historical context report on public parks in a region can help to establish the relative significance of any parks under the area of study.

The relationship between an item and its historical context underpins the investigation process. Historical themes provide a context for the heritage investigation to be conducted, especially if historical significance is critical to understanding an item's heritage significance.

The Heritage Council of NSW has developed [NSW historic themes](#) and [maritime themes](#) to connect local themes to the broader history of NSW. Local historical themes are usually identified by qualified historians in a historical context report, prepared as part of a heritage study.

5. The procedure for investigating significance

After gathering all available evidence, follow this process to investigate heritage significance:

- i. Investigate the item's historical context
- ii. Investigate relevant communities' understanding of the item
- iii. Identify local historical themes and relate them to NSW historical themes
- iv. Investigate the item's history
- v. Investigate the item's fabric

Records should be made of the evidence identified, research undertaken, methods and sources for identifying and researching items, findings and unanswered research questions.

5.1 Investigate the item's historical context

Key questions:

- what Country is the item is located on?
- when was it built?
- how was it built?
- what evidence is there of the design intent?
- when and how has the item changed?
- does the item demonstrate any of the themes in the NSW historical themes or maritime themes?
- what is the historic curtilage and setting?

A heritage item needs to be considered in the context of the Country, history and geography of the area surrounding it and changes over time. When investigating an item's significance and level of significance, it is important to understand the underlying historical influences that have shaped its creation, use and change over time.

To consider an item in its historical context, it is important to identify the links between information known from the historical sources and physical evidence you have gathered.

The NSW historical themes and maritime themes can be a useful tool to establish the five significance criteria.

Using historical and maritime themes in this way can be particularly important for large survey and assessment projects, where it may not be practical to research each item in detail.

[Historical research for heritage](#) has information on sources, research materials and repositories.

5.2 Investigate communities' understanding of the item

Key questions:

- does the item hold social significance for any communities?
- does the item hold spiritual and symbolic significance for any communities?
- what communities hold the item in esteem?

- do any communities assign other intangible significance to the items (performance, celebration)?
- what is the planning context of the item (zoning, use, capacity)?
- does the item represent unique or rarely seen cultural practices of a community (traditions, celebrations, performance)?

The purpose of heritage listings and heritage conservation practice is to sustain those items and places that a community, or multiple communities, value. As such, it is important to identify which communities have an association with the item and its significance to them.

Community practices, traditions and stories may reflect or reveal rare, endangered or unusual aspects of our history or cultural environment and can be important evidence in the comparative analysis.

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITIES

Communities can be a valuable source of evidence and information. To determine which community or communities have an association with an item, consider:

- who uses the item now or used it in the recent past. This community or communities will likely be the primary source for establishing contemporary community significance
- who has historically used the item
- if multiple communities use the item
- if there is contested ownership or has been a history of contested ownership over the item.

Commonly consulted groups include traditional owners, relatives and friends of owners, communities who use/d the item, Aboriginal land councils, historical societies, migrant community organisations, sports and social clubs, education institutions, professional associations and government agencies.

WORK WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal people are the determinants of Aboriginal heritage significance. Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders should be consulted about items with Aboriginal cultural heritage significance to understand those values and the heritage significance of the items. This should occur as early as possible when investigating and assessing items and should continue to inform management decisions. Engagement with Aboriginal people should be based on the principles of free, prior and informed consent. It should be based on principles of mutual respect, empowerment and a shared responsibility for culture and heritage.

Information provided by communities can come in many forms, documents, photographs, oral histories, informed judgments, all of which can be useful in making comparative analyses.

5.3 Identify local historical themes and relate them to the NSW history themes

Key questions:

- is the item unique, one of a group or one of many made at a certain time?
- does it have historic links to other related items or significant cultural activities?
- is the item significant to multiple regions or levels of significance (local, state, national, world)?

Thinking about an item in terms of themes can help us to understand its significance.

CONTEXT

Historical themes provide a context for an item's heritage significance to be understood, assessed and compared with similar items. Themes:

- can help to explain
 - why an item exists
 - whether changes to the item have enhanced its significance
 - how it relates to other items linked to the theme
- can unite a variety of actions, events, functions, people and dates
- can bring a level of objectivity to an investigation, because it can reduce the risk of people unconsciously focusing on a type of item, period or event.
- help to evaluate comparative significance, because similar items under similar themes can be compared, and their rarity or representativeness assessed.

Themes such as events, industry, social institutions or welfare help in deciding whether historical or social significance may be more important to the heritage significance of a building than aesthetic or research significance.

The historical development of an area or item can be understood as occurring in a thematic way. A physical illustration of this can be seen when we think about a landscape, garden, building or arrangement of artefacts as a series of layers, each one representing an earlier or later theme, or historical process.

