



# Significance<sup>2.0</sup>

a guide to assessing the significance of collections

**Front cover:** clockwise from centre top

'Airzone' wireless radio kept *in situ* at Prime Minister Chifley's Home in Bathurst, NSW  
Reproduced courtesy of the Chifley Home, Bathurst Regional Council

Letter written by Edward (Ned) Kelly to Sergeant James Babington of the Kyneton Police 28 July 1870 PROV, VPRS 937/PO, Inward Registered Correspondence [Victoria Police], Unit 272, 1870/D7256  
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Helmet worn by Ned Kelly  
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*Flowers and fruit of the mangrove for kamu sagul*  
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Wood sculpture of a dingo  
Aurukun carvings  
Photo: George Serras  
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Detail of embroidered velvet hanging, possibly part of a curtain, made by Mrs D Amos, née Saxon of Murrundi, 1892. The item was identified in the *Her Story* thematic study. Donated Mrs Jack Wilson, Beauford Hotel, Mayfield. Port Macquarie Historical Society 453  
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Arthur Boyd  
*Portrait of Manning Clark* 1972  
Oil on canvas  
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The Clayton & Shuttleworth engine before acquisition by the Golden Memories Museum, Millthorpe, NSW  
Photo: Kylie Winkworth

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Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth



**Australian Government**

**Department of Communications and the Arts**



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## Foreword

# *The way Australians think and live is captured in our collections.*

These collections reflect Australians' lives in myriad areas at different times in our development—they provide insights into our unique national spirit and values, and contribute to our ability to solve new problems in distinctively Australian ways.

Just as Australians are spread across a vast land, so our collections are distributed across the nation. Understandably, many different ways have been created to identify and care for our collections, in response to their type, location, or available resources. Whether located in the country or the city, significant collections occur throughout Australia—often in surprising places.

*Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections* builds on the solid foundation laid by the first edition of *Significance* (2001) in defining an adaptable method for determining significance across all collections in Australia. Those who have been guided by this 'significance method' since 2001 report that this has translated into better decision-making about their collections in areas like preservation, physical and digital access, and funding support.

The impact of significance to date and new applications of the method will resonate when more, in-depth case studies are tailored for the evolving online environment—along with e-learning modules and technical studies. These exciting developments will be achieved with partners in coming years and will make significance live through <http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au/>

The Collections Council exists to support all of Australia's collections. We thank the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, for funding this second edition of *Significance*. We also thank the Arts Ministers in each state and territory of Australia and the Federal Arts Minister (via the Cultural Ministers Council), for supporting the work of the Collections Council.

I encourage you to explore *Significance 2.0*, to adapt the significance method to your particular situation, and to contribute to significance online. As we strive for more sustainable collections let us also realise the potential that collections hold for further innovative thinking across Australia.

Noel Turnbull  
Chair  
Collections Council of Australia Ltd



## Preface

*Significance 2.0* is published by the Collections Council of Australia Ltd.<sup>1</sup> Some objectives of the Collections Council<sup>2</sup> are to:

- advance the stability and sustainability of the collections sector, through communication, consultation and resolution of common issues;
- sponsor such programs deemed necessary and desirable to further industry development;
- promote benchmarks and standards for the care and management of collections;
- promote access to and participation in Australian cultural heritage collections.

*Significance 2.0* helps the Collections Council to achieve a number of its objectives—in particular to promote a successful standard for industry-wide development by enhancing its relevance for archives and libraries, in addition to museums and galleries.

The Council recognises a wide range of approaches to collections that derive from the training of their custodians—whether as archivists, librarians, records managers, historians, art historians, curators, scientists, conservators, managers or traditional owners. The Council often refers to the four major collecting ‘domains’ that represent and include this range of custodial approaches—archives, galleries, libraries and museums.<sup>3</sup> You will see references to this short-hand terminology throughout the book.

After discussions with the authors during 2006–2007 about their experience with significance since the release of the first edition, the Collections Council set about verifying the usefulness of the ‘significance method’ presented in the first edition through a number of consultations.

To begin, a survey was conducted in April 2007. Together with a literature search, Collections Council Board and funding partner advice, analysis of these survey results provided direction for the authors about the Collections Council’s aims for the second edition.<sup>4</sup> In early 2008 a Sector Advocate was appointed to ensure that the diverse voices of the collections sector were heard at every phase in the project. Ian Cook provided astute advice at various points in the process, and contributed generously and thoughtfully to the project well beyond his brief.

In April 2008, a workshop enabled the authors to hear about participants’ experience with determining significance in a wide range of collections settings. A number of workshop presentations were uploaded to a forum webpage from July 2008 and these attracted considered online comment throughout the year.

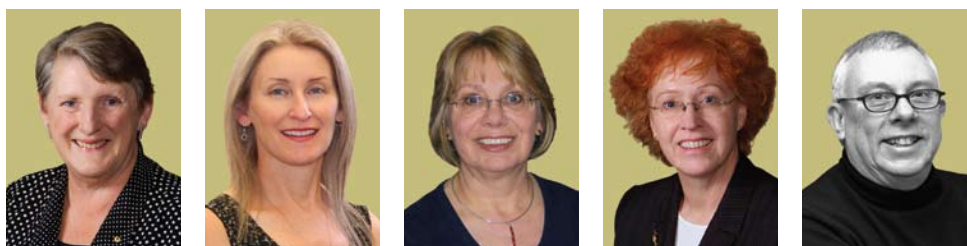
Finally, in February 2009 a draft of the proposed *Significance 2.0* text was released for review to approximately 100 people and organisations involved with cultural heritage, mainly in Australia.

The Collections Council was impressed with the high quality of responses to the review, and indeed to each round of consultation, and sincerely thanks all contributors for their efforts. The *Significance 2.0* Project Team (pictured) considered every contribution in detail, and incorporated salient ideas into this revised text.

A number of points raised by reviewers of the February 2009 draft were regarded by the Project Team to be beyond the scope of this document, which aims to explore the common ground between various established practices in the different collecting domains. While stressing that the significance method is adaptable to a range of circumstances, the Team readily acknowledges that other methods run parallel to this approach. For example, we understand it is unlikely that detailed statements of significance would be developed in archives for individual items, series or record groups, or in libraries, for loan collections.

In the case of such ‘operational’ collections we also understand that in archives and libraries the assessment of significance or value usually begins with a study of context and provenance rather than with an analysis of actual records. This contextual study may identify functions, activities, individuals, events, relationships and organisational units or entities (all of which can be regarded as falling under the broad heading of ‘provenance’), that are potentially of significance. An archive or library will then endeavour to identify the valuable records that need to be created and preserved as evidence of those significant events, activities or entities. This can be viewed as a different method to that articulated in Parts 3 and 4 of *Significance 2.0*.





The *Significance 2.0* Project Team, from left to right: Sue Nattrass (Chair), Veronica Bullock (Project Manager & Editor), Roslyn Russell (Author), Kylie Winkworth (Author) and Ian Cook (Sector Advocate). Portrait of Ian Cook at the National Library of Australia, Sept 18 2001. Photo: Loui Seselja nla.pic-an23323456. Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

At the April 2008 workshop, four guiding statements<sup>5</sup> were expressed as representing the 'common ground' between the four major collecting domains in regard to significance:

- We cannot keep everything forever. Therefore significance assessment is vital to make the best use of our scarce resources for collecting, conserving, documenting and digitising our collection materials.
- Significance is not an absolute state—rather, it is relative, contingent and dynamic. Views on significance depend upon perspective and can change over time.
- In assessing significance, power is wielded in constructing societal memory and identity. Collection custodians therefore have a responsibility to consult affected communities and to be hospitable to alternative views in recognition of the fact that significance decisions inevitably privilege some memories and marginalise or exclude others.
- When assessing significance, it is vital to understand, respect and document the context of collection materials—the events, activities, phenomena, places, relationships, people, organisations and functions that shape collection materials.

These guiding statements underpin much of the authors' fresh work in *Significance 2.0*, and have also informed the development of new features that focus on Provenance, Context and Principles.

In this second edition, you will find that the core of the significance method remains unchanged. It still hinges on the preparation of a well-researched 'statement of significance', which references a set of primary and comparative criteria. This consistent method should aid all those conducting or receiving significance assessments to 'speak a common language'. Greater prominence is given to the assessment method as the key process for expressing significance, and the significance assessment steps have been refined.<sup>6</sup>

We responded to the concern that it often isn't possible to conduct significance assessments item-by-item, by including more 'whole / part collection' and 'cross-collection' examples and guidance. There is also a greater diversity of case studies and this is illustrated in the introductory feature titled 'Distributed collections and significance'. Its focus on cultural and scientific collections through the cases of the popular outlaw Ned Kelly and the extinct native Australian dog the thylacine, highlights a range of item and collection types held across archives, galleries, libraries and museums. These examples underscore the value of a common language and method for communicating the meaning and importance of all collections.

The features on Context and Provenance show how it is crucial to consider these factors both before and after determining which primary criteria are most relevant to an item or collection under significance assessment, and the 'Principles for good practice with significance' feature is a useful complement to the significance applications presented in the following Part 6.

Part 6 applications are summarised in this volume, and appear in full in *Significance 2.0* online at <http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>

Also included in this edition are new criteria for the assessment of items of national significance, to better support the Community Heritage Grant Program and the Commonwealth *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, as well as helpful diagrams, an index, and an extensive glossary.

*Significance 2.0* has already been a fruitful journey, and I would like to thank Roslyn and Kylie for their continuing development of the concept and practice of significance. I would also like to thank the Collections Council Board, especially former Chair Sue Nattrass, for their wise counsel throughout the development of the *Significance 2.0* print publication, and for embracing the vision for significance online.

Veronica Bullock  
Project Manager & Editor  
*Significance 2.0*  
March 2009



## Part 1 Introducing Significance 2.0

### What is Significance 2.0?

*Significance 2.0* outlines the theory, practice and many applications of the concept of significance in collection management. It takes readers through the key concepts and steps in assessing significance, for single items, collections and cross-collection projects. With examples and case studies it shows significance in action, in a wide range of applications.

This is a new and revised edition of *Significance; a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage collections*, published in 2001 by the Commonwealth of Australia on behalf of the Heritage Collections Council. This second edition extends the scope of significance to demonstrate its use with a wide variety of collections across the four major collecting domains—archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

Since the publication of the first edition, many collecting organisations across Australia have embraced the concept of significance, using it in many facets of their work—in collection policies, for acquisitions and deaccessioning, in conservation, planning, promotion, advocacy, education, online access, and in innovative collaborative projects. Significance is now widely used by collecting organisations in Australia and it has a growing number of supporters overseas.

### Who is Significance 2.0 for?

*Significance 2.0* is for anyone who is curious about collections and their meanings.

*Significance 2.0* is for all collecting organisations, agencies and owners that manage or hold collections. This includes everyone working with or associated with collections in any capacity—archivists, conservators, curators, educators, heritage managers, librarians, policy officers, interpreters, private owners and collectors, registrars, researchers, scientists, and students, whether as paid workers or volunteers.

### How can Significance 2.0 help?

*Significance 2.0* is designed to work for all types of collections, giving collection managers throughout Australia a shared framework and standard process to analyse and communicate the meanings and values of collections.

Collecting organisations will have different uses for significance, depending on their circumstances and collections. While some collecting organisations are using significance in all aspects of their collection work, others find it useful for occasional or specific applications, such as supporting acquisition proposals to boards, or before conservation work. Some collecting organisations mainly use the single item assessment process, while others will find the whole collection process more useful.

This guide provides ideas, examples and suggestions that can be adapted to suit the needs of all kinds of collections.

### Using Significance 2.0

This guide explains the concept of significance, the assessment process, how to draft a statement of significance, and gives examples of many different applications of significance.

It is designed to work with a suite of online resources including a workbook and e-learning module for developing practical skills in assessing significance, and other supporting online resources.<sup>7</sup>

Examples and case studies in *Significance 2.0* are tightly edited and may not fully convey the significance of the item or associated research. Further more detailed case studies will be added online in the future.<sup>8</sup> The first edition of *Significance* contains other case studies, and remains available online.

### A note on terms

*Significance* is the short title for this publication, either the first edition or *Significance 2.0*. ‘Significance’ without italics refers to the concept. ‘Significance assessment’ is the process of researching and understanding significance, and the ‘statement of significance’ is the summary of how and why an item or collection is significant. These terms are more fully defined in Part 3 and in the Glossary.

### What is Significance?

‘Significance’ refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections, and to understand the history, cultures and environments of Australia.

### How is Significance 2.0 different from the first edition?

This revised edition of *Significance 2.0* draws on a substantial body of experience in using significance to analyse and communicate the meanings and values of items and collections. It includes refinements to the step-by-step assessment process, a greater emphasis on whole collection and cross-collection applications, and the inclusion of criteria for assessing national significance.<sup>9</sup>

## Part 2 Why significance?

### Collections and significance

Australian collections are the memory bank of the nation and a key to its future. They embody the people, history, cultures, science and environment of Australia, and they show the creativity of Australians in all dimensions. Collections give a sense of our place in the world, and explain how the land and nation have evolved.

Australians will need knowledge, ideas, creativity and innovation to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century. This can be discovered and nurtured through engagement with Australia's collections.

But how can we ensure that the nation's distributed collections are able to fulfill their potential?

Many important themes, subjects and histories that are central to Australia's identity and culture can only be fully understood by reaching across collection boundaries and collecting domains. Indigenous cultures, exploration and settlement, the convict system, Australia at war, Australia's engagement with Antarctica and the history of migration are all themes that run across the collecting domains. A proper understanding of these themes means investigating all types of collections.

This is also the case for more specific topics. Specimens of the extinct thylacine are held in many natural history collections in Australia. Each collection holds a particular part of the natural or cultural history of this iconic animal. Our relationship with the thylacine is also documented and interpreted in pictures, books, film and contemporary art. Similarly, papers, objects and works of art related to Patrick White are distributed through collections in Sydney and Canberra. The sum of the man, as a novelist, playwright, benefactor, agitator and Nobel laureate, can only be understood by crossing institutional and domain boundaries.

Australia's collections have evolved through distinct and independent organisations, each with its own mission, purpose, collection policies and priorities. Items acquired new meanings and associations once they entered collections and were constructed into particular histories, taxonomies and assemblages. But who determines what collections mean? Is it the expert curator who identifies and catalogues the item, or the scientist who names and describes a specimen? Or is it the people once associated with the item in its original context? Sometimes the meaning of a collection is highly contested. The Parthenon marbles in the British Museum are presented as artefacts in the universal history of civilisation. They have acquired new meanings since they entered the British Museum. For the people of Greece, the Parthenon marbles are an integral part of a single work of art, a sacred building and place that is central to the culture, history and modern identity of Greece.

With more democratic access to collections, the collecting institution and its staff are no longer the sole authority on meaning. Best practice for collections recognises that many people may have an interest in a collection and contribute to an understanding of its importance. Knowledge and relationships are enhanced by engagement with interested people and communities. Significance assessment recognises the importance of people, places and context in understanding collections. It is a process that investigates and analyses the meanings and values of items and collections, facilitating the sharing of ideas and information. It has not yet been used to solve the contest over the Parthenon marbles, but it could make a positive contribution to this debate.

Today collections exist in every corner of Australia and in a great variety of management and ownership regimes. They are found in community and civic spaces, in scientific and educational institutions, in businesses and government agencies.

Collections are held by the four main collecting domains; archives, art museums, libraries and museums, and by many other organisations, including the National Trust, national parks, historical societies, universities, house museums, Indigenous keeping places and knowledge centres, heritage places, herbaria and families and community organisations.

Australian collections range from the beginnings of life on earth to work made yesterday; from microscopic specimens to planes, trains and automobiles; from inspirational works of art to ephemeral items from daily life; and from official records to rare books and unique manuscripts. Many disciplines and types of knowledge are used to develop and research collections, each with particular ways of looking at items and collections.

The Internet is expanding the audiences and users of collections. It is transcending institutional boundaries and connecting collections across Australia and the world. It is also creating opportunities to communicate more effectively the meanings of items and collections. The growth of collections online highlights the need for a common language to speak about how and why collections are of value. Significance works across institutional, domain and disciplinary boundaries to provide a more complete and rewarding way of sharing the meaning of collections.

### Why use significance?

There are three main areas where significance helps collecting organisations: access and community engagement; advocacy; and making good collection management decisions.

Significance is a proven persuader. Whether it's making the case for a new acquisition, substantiating a funding application, or lobbying for education and online resources, significance goes to the heart of why collections are important and why they should be supported.

Significance draws out the knowledge, passion and expertise of collection staff and volunteers, and puts it in the public domain. The assessment process and statement of significance shine a powerful light on the richness, diversity and potential of Australia's collections.

In collection management, significance assessment is finding many applications, not just within collecting organisations, but in cross-collection collaborative projects. It facilitates collection analysis and a more coordinated and strategic approach to collection development.

### Significance and sustainable collections

The last fifty years have seen enormous growth in the number and size of collections. Many collecting organisations have run out of storage space, or room to present new exhibitions or resources to reach new audiences and users. There is a backlog of items needing conservation and research, and collecting organisations face difficult decisions about which collections to digitise and make accessible online. Every day, collecting organisations are making judgements about which items and collections will be collected, conserved, researched and made accessible. These are profound decisions that shape what future generations will know and understand about the past and present.