Themes provide the framework for identifying and assessing the physical evidence and help historians to consider all periods in the history of:

- an item
- an area in a heritage study
- a conservation management plan.

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVIDENCE

The NSW historical themes and maritime themes summarise the historical framework for NSW, but they do not describe physical evidence or items. For example, the theme of accommodation refers to the process of land subdivision and building, not to the fact that an area contains houses.

It is useful to identify the local theme relating to an item and the broader state theme to which it relates. For example, an inner suburban railway station in Sydney may fit within the local study theme of developing railways, which is a sub-theme of the NSW theme of transport.

INTERPRET AND APPLY THEMES FLEXIBLY

The themes are deliberately general in character. The use of single words to describe a theme allows for their flexible interpretation. The theme of exploration, for example, could refer to the early expeditions of Hume & Hovell, to more recent treks in wild areas or to astronomical observation of the skies.

Most heritage items relate to more than one theme. A grandstand, for example, may be considered under the themes of:

- education, if it belongs to a school
- religion, if it belongs to a church school
- leisure or sport, if it is part of a public park

- defence, if it is part of a war memorial
- creative endeavour, if it reflected in a memorable piece of writing, a painting or an architectural style
- industry, if it is the only remaining evidence of an important commercial or industrial enterprise.

Commonly, a combination of some or all themes will be applicable. In this way, themes help to clarify the layers of meaning that an item can demonstrate or reveal.

LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The NSW historical themes and maritime themes provide the context needed to investigate and assess whether an item is of state heritage significance. They also serve as a useful checklist when preparing local historical context reports.

In many cases, the themes identified in historical context reports will parallel the NSW themes. Local themes should be cross-referenced to the NSW themes, as this will assist the comparative analysis and assessment of individual items.

The NSW historical themes and maritime themes also notes Australian themes that have been developed by the Australian Heritage Council. It is useful to relate particularly important state heritage items to these themes, especially if an assessment of an item for national significance is being considered.

[The Twentieth-Century Historic Thematic Framework: A Tool for Assessing Heritage Places](#) (Marsden and Spearritt 2021), provides a framework for world-wide historic themes of the 20th century. Ten succinct themes can be used to assess places in the context of the twentieth century and undertake comparative analysis. It can be used to link themes across all levels of significance.

5.4 Investigate the item's history

Key questions:

- which individuals or groups have historically occupied or used the item?
- who occupies or uses the item now, or did so in the recent past?
- is there any potential for archaeological evidence on the site or is the item a relic? What does it reveal about the item's history?
- does the item have moveable heritage associated with it? What does it reveal about the item's history?
- does the fabric of the place particularly reflect its history and the changes made to it?
- what is the date of land grant / parcel / occupation / approximate date of the site's layout?

THE ROLE OF HISTORY AND HISTORIANS

Historical research in the investigation process aims to provide an understanding of an item's history in order to determine what is significant about the item. It always begins with a question that is asked in the present such as:

- on what Aboriginal Country is the item located?
- when was the item constructed?
- why was this garden designed using these plant species?
- what is that pile of rocks located in that paddock?
- how did these old wharves function?
- who commissioned it?

- who conceived or designed it?
- this museum has a collection of geological specimens, but why have they been collected?
- how have the place's layout, function and detail changed over time, and why?

All items and events in the past can be situated within historical patterns. It is the role of a historian to describe and analyse those patterns and so provide a context for the item or event.

Historical research is a fundamental, though often neglected requirement, for identifying and assessing heritage items. It aims to find out the facts about an item or event. Professional historians are the most qualified people to analyse these facts, but for less complex or less significant items and events, community historians that are guided by a professional may be used.

SOURCES

Key sources for historical information include:

- local libraries including local studies' collections, historical societies and local history publications
- local council records and archives – for building and development applications, rate books, minute books, service records and commons records
- local community organisations – sporting clubs, special interest organisations, land care or conservation groups, neighbourhood associations and action groups, etc.
- State government – NSW State Archives, NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages, State Library, NSW Registry Services, Geographical Names Board and NSW Government Gazette
- Commonwealth government – National Archives of Australia, National Library of Australia, Australian Heritage Commission's *Australian Heritage Bibliography*
- specialist organisations – National Trust, Australian Garden History Society, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Australian Institute of Engineering, DOCOMOMO Australia, Australian Institute of Architects, Royal Australian Historical Society.

[Historical research for heritage](#) provides more detailed guidance on heritage management, researching the history of heritage places and identifying suitable sources.