Many factors guide these decisions, including policies, budgets, staffing, volunteers, space and other resources. Collecting organisations are conscious of the need to balance current programs with future obligations. Sustainability is an important principle that underlies effective collections management and significance practice.<sup>10</sup> Significance is a process that helps collecting organisations make good decisions about the sustainable development, care and management of their collections.

Significance is fostering collaboration across collecting organisations, sharing knowledge and prompting conversations about the sustainable future of collections. Collection analysis using significance is raising important questions about duplications and omissions in collections, leading to more cooperative and strategic collecting. There are high costs in keeping collections in perpetuity, so careful decisions about acquisitions are essential.

### The Distributed National Collection

The Distributed National Collection (DNC) has been defined as 'the sum of all heritage collections of significance to the nation'.<sup>11</sup> These are held by a wide range of organisations and individuals across the country. Nationally significant items and collections are not just found in state and national institutions, but also in rural and regional areas, heritage places, businesses and community organisations. Additionally, some significant items and collections are held by families and individuals. This wide distribution of Australia's important collections underlines the case for national policies and programs to sustain significant collections wherever they are found. *Significance 2.0* is one of the tools to build awareness of the Distributed National Collection.

There are crossovers and common ground for collections. New cultural developments are merging or co-locating art galleries, libraries and museums.<sup>12</sup> However, collections from different domains have always been mixed in collecting organisations. Museums and galleries are often found under the one umbrella, as in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory. State and national libraries hold important collections of historic paintings and objects; many historical societies have archives and paintings; and state and national museums include archives and libraries.

Significance assessment is inherently a cross-domain activity, and almost always requires research from more than one domain. The opportunity in collections convergence is perhaps less about co-location or merging collecting organisations, and more about collaborating to share the meanings of collections and learning from the practice and capacities in each domain. Significance has practical applications for each collecting domain, and the capacity to encourage collaboration and communication about the values of collections across domains and within communities, nationwide.

### Speaking a common language, sharing a methodology

Significance provides a common framework for analysing all kinds of items and collections and communicating their meanings and values. *Significance 2.0* aims to demonstrate the relevance of the significance method to all types of collections.

It is recognised that each of the four collecting domains—archives, galleries, libraries and museums—has its own policies, procedures and methodologies that have evolved to suit the purpose of the organisation, the nature of the collections, and the needs of their audiences and users. Many terms, such as 'provenance' and 'context', have different shades of meaning in particular domains or with certain types of collections. Collecting organisations have their own criteria for assessing acquisitions, some of which overlap with the significance criteria. Ways of accessing collections vary across collections from users, to visitors and audiences.<sup>13</sup>

***Significance 2.0 does not aim to compete with or replace well-established collection practice and procedures.***



Rather, it adds value to current collection practices. It can be used and incorporated into collection management practices in ways that best suit the needs of the organisation, the collection, and its audiences or users.

The collecting domains will always have distinctive ways of working with their collections. Nevertheless, in a collections environment that is increasingly connected and intertwined, there are benefits in using a flexible process and a common set of assessment criteria to share the meaning of collections and explain how and why they are of value.

## How significance evolved

Significance was first used in Australia for the management of places of cultural significance. The concept of the assessment process and summary statement of significance was developed by Australia ICOMOS (the Australian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites) in 1979 as the *Burra Charter*.<sup>14</sup> This widely admired technique is the cornerstone of heritage practice in Australia.

The first edition of *Significance* was developed by the Heritage Collections Council (HCC), a forerunner of the Collections Council of Australia.<sup>15</sup> The HCC recognised the need for collecting organisations to assess the significance of their collections, and identified this issue as one of the key goals in the *National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy*.<sup>16</sup> Before publication of *Significance*, three years of investigations and workshops road-tested the best assessment criteria for Australia's movable heritage collections. By trialling the step-by-step process of assessment, and using the draft criteria, participants in the workshops discovered new information about even well-documented items, changing the way they understood their meaning and importance.

The case studies demonstrated that significance assessment logically analyses, explores and articulates the meanings and values of items and collections. While significance was developed for use with original materials, its use has more recently been extended to include 'born digital' items, such as wikis and multimedia objects.

In exploring options for the best assessment process and most flexible criteria, the first edition of *Significance* drew on the work of Australia ICOMOS and the *Burra Charter*. Many collecting organisations, especially those located in heritage buildings, were already familiar with the concept of significance and the assessment process. Australia's collections are part of a cultural continuum, connected with communities and places, tangible and intangible heritage. All the interconnected elements of Australia's culture and heritage are better managed through an integrated assessment process that builds understanding of the layers of meanings found in collections. A particular strength of the significance assessment process is the way it uncovers the connections between collections, communities and places, exploring the wider context and meanings that collections have for people and communities.

When the HCC was recommending significance for collections it was also developing a website with online access to collections across Australia. This has evolved into the Collections Australia Network<sup>17</sup> (CAN), an online portal to hundreds of Australian collections. In the initial development of the collections website, museums were asked to identify their most significant items for listing. The response was a fascinating range of items, many linked to important events, activities, and people in Australia's history. However, in listing their important items, collecting organisations tended to describe their appearance, rather than explain how or why they were significant.

The organisations knew why their items were significant, but this wasn't necessarily obvious to users of the site. To really take advantage of the opportunities to share information about collections on the web, it was apparent that collecting organisations needed to go beyond the standard catalogue description to explain the meaning and importance of items and collections. Since then, the growing availability of significance statements on CAN, and in other collections databases, is enlarging access to collections and opening up new ways of using collections.

# Distributed collections and significance

Items and collections held in archives and art galleries, libraries and museums across Australia help to tell our national stories. We have chosen to look at two of these stories—of Australia's great folk hero, Ned Kelly, and our most famous extinct animal, the thylacine. Preserved in collecting organisations and at heritage sites, the essential records and artistic expressions of Ned Kelly and the thylacine will continue to demonstrate their significance into the future.

## Ned Kelly's story across collections

Perhaps no other story in Australian history has exerted such a strong influence on our visual and literary culture as that of the outlaw or 'bushranger' Ned Kelly, and his gang. It has inspired artists and musicians, historians and novelists, film and documentary makers and cultural tourists, and evoked a range of opinions about the outlaws. Were Ned Kelly and his gang vicious murderers, or champions of the poor and oppressed? Was Ned, their leader, a hero or a villain?

The diversity of collections relating to Ned Kelly underlines the need for a common language to describe the meaning and values of objects, documents, works of art and heritage places. The following 'statement of significance' introduces a presentation of Kelly memorabilia overleaf.

### Statement of significance

A website devoted to Ned Kelly, *Ironoutlaw*, claims that 'From stamps to movies to the opening of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Ned Kelly has become one with the Australian psyche'.<sup>18</sup> Material held in archives and art galleries, libraries and museums across Australia has allowed Kelly's story to be researched, viewed, and interpreted for over a century. Preserved at the time when the exploits of Ned Kelly and his gang were capturing the attention of Australian colonists of the 1870s and 1880s, items and collections relating to Ned Kelly have been mined ever since to tell his story and to explain its grip on the nation's consciousness. These items and collections are thus of great *historical significance*. Australian artist Sidney Nolan in his Ned Kelly series of paintings created an icon—a stylised black helmet—that acts as a visual shorthand for Kelly's story, and evokes instant recognition in Australians, a distinction it shares with only a handful of other works of art created in this country. Nolan's Ned Kelly series is thus of great *artistic significance* for its evocation of the stark figure of Kelly framed in the vibrant colours of the Australian landscape, and for the pathos of his story captured in paint. Kelly's story is still being investigated at archaeological sites such as that of the siege of Glenrowan, where excavated material has *research potential* to shed more light on those fateful events. And the enduring story of Ned Kelly, described as 'our greatest folk hero' and 'one of the unsuspecting fathers of Australian nationalism' by the *Ironoutlaw* website, has immense *social significance* as successive generations of Australians identify with aspects of his story.



Armour worn by Ned Kelly and members of his gang is held in collections around Australia. This helmet is from the State Library of Victoria's collection, and was shown in the National Library's travelling exhibition, *National treasures from Australia's great libraries* (2005–07). Reproduced courtesy of the Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria.

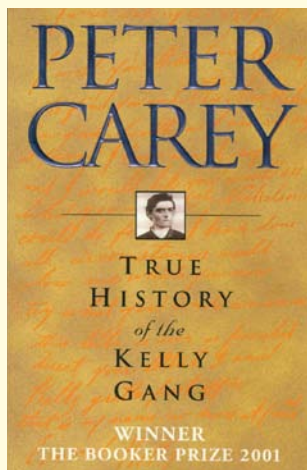


Photograph of Edward (Ned) Kelly aged 25, shortly before his execution in November 1880. From the Kelly papers collection PROV, VPRS 515/P0 Central Register of Male Prisoners, Unit 17, No.10926.