5.5 Investigate the item's fabric

Key questions:

- what is the heritage item made of and how is it constructed?
- for broader places and precincts, what are the spaces, landscape and setting? What materials are they made of and how are they constructed?
- what can the fabric tell us about how the item has been used, in the past or today?
- is the item associated with moveable heritage? What fabric is the moveable heritage and how does it relate to the item's fabric?
- what is the curtilage of the item and what fabric does it contain?

The fabric of an item and its setting is vital evidence in investigating and assessing significance. This is because the fabric of a place provides a record of what happened rather than what was intended or believed to have happened, as might be suggested by the documentary evidence.

PHYSICAL MATERIAL

Fabric refers to all the physical material of an item, including its surroundings and contents (Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, articles 1.1 and 1.3). When investigating an item's fabric, we need to consider all the details of its structure, construction, architecture and design. Other aspects

also include services, such as in a building or garden, or engineering, such as the functioning mechanism of machinery.

Information that can be gleaned from the fabric includes:

- how the item was constructed, fabricated, laid-out and finished over the years
- approximate date of changes to the item and what these changes may have entailed
- materials and techniques used in the making of the item or object
- type and style of design, its response to the place and the local climate
- significant views to, from or within the item, especially when they form part of the design intent
- special devices/features added/used to provide comfort in the changing seasons
- hard landscape components, such as walls, structures, means of access, buildings
- soft landscape components, such as trees, shrubs, ground covers, climbers, weeds
- approximate date of construction or the planting of landscape elements
- the present and past relationship between the item, adjacent items and the surroundings
- how the item was used, managed and/or valued in the past
- the people involved in, or who influenced, its creation, change, use or management
- indication of transport system or the relationship of the item to transport and other access routes
- the research potential the item may possess.

The evidence gathered and research undertaken in previous steps will help to narrow down the questions that need to be investigated when examining the fabric. Before examining the item:

- write a list of questions you hope the fabric may answer
- determine the tools you will need, such as base plans, camera, tape measure, access ladders, lifts and hoists, ground penetrating radar, LiDAR, thermographic equipment, three-dimensional scanning equipment (for “point cloud” plotting)
- check safety requirements under Work Health and Safety legislation, codes and site policies that must be complied with. Undertake a risk assessment of the planned activities. If necessary, prepare a Safe Work Method Statement and obtain necessary safety equipment.

INVESTIGATE FABRIC THOROUGHLY, CAREFULLY AND PROFESSIONALLY

Preliminary investigations should be non-invasive and not involve excavation (article 28 of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter). Such disturbance could destroy important evidence, before significance has been assessed and appropriate policies and management plans are put in place.

Investigations should be supervised by a suitably qualified heritage professional. For example, invasive investigations need prior approval if they have the potential to disturb significant fabric, archaeological sites or relics. Specific assessment and reporting practices are required for these activities to comply with the Act and should be supervised by an archaeologist with relevant experience.

If you intend to undertake an excavation on a heritage site, an item of potential heritage significance, or where you may disturb archaeological resources, contact Heritage NSW to apply for a permit.

MEASURED DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Often an item will need to be inspected several times before it can be fully understood. As such, all aspects of the item and its setting need to be documented.

A good first step is to prepare measured drawings and take documentary photographs. These will be invaluable when recommending appropriate repairs, stabilisation, maintenance, adaptive reuse and other conservation measures in the future. This information will also assist with the comparative analysis where the item's condition, integrity and authenticity (how much of the original item is present) is considered.

Drawings should include a location plan, site plan, floor plans, roof plan, elevations (with north clearly marked), sections and key details. You can show how the place developed over time by using different colours or hatchings for phases of development.

A basic tool that will assist you in the assessment phase is an accurate plan of the item. A marked-up plan of the whole site containing its landscape and structural elements should be prepared to include:

- the date/s of construction and planting
- the relative intactness of the item or its parts
- the curtilage and setting
- views to and from the site and how these have changed over time.

Photographs should include overall views from different angles and, in the case of buildings, each interior and exterior elevation and key details.

Old photographs can be invaluable aids to understanding the changes to a site over time. Captions describing past features or changes can help a reader understand what has happened. Aerial photographs taken at different times over a period can be a valuable record of change, particularly in showing changes to layout and vegetation or building cover on a site.

HISTORICAL PERIODS AND ITEM TYPES

Knowledge of historical periods and similar types of items is useful in determining the likely construction dates of development phases of an item. Archival documents such as old photographs, aerial photographs for complex or large sites, drawings and written descriptions can also help to explain how a place developed over time.

The way the item 'sits' in its surroundings can say a lot about its significance. For example:

- is it like its neighbours?
- was it one of a group or part of a larger complex of items?
- what is the surrounding environment?
- how did its setting influence the placement, form, materials, additions or condition of the item?
- what is the settlement pattern, lot size or character of its setting?
- is this property of a similar size and pattern to its surroundings?
- has that changed?