Photo: Charles Nettleton  
Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of Public Records, Public Record Office Victoria, Australia



IMG\_7991 Aerial Photograph of  
Anne Jones Inn, Glenrowan, Victoria,  
June 2008  
Reproduced courtesy of  
Ken A Mackenzie OAM



Peter Carey, *True History of the  
Kelly Gang* (2001)  
Reproduced courtesy of University  
of Queensland Press



The McIntyre manuscript and  
illustration of Ned Kelly's Trial  
Reproduced courtesy of the Victoria  
Police Museum and Historical Unit

## The Jerilderie letter, State Library of Victoria and National Museum of Australia

The Jerilderie letter has been described as Ned Kelly's 'manifesto'. Around 8000 words long, it was dictated by Ned Kelly to Joe Byrne in February 1879, and conveys his pleas of innocence, and his passionate desire for justice both for his family and for the poor Irish selectors of Victoria's north-east. It is one of only two documents by Ned Kelly to have survived, and the only one with a direct link to the Kelly gang and the events with which they were associated. The Jerilderie letter brings Ned Kelly's distinctive voice to life, and offers a unique insight into the man behind the legend.<sup>19</sup> The National Museum of Australia holds a digital copy of the Jerilderie letter.

## Archaeology at Glenrowan, privately owned site

In June 1880 Ned Kelly and his gang held local people hostage at the Ann Jones Inn, Glenrowan, Victoria, while they attempted to fend off an attack by Victorian Police that ended in a shoot-out. Kelly was captured, and the other gang members were killed. The incident left behind a wealth of material culture—seven and a half thousand items—that was recovered in archaeological digs on the Inn site from 2006. The physical evidence of the battle tells us much about the course and direction of the Police attack, and where the gang members reloaded their rifles before resuming the defence. The online Victorian Heritage Database has a statement of significance for the site.<sup>20</sup>

## Kelly in fiction, State Library of Victoria

Australian novelist Peter Carey won the Booker prize in 2001 with his best-selling novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, written in similar language to that used by Ned Kelly. Peter Carey's papers in the State Library of Victoria (MS 13475) contain a draft of what was later published as *True History of the Kelly Gang*. The papers also include notes Carey kept when he was compiling the work, as well as photographs and twig, plant and leaf samples.

## McIntyre manuscript, Victoria Police Museum

The Victoria Police Museum holds two copies of a manuscript written by Thomas McIntyre, the only policeman to survive the murders of police by the Kelly gang at Stringybark Creek on 26 October 1878. He became the only living witness to give evidence at Kelly's trial, apart from Ned Kelly himself. The manuscript gives his account of the massacre at Stringybark Creek.



Still from *The Story of the Kelly Gang* 1906  
Reproduced courtesy of the National Film and Sound Archive



This sash was awarded to ten-year-old Ned Kelly for heroism, after rescuing a young person from drowning. It illustrates the esteem that his community held him in and indicates that that Ned Kelly also valued life. Reproduced courtesy of the Benalla Costume and Pioneer Museum, Benalla and District Historical Society Inc.

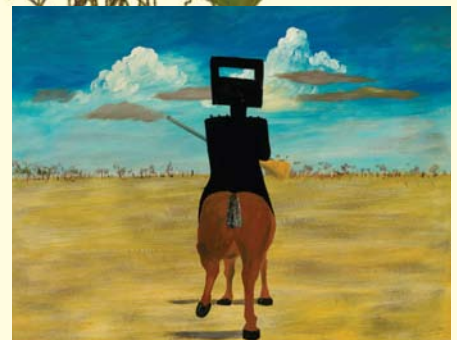


### Ned Kelly's sash, Benalla Costume and Pioneer Museum

A young neighbour of the Kellys at Avenel, Richard Shelton, nearly drowned when he fell from a footbridge while crossing a creek on his way to school in 1865, but was saved by Ned Kelly, then ten years old. The grateful Shelton family gave Kelly a silk cummerbund or sash as a thank you gift. The 2.21 metre x 21 centimetre sash was found on Kelly's injured body after the siege of Glenrowan in 1880.

### Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly, National Gallery of Australia

Sidney Nolan's creation of an abstracted helmet with an oblong eyeslit has become a visual icon for the Ned Kelly story, and has been featured widely as an instantly recognisable Australian image, including its use in the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Paintings in Nolan's Ned Kelly series are in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, in the Canberra Museum and Gallery and in private collections.



Sidney Nolan  
Ned Kelly 1946  
Enamel on composition board  
90.8 x 121.5 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Gift of Sunday Reed 1977

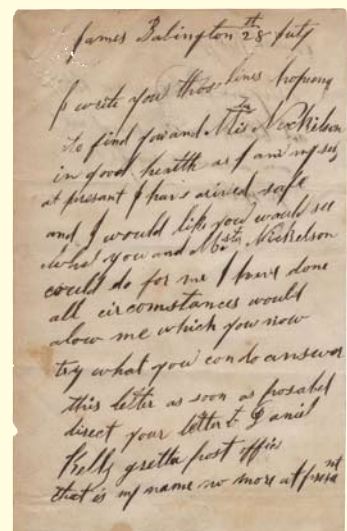
### Kelly papers, Public Record Office Victoria

The Kelly papers held by the Public Record Office Victoria are the primary documentary evidence of Ned Kelly's story and provide detailed factual information on Kelly, his gang members, family and supporters. The hundreds of official Kelly papers at PROV are the largest and most intact collection of historic documents on the subject, and range from the earliest police reports in the Kelly saga to the court records of Kelly's trial. The papers, dating from the 1850s to 1882, also document the reform of the Victorian Police Force as a result of the 1881 Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria, which was reviewed at the time of the Kelly breakout. The records provide substantial material evidence of the life and career of Australia's most notorious outlaw.<sup>21</sup>

### The Story of the Kelly Gang, National Film and Sound Archive

Made in Australia in 1906 by Charles Tait, and believed to be the first full-length feature film (60 minutes) to be produced in the world, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was a success in Australia, New Zealand and Britain. It is a testament to the birth of the Australian film industry, and exerted an influence on modern cinema production.

The surviving seventeen minutes of fragments of the *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, along with its promotional booklet that gives a context for the tale, have historical significance as the first Australian narrative film, and as signifying the foundation of a vigorous Australian film-making industry. The film has creative significance as the surviving original filmic representation of the Kelly bushranger legend.<sup>22</sup>



Letter written by Edward (Ned) Kelly to Sergeant James Babington of the Kyneton Police 28 July 1870. From the Kelly papers collection PROV, VPRS 937/PO, Inward Registered Correspondence [Victoria Police], Unit 272, 1870/D7256

Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of Public Records, Public Record Office Victoria, Australia

This letter is the only extant example of Kelly's handwriting apart from a few signatures

## The thylacine across collections

The thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*), also known as the Tasmanian tiger or Tasmanian wolf, is Australia's best known example of recent species extinction, with the last known animal dying in Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart, on 7 September 1936. The poignant reminders of its fragile existence, terminated within the living memory of many Australians, have been captured in physical specimens, in photographs and on film, and pictured in works of art. The thylacine has become a potent symbol of man's impact on the natural environment and, from being a vilified pest hunted to extinction in previous centuries, has now achieved iconic status, not least as the symbol of the only state in which it lived at the time when Europeans settled Australia.

These reminders of the thylacine, and the memories they evoke, are by no means confined to collections in Tasmania, or indeed in Australia. It demonstrates the capacity of museums and art galleries, libraries and archives to hold evidence of what has existed in the past, and to research its impact in the present and future.



Displaying a trapped thylacine  
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

### The thylacine in scientific collections

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) zoology department has about seventy thylacine specimens: taxidermy mounts, flat skins, osteological material including a male and female articulated skeleton, a rug and a pincushion made from the jaw of a thylacine. There are several thylacine artworks in the art collection, including the famous images by John Gould from his book, *The mammals of Australia*, and a notable watercolour by Edward Lear dated around 1830. TMAG also holds many photographs of thylacines. The Museum holds a small collection of documents, diaries, print casts, and cameras from the various searches for a still-living thylacine that have been carried on over the years.

The most spectacular of all the thylacine items at TMAG—and the most chilling to contemplate—is the rug made of eight pelts of young thylacines. Previously in private ownership, made probably as a knee rug at the turn of the twentieth century, then draped over a piano stool in the family home, the rug was bought at auction in 2002 for \$270 000 by the museum in collaboration with a local brewing company.<sup>23</sup>

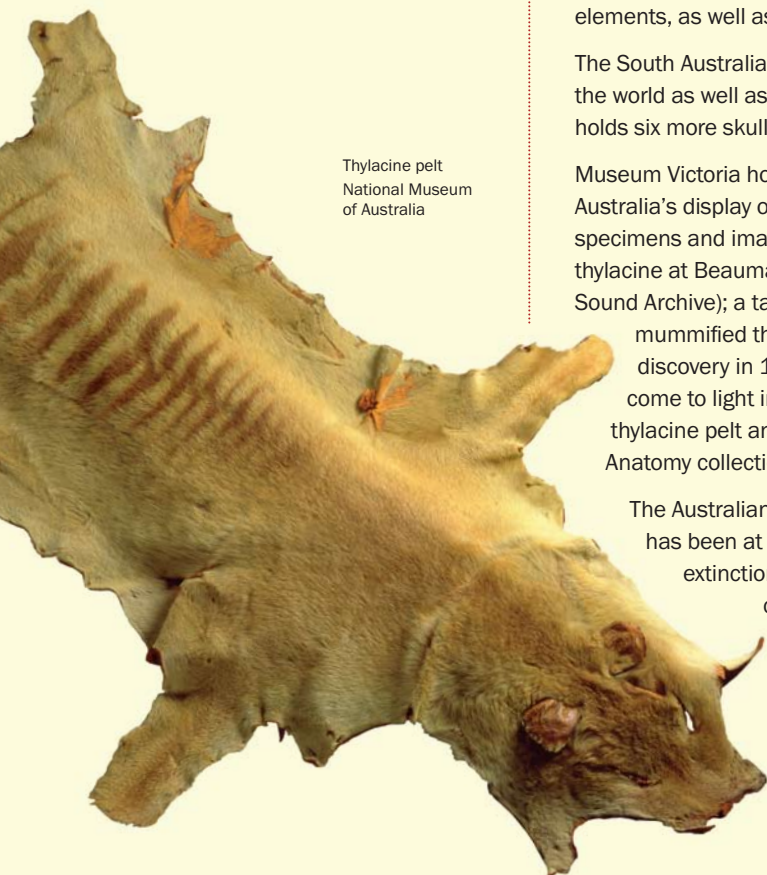
The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, holds five thylacine mounts, and sixteen registered skeletal lots comprising skulls, part skeletons and skeletal elements, as well as an unknown amount of fossil and cave material.

The South Australian Museum is said to hold the five best prepared thylacine mounts in the world as well as six full skeletons, one of which is articulated. The collection also holds six more skulls, two flat skins and two part skeletons.

Museum Victoria holds a partial skeleton and thylacine skin. The National Museum of Australia's display on the thylacine in its Old New Land Gallery brings together thylacine specimens and images from other collections, including the only known footage of the thylacine at Beaumaris Zoo in the 1930s (from the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive); a taxidermied 'puppet' thylacine skin (from Museum Victoria), and a mummified thylacine skull (from the Western Australian Museum). Its story of discovery in 1990 at Murra-Ei-Elvyn Cave shows that thylacine specimens still come to light in mainland Australia. The National Museum's collection includes a thylacine pelt and around thirty-five wet specimens from the former Institute of Anatomy collection created by naturalist Sir Colin Mackenzie.

The Australian Museum in Sydney, which holds numerous thylacine specimens, has been at the forefront of attempts to bring the thylacine species back from extinction, using DNA from preserved thylacine embryonic material in its collection. The project, initiated by former Australian Museum Director, Dr Michael Archer, stopped in 2004, but there have been recent suggestions that scientists, using new techniques, are again thinking about cloning a thylacine.

Thylacine pelt  
National Museum  
of Australia





The Queensland Museum has several thylacine skulls and some post-cranial skeleton material in its collection. Museums in regional Australia also hold thylacine specimens. For example, a thylacine is included in the natural history cabinet at the Burke Museum, Beechworth, Victoria.

## The thylacine in archives

The Archives Office of Tasmania holds around seventy records related to the thylacine at agency, series and item levels. These include information on vouchers for bounty claims for thylacine skins, research papers and photographs, ministerial files, and private papers such as those of the Roberts family (NG823). Mary Roberts created Beaumaris Zoo in 1895, breeding Tasmanian devils in captivity and caring for thylacines, among other indigenous fauna. After her death in 1921, the Zoo passed to Hobart City Council; the last known living thylacine died there in 1936.

## The art of the thylacine

Ever since John Gould published Volume I of *The mammals of Australia* in 1863, with its iconic lithograph of two thylacines, artists have depicted this animal. Art galleries, museums and libraries around Australia hold copies of individual prints created by natural history artists, and illustrated books relating to the thylacine.

Contemporary artists have used the thylacine as a powerful symbol of humans' effect on indigenous species, and as a way to reflect on the loss of environmental diversity. Textile artist Beth Hatton, whose work is represented in state and regional galleries around Australia, has created, from kangaroo skin off-cuts, woven rugs that represent the thylacine. In her *Extinct and endangered* series, the stripes and silhouette of the thylacine conjure a fingerprint: 'Like finger prints left at the scene of a crime, the animal has gone but it has left its imprint on the land, and as a brand in our imagination.'<sup>24</sup>

Tasmanian artist Michael McWilliams, overall winner of the South Australian Museum's Waterhouse Art Prize for 2005, depicted a noble thylacine in a landscape of felled trees in his prize-winning work, 'The centre of attention'. McWilliams' chief concern in his art 'is for the original inhabitants of this vast country ... such as the thylacine who belongs to an earlier time and whose territory has been taken over insidiously by introduced species ...'<sup>25</sup>

## Statement of significance

Thylacine specimens and items in all media and collection types are significant across all the primary criteria. They are of immense *historical significance* for their ability to convey the story of this lost species to present and future generations. Many of the items and images associated with the thylacine story have considerable *artistic significance*. The many thylacine specimens housed in museums and university collections around Australia and the world are investigated for their *research potential* to unlock scientific secrets. Attempts to clone the thylacine from material held in museums attest to the passion that its memory still evokes in the scientific community and the wider world. There is considerable *social significance* surrounding the thylacine and the items and collections associated with it: from the 'true believers' who report and record sightings of the elusive animal in the wilder parts of Tasmania; to the whole state whose official symbol it is. One commentator has said: 'The thylacine *is* Tasmania. To that extent it lives on.'<sup>26</sup>



Michael McWilliams  
*The centre of attention* 2005  
Acrylic  
Overall winner Waterhouse prize  
for natural history art 2005  
Reproduced courtesy of the  
South Australian Museum



A thylacine in Burke Museum  
natural history cabinet  
Photo: Roslyn Russell  
Reproduced courtesy of Burke  
Museum, Beechworth, Victoria



Former thylacine display in  
South Australian Museum  
Reproduced courtesy of the  
South Australian Museum

## Part 3 Significance: concept and process

Significance defines the meanings and values of an item or collection through research and analysis, and by assessment against a standard set of criteria.

### What does 'significance' mean?

**'Significance' refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities.**

At a simple level, significance is a way of telling compelling stories about items and collections, explaining why they are important.

Significance may also be defined as the historic, artistic, scientific and social or spiritual values that items and collections have for past, present and future generations. These are the **criteria** or **key values** that help to express how and why an item or collection is significant.

### What is significance assessment?

**Significance assessment is the process of researching and understanding the meanings and values of items and collections.**

The assessment process explores all the elements that contribute to meaning, including history, context, provenance, related places, memories, and comparative knowledge of similar items. It goes beyond a conventional catalogue description to explain **why and how** the item is important and what it means. The results of the analysis are synthesised in a **statement of significance**. This is a readable summary of the values, meaning and importance of the item.

The assessment process helps collection managers to make reasoned judgements about the importance of items and collections and their meaning for communities. This in turn enables collecting organisations to manage collections to conserve their significance,

and make their meanings accessible to users and the community in many different circumstances.

### The assessment process

Significance assessment involves five **main** steps:

- analysing an item or collection
- researching its history, provenance and context
- comparison with similar items
- understanding its values by reference to the criteria
- summarising its meanings and values in a statement of significance

These steps are explained in the step-by-step method in Part 4.

Significance assessment is a transparent and collaborative process that brings all kinds of research and knowledge together to shape and inform the statement of significance.

The assessment process builds knowledge about an item from a wide range of sources. Based on this research and knowledge, the process defines the meaning and values of an item or collection by reference to comparable items, and a standard set of criteria or values.

Significance assessment can be used in tandem with an organisation's existing policies and assessment criteria, depending on the circumstances. For example, it can be built into collection policies to aid consideration of new acquisitions. Significance assessment can complement or enhance domain or discipline-specific methodologies and practice, such as archival appraisal, taxonomic research, or art museum assessments based on connoisseurship.<sup>27</sup>

Items and collections may hold different meanings and values for different groups and individuals. The significance assessment process requires consultation so that multiple meanings and values, where they exist, are documented and recognised in the assessment.

**The purpose of significance assessment is to understand and describe how and why an item is significant.**

### The assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are a broad framework of cultural and natural values relevant to the whole spectrum of collections in Australia. The criteria help tease out how and why the item is significant.