DATING FABRIC

The nature and provenance of the fabric can improve our understanding of the item and its significance. Sources for establishing provenance include:

- patents and registered designs
- catalogues for building materials and prefabricated structures' brands
- trademarks and dates
- tradesperson marks and signatures

- construction technique and methods of using certain materials
- records of botanic gardens and herbaria
- old nursery catalogues (for evidence of plant availability).

Archival designs and drawings can be misleading – buildings are sometimes not constructed exactly as planned. Conversely, archival documents can indicate parts of the building that have been altered or demolished.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Analysing the style of a building is one way of putting it into historical context. It can also be useful to identify later changes to the fabric. Care should be taken though, as elements of one style are often carried over into subsequent stylistic periods and some eras deliberately revived historical styles. For these reasons, dating buildings solely by their stylistic characteristics is not advisable. Several publications examine the stylistic periods and give identifying points for different styles but reference to these publications must be combined with thorough documentary research related to the specific place.

EXAMINING DECORATIVE SCHEMES

Learning about earlier decorative schemes of a heritage item can help to explain some of its history, such as alterations, and provide guidance for future schemes. Examination of finishes is often done by carefully removing layers to reveal previous finishes. It is important to note:

- earlier surface finishes are a valuable archaeological record and should not be destroyed
- any examination must not destroy the fabric
- many old materials and finishes may be toxic (i.e. contain lead, arsenic, asbestos, etc), and their composition should be verified by a relevant expert before examining them.

When examining finishes, a good starting place is a finish that has been unchanged or is in an unseen location, such as inside built-in cupboards, behind electrical conduits or mounting boxes. Interpreting earlier finishes requires an analytical approach and experience, especially to determine which paint layers were finish layers and how colours degrade over time. Refer to the Heritage Council's [Maintenance Series 7.2 Paint finishes](#) for information on the removal of paint layers.

Similarly, learning about earlier garden or landscape styles, dates of plant introduction and availability can help to explain how a garden or landscape may have appeared. This can aid the selection of appropriate material to reconstruct or maintain it.

Terracotta bed edging tiles and paths are often buried or survive below lawns or garden beds, providing evidence of past layout and materials. A permit issued under the Act is required for excavation that may disturb an archaeological site or relics. In some cases, previous garden layout can be determined through research of documentary evidence rather than more invasive actions.

Specialist information on plant availability, garden design styles, etc. is available from the Australian Garden History Society, National Trust, Sydney Living Museums and Heritage NSW.

6. Prepare to assess heritage significance

The next step in managing heritage is to assess significance and produce the statement of significance. The statement of significance is the basis for the policies and management frameworks that will determine how the item is conserved and managed.

A good statement will:

- draw on an existing, robust statement of significance, where it exists
- be succinct
- reflect the full range of heritage values fairly
- help understand if the item has greater significance against some of the criteria and why
- link to attributes that embody or convey significance
- provide a finer-grained understanding of the contribution of parts to the overall significance.

Information gathered and analysed in the investigation process is used to assess significance and develop the statement of significance. Prepare to assess significance by:

- documenting all supporting information and records, and where to locate them for future use
- reviewing the information recorded and consider:
 - what did the investigation find?
 - what was the investigation unable to find or verify?
 - what significance may the item hold?
 - what is the likely level of heritage significance (local, state, national, world)?
- succinctly write up the findings, so they can be used to effectively assess significance.

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Appendix A

Steps for managing heritage in NSW

STEP 1 - INVESTIGATE SIGNIFICANCE

- i. Investigate the item's historical context
- ii. Investigate relevant communities' understanding of the item
- iii. Identify local historical themes and relate them to the NSW history themes
- iv. Investigate the item's history
- v. Investigate the item's fabric

STEP 2 - ASSESS SIGNIFICANCE

- i. Summarise what you know about the item
- ii. Describe the previous and current uses of the item, its associations with individuals or groups and its meaning for those people
- iii. Assess significance using the NSW heritage assessment criteria
- iv. Check whether you can make a sound analysis of the item's heritage significance
- v. Determine the item's level of significance
- vi. Prepare a succinct statement of heritage significance
- vii. Get feedback from the community and stakeholders
- viii. Succinctly write up all your information in plain English

STEP 3 - MANAGE SIGNIFICANCE

- i. Analyse the management implications of the item's level of significance
- ii. Investigate the opportunities and limits arising out of the item's significance (including appropriate uses, activities or practices essential to significance)
- iii. Understand owner and user requirements
- iv. Prepare conservation and management recommendations
- v. Get feedback from the community and stakeholders
- vi. Identify statutory controls and their relationship to the item's significance
- vii. Recommend a process for carrying out the conservation and management policies and actions

More information

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