Four primary criteria apply when assessing significance:

- historic
- artistic or aesthetic
- scientific or research potential
- social or spiritual

Four comparative criteria evaluate the degree of significance. These are modifiers of the main criteria:

- provenance
- rarity or representativeness
- condition or completeness
- interpretive capacity

Using a consistent set of criteria facilitates more accurate analysis and helps elucidate the unique characteristics and meanings of each item or collection.

All criteria are considered when making an assessment, but not all will be relevant to the item or collection. One or more criteria may apply and be interrelated. It is not necessary to find evidence of all criteria to justify that an item is significant. Indeed, an item may be highly significant under only one primary criterion, with clarification added by considering the comparative criteria.

The criteria are a prompt for describing how and why the item or collection is significant. They will have different shades of meaning depending on the type of item or collection under consideration.

A more detailed explanation of the primary and comparative criteria is at Part 5.

## What is a statement of significance?

**A statement of significance is a reasoned, readable summary of the values, meaning and importance of an item or collection.**

It may be as short as a few succinct sentences, several paragraphs, or a page. The length and level of detail will depend on the item or collection, the circumstances in which the assessment is carried out, and the available time, skills and resources.

A statement of significance summarises the information and research assembled by following the step-by-step assessment method, looking at how the item compares with similar items, and considering the relevant criteria.

It is effectively an argument about the meaning of an item or collection and **how and why it is significant**. The case made in the statement of significance can be justified by referring back to the research and analysis laid out in the step-by-step process.

A statement of significance is a reference point for all the policies, actions and decisions about how the item is managed. It is a means of sharing knowledge about why an item is important, and why it has a place in a public collection.

The statement of significance should be reviewed from time to time, as circumstances change and in the light of new research and knowledge.

**A statement of significance is a concise summary of the values, meaning and importance of an item or collection.**

**It is an argument about how and why an item or collection is of value.**

Part 5 explains how to write a statement of significance.

## Contrasting a catalogue description with a statement of significance

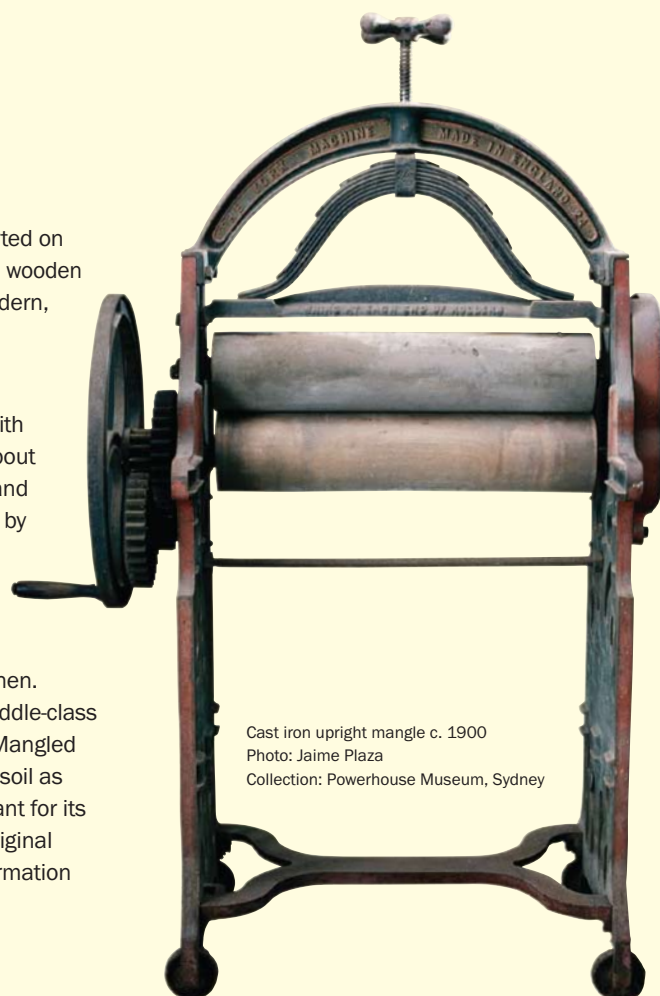
### Catalogue description

Cast iron mangle, K1372, Powerhouse Museum

Mangle, laundry, upright, ornate, cast-iron, red and green frame, supported on 4 casters, arched roof, 2 wooden rollers, operated by wheel with rounded wooden handle, patent no. 120847, 'The York Machine', retailed by Anthony Hordern, England, from the laundry of 18 Watkin St Newtown (OF). c. 1900 (AF).

### Statement of significance

An upright cast iron laundry mangle with original paintwork, complete with draining and mangling boards, retailed by Anthony Hordern's Sydney, about 1900. The upright mangle was invented in the mid-nineteenth century and was a common item in domestic laundries, hotels and boarding houses by the turn of the century. The design of the mangle, with its main spring, tooth gears and wheel, shows the application of industrial design to household technology, while the decorative cast iron panels are typical of Victorian taste. The mangle was used to wring out washed linen and clothes, and to press, smooth and add gloss to dampened household linen. The mass production and affordability of the upright mangle allowed middle-class homes to enjoy glossy, pressed linen, even with limited domestic help. Mangled linen did not need to be ironed, and the glossy surface meant it did not soil as readily. Although not rare in museum collections, this mangle is significant for its good condition, completeness, and provenance, being recorded in its original laundry context in a terrace house in inner Sydney, with associated information about the family's domestic life.

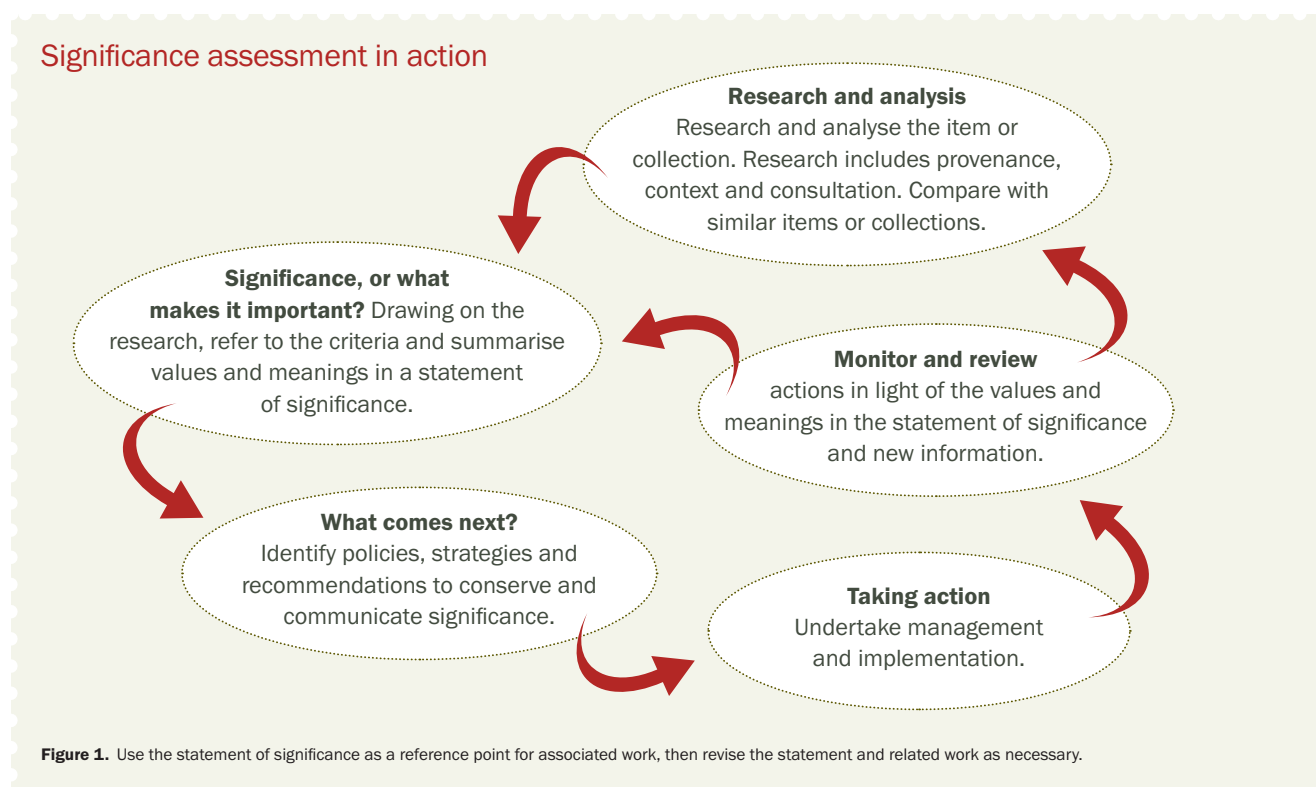


Cast iron upright mangle c. 1900  
Photo: Jaime Plaza  
Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney



## What comes next?

Significance assessment is not an end in itself but a process to aid good management of items and collections. After drafting the statement of significance, consider policies, actions and recommendations to improve the care, management and access to the item or collection. This might include clauses for the collection policy, recommendations on storage or access, a conservation policy, identification of issues or special attributes to be considered in conservation treatment, further research, and strategies or actions that might be built into the organisation's strategic plan or management plan. Monitor and review work arising from the assessment of significance by referring back to the statement of significance.



## Why assess significance?

Significance is a vital tool in the sustainable management of collections. Good decisions about the conservation and management of items and collections depend on understanding their meaning and importance. Identifying the significant attributes of an item helps to ensure that it is managed in a way that best conserves its values for the present and the future.

Significance assessment helps focus resources on the most significant items and collections, giving them priority in curatorial, conservation, exhibition, research and access programs. The practice of assessing the relative importance of items and collections is already embedded in a range of decisions and tasks made every day by

collecting organisations. Significance assessment simply provides an explicit framework for debate and decision making about items and collections.

Significance is the key to unlocking the meaning of collections, sharing collections with a wide range of users across Australia and the world. It takes the deep knowledge of collections held inside institutions and by their expert staff, and it makes this accessible in a way that can be easily understood. Significance enables communities to use, enjoy and engage with collections in all kinds of ways.

Significance is also proving to be an effective tool to foster collaboration across collections, sharing knowledge, coordinating collecting and using scarce resources more effectively.

## Who assesses significance?

**Significance assessment is a collaborative process that draws on the knowledge, skills, and experience of many people.**

One person may be primarily responsible for researching an item or collection, but the assessment process is most effective when it involves a range of people who have knowledge of and an interest in the item or collection. Involving people in significance assessment may occur at any time in the organisation's care of the collection, such as at the point of acquisition, during a research project, preparing for an exhibition, for online access, or for conservation.

### Consultation is an essential part of the process of significance assessment.

The significance assessment process is an opportunity to involve people in discussion about the meaning of items and collections. There are large areas of Australia's collections where information and knowledge about the item will not be found in books and printed references. Tapping knowledge and skills in the community and other collecting organisations is good practice for many reasons. Seeking community input into significance can strengthen an organisation's relationships with communities and interest groups, leading to new partnerships and enhanced support. This includes scholars and expert people working with and using collections.

### Where items have social or spiritual significance to specific communities, these communities must be consulted and their points of view documented and reflected in the statement of significance.

Wherever possible, give the donor or community the opportunity to describe, in their own words, why an item or collection is important to them. This might be recorded or expressed in a variety of media.

The question of who defines significance is complex, and will vary from item to item, collection to collection, and from organisation to organisation. Individuals, donors and cultural or community groups may have different views about an item or collection's significance. Sometimes there are strongly contested ideas about an item or collection's meaning.

The significance assessment process should record differences in emphasis, and reflect this in the statement of significance. Increasingly, collecting organisations respect the ties and links between people and collections, recognising these relationships in statements of significance, and in how items and collections are managed and accessed.

### Always ask and consider to whom the item or collection is significant.

## When to assess significance

### Significance assessment may be undertaken at any stage of an item or collection's life in a collecting organisation.

Significance assessment may be included in all kinds of collection management tasks, depending on the type of collection and the organisation's needs:

- to accept or refuse an acquisition, or support an acquisition proposal to a board or governing council;
- as part of the cataloguing and collection documentation process, ensuring that crucial information is recorded at the time the item comes into the collection;
- to guide conservation priorities and decisions on treatment, so that the item's values are thoroughly understood and preserved;
- in disaster planning, to identify the most significant items or collections as a priority for rescue or recovery action;
- in exhibition development, informing the selection of items and ensuring that meanings are communicated in exhibition design and interpretation;
- to justify and document deaccessioning decisions, and guide disposal of an item or collection;
- to review the strengths and weaknesses of a collection and set strategic priorities for future acquisitions;
- to make collections accessible online, sharing the meaning of items in a way that aids their use and promotes access and enjoyment;
- in strategic planning, to ensure the needs of the collection are embedded in the organisation's strategic plan and funded through the budget and work program that flows from the plan;
- to nominate items and collections for registers, such as state heritage registers that include movable items, or UNESCO's *Memory of the World* Register for documentary heritage, and thereby to build wider appreciation of their significance and support subsequent funding applications; or

- in collaborative and cross-collection projects like thematic studies, building a broader understanding of the theme and laying the foundation for strategic collecting and promotion.

These uses and applications are detailed through case studies in Part 6.

## Some common questions about significance

### Is significance a value judgement?

No. The purpose of using a standard assessment process and criteria is to substantiate and justify assessments as factually as possible. The judgements and assertions in the statement of significance are explained and supported by research, evidence, analysis and comparison with similar items. While there will always be an element of personal judgement and enthusiasm in the statement of significance, using a consistent process and criteria ensures that assessments are rigorous and well substantiated. At their best, statements of significance combine logic, passion and insight.

### What happens when there are conflicting opinions about significance?

At times individuals, families or cultural groups may be at odds over the meaning and significance of particular items or collections. It is not necessary to resolve conflicting viewpoints, or determine which is right or wrong, especially where the parties have cultural or spiritual attachments to an item or collection. The statement of significance can reflect the nature and substance of multiple points of view.

Australia ICOMOS has acknowledged the special circumstances surrounding these conflicts and has produced a *Code on the ethics of co-existence in conserving significant places* (1998), which could be adapted by collecting organisations facing similar issues with items or collections.

### Can significance be used for all types of collections?

Yes. Although the concept of managing according to significance was originally developed for heritage places, the assessment process and criteria are designed for use with all kinds of cultural and natural collections, including visual arts, natural history and scientific collections.

### Is significance assessment the same as cataloguing?

No. Cataloguing traditionally describes the fabric, appearance and history of an item. Significance assessment goes further, building on the catalogue description with additional steps that establish the meaning and values of the item, drawing conclusions about its importance. The resulting statement of significance then forms a judgement, or argument about why an item is important and what it means. Significance assessment is readily incorporated into documentation procedures. The illustrated example in this section demonstrates the difference between a catalogue description and a statement of significance.

### How long does significance assessment take?

This depends on the item or collection and how much is already known about it. A preliminary assessment may be made at the time of acquisition. A more thoroughly researched assessment may be done later, such as before conservation. If time is short, ensure that the item's provenance and history are recorded, as this information may be difficult to obtain in the future.

### What if there is no time to assess the significance of every item?

Collecting organisations have several options and may use the single item assessment method, assess particular themes or a section of a collection, or access the whole collection.

One option is to focus on the most important items in the collection. Scan the collection and identify significant items whose history and context has not been fully documented. Perhaps the donor or user of a particular item has more information about its use and context that has not yet been recorded, so this might be a priority. This information could be lost as those who remember it age and die.

Consider setting a goal to assess the significance of a certain number of items per year, focusing on the most important ones or those related to a forthcoming exhibition. Alternatively, assess the significance of a group of related or similar items that share a common theme, association or history.

Where relevant, incorporate significance assessment into acquisition, registration and cataloguing procedures so that all new acquisitions have a statement of significance. Or seek funding to undertake a whole of collection assessment.

### Why can't we just tick a box or give items a significance ranking?

Significance assessment is an **argument** about how and why an item or collection is important. The argument is justified by referring back to each step in the assessment process. Merely asserting that an item or collection is significant fails to properly explain or communicate why it is important. Ticking a box or giving a ranking misses the point of the process, which is to make a reasoned argument about **how and why** the item or collection is significant.

### Does significance explain why an item or collection is acquired?

Yes, in part. With new acquisitions, significance assessment works in tandem with the organisation's acquisition policies, with collection development priorities, and in light of the mission and purpose of the organisation.

The assessment process will reveal if the item is of limited significance, helping to explain the reasons for declining a donation. The high cost of collecting and storing items in perpetuity means that collecting organisations must carefully evaluate the merits of particular acquisitions, however generous an offer of donation may be. Significance assessment helps organisations to consider potential acquisitions more rigorously.

### How does significance relate to the financial value of an object?

The monetary value of an object often reflects significance, and significance assessment is an essential tool in any valuation process. However, financial value is not a significance assessment criterion. An item may be significant and worthy of inclusion in a public collection, but still be of limited monetary value. Similarly, many valuable items are of limited significance for public collections.

### How can families and private owners use significance?

Very easily. Families and collectors may find significance particularly useful in documenting their items and collections. Provenance is an important dimension of the value and meaning of items owned by families and collectors and it is a crucial part of significance. This information is easily lost when those who know about the item die. Make sure the story of the item is written down and kept with the item, so that the next generation understands its history and associations. This includes family memorabilia, photographs, furniture or any item cherished as part of a family's history. Collectors should keep receipts and records of how and when an item was acquired. It is a good idea to keep a photograph of the item with these records so the two are easily matched.

Research and assess the significance of privately owned items and collections by following the significance assessment step-by-step method in Part 4.



# Provenance

Provenance is a key element in assessing significance. It is considered, along with the history of an item or collection, in the step-by-step assessment process. Provenance is also a comparative criterion, as it can add important dimensions to significance.

A provenanced item is likely to be more significant than an equivalent unprovenanced item. This section explores the key role of provenance in different domains and with a variety of items and collections.

Provenance is the life story of an item or collection and a record of its ultimate derivation and its passage through the hands of its various owners.

Provenance may be recorded on the item itself. This may take the form of an inscription on the back of a work of art or a historical item, or an owner's bookplate, or it may be in the form of associated documentation and research. Provenance depends on good record keeping by families, private collectors, dealers and collecting organisations. Well-provenanced items are the building blocks of artefact histories and connoisseurship, and are used as a reference point for analysing similar undocumented items.

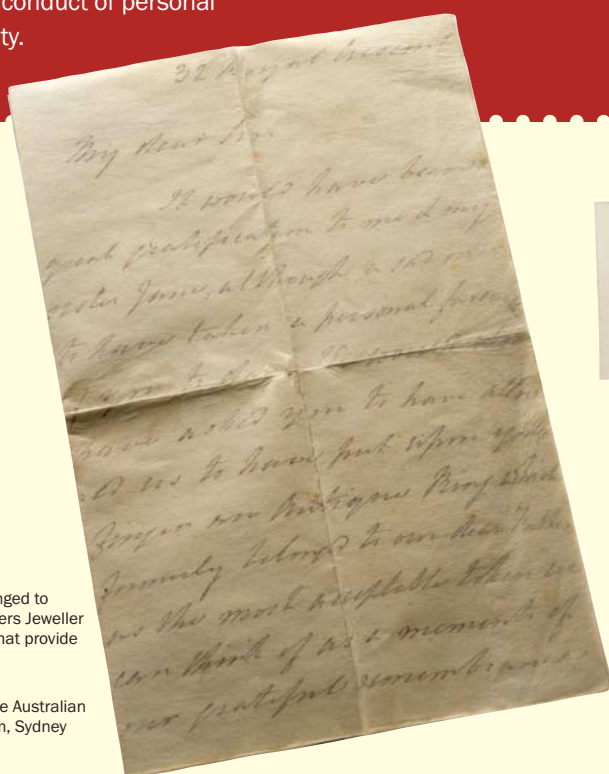
The definition and use of provenance as a tool for analysis and assessment varies among different collecting domains and disciplines.

**Provenance in archives** pertains to the organisation or individual that created, accumulated, maintained or used documents in the conduct of personal or corporate activity.

'Respect for provenance means keeping the integrity of the records of a person or an organisation by not mingling records from one person or organisation with those from another.'<sup>28</sup>

**The provenance of archaeological artefacts** is the documented context of excavation, ideally the precise location of the item within an archaeological site and in relationship to other excavated items. This information greatly enlarges the research potential and significance of the item and the site as a whole, enabling comparison with other items and sites. This is why looting sites—taking items from their context—is so damaging: 'individual items lose their cultural and historical value if assessed outside the matrix from which they emerged'.<sup>29</sup> International conventions guard against the removal and sale of illicitly obtained items such as antiquities.

Following are illustrated examples of 'provenance in action' across some collection types.



Signet ring that once belonged to Governor William Bligh, Miers Jeweller London, with documents that provide its provenance

Photo: Andrew Frolows

Reproduced courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney



## Provenance and historical items

The provenance of historical items may take the form of a chain of ownership or descent through generations of a family, but it may be more widely defined as the story or life history of the item.

Provenance is often the key to an item's historical significance and may be the main reason a museum or library acquires an item. Museums today encourage donors to provide as much information as they can about the item and who used it and how. Knowing the provenance of an item helps collecting organisations to understand its significance and make decisions about how to display and care for it so that its distinctive characteristics are preserved.

Provenanced items are the building blocks of artefact histories and a reference point for similar unprovenanced items.

The letter surviving with Bligh's signet ring documents the gift of the ring to Suttor, and its chain of ownership from Bligh to his daughters to Suttor. The documentation substantiates the provenance and enhances the significance of the ring.

This gold signet ring, which carries a flat-surfaced bloodstone finely engraved with a classical male head, was once owned by Governor William Bligh. It is thought that it was used by Bligh to stamp imprints on wax seals.

Bligh's name is best remembered internationally for the mutiny against his captaincy of HMS *Bounty* in 1789, followed by his navigating an open boat 3000 miles to Timor.

Bligh became Governor of New South Wales in 1806, succeeding Philip Gidley King. Bligh's irascible temperament and his support for smaller landowners against the wealthier private settlers and senior officers of the NSW Corps provoked tensions in the colony. These came to a head in January 1808 when John Macarthur, a former NSW Corps officer and now a prominent free settler, went on trial for failing to pay a shipping bond.

Bligh criticised the conduct of the trial and accused certain NSW Corps officers of treasonable procedures. In defiance of the Governor, the senior officer of the NSW Corps, Major George Johnston, ordered Macarthur's release and the arrest of Governor Bligh on 26 January 1808.

One of Bligh's supporters throughout the leadership crisis was a free settler named George Suttor, who was the main force behind a petition to the British government in November 1808 seeking Bligh's reinstatement as governor. In 1810, Suttor sailed to England to give evidence at Johnston's court martial for mutiny. Bligh was exonerated and Johnston was cashiered.

Bligh died in 1817 in England. Later, his daughters gave the signet ring to Suttor as a gift of appreciation while he was on a visit to England. In an accompanying letter, Fanny Bligh wrote that she and her sister Jane were offering their father's antique ring to Suttor as 'the most acceptable token we can think of as a memento of our grateful remembrance of you, your faithfulness and integrity'.

Fanny Bligh's letter establishes the ring's provenance to her father. The gift to Suttor by the Bligh sisters commemorates their father's association with one of his supporters during one of the most momentous events in Australia's early history.

The provenance of the ring is both its association with Bligh and its descent through his daughters to Suttor, thence to its sale to the Australian National Maritime Museum.



Signet ring that once belonged to Governor William Bligh, Miers Jeweller London  
Photo: Andrew Frolows  
Reproduced courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney



Sentani people  
Papua New Guinea  
*Double figure [to-reri uno]* 19<sup>th</sup> century  
wood carved  
177.2 h x 49.5 w x 19.1 d cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1974

In 1929 this sculpture, dating from the nineteenth century, was dredged from remote Lake Sentani in West Papua, where an old ceremonial house had collapsed. The Sentani people traditionally lived in communal dwellings built over the water and supported by tall, carved wooden poles that protruded through the floor into the living area above. These figures would have been positioned at the top of one such pole. The sculpture was photographed by Jacques Viot at the time it was recovered from the Lake. Viot had been sent to New Guinea by the art dealer Pierre Loeb to collect material for sale in Paris.

Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) bought the sculpture from Galerie Pierre Loeb in Paris. This sculpture was known to the Surrealists, who named it 'the lily'. It is thought to have inspired Max Ernst's sculpture *Les asperges de la lune* [Lunar asparagus] of 1935. Ernst probably saw it at a commercial gallery in Paris after 1929. Epstein then sold it. The then Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia), bought it from Gustave Schindler through Gaston de Havenon, New York, in April 1974.<sup>30</sup>

The pointed faces, pronounced chins and slender limbs of these male and female figures are characteristic of art from the central north coast of West Papua. The sublime beauty of this sculpture makes it a work of enormous artistic significance; while its firm provenance allows an accurate reading of the cultural context from which it came. Its provenance also allows art historians to trace the sculpture's influence on later works, notably those by Max Ernst and Jacob Epstein.

## Provenance may have many dimensions

The detailed documentation of this sculpture, from the photo of its original location at Lake Sentani, to its verified chain of ownership, establishes its provenance and adds to its significance both as a masterpiece of art from West Papua, and as a work that inspired the surrealist Max Ernst and sculptor Jacob Epstein.



## Provenance and natural history collections

In natural history, provenance or context is expressed through voucher specimens. A 'voucher specimen' is any specimen that serves as a basis of study and is retained as a reference. In zoology, a voucher specimen is usually but not always a cadaver. As an absolute minimum, a voucher specimen consists of a specimen collected in the field under scientific controls that include data on the find spot, date of collection and name of collector. Any published record that is not accompanied by a detailed description and is unsupported by a voucher collection has an element of doubt attached to the veracity of the identification. 'Specimen' in zoology means the whole animal or a part thereof. (A voucher should be in an accessible collection; however, even if it is not, it remains a voucher.) To be optimally useful, voucher specimens should be lodged with a museum that can properly house and curate them and make them available for further study. A similar emphasis on provenance as the recorded context of recovery or collection also applies to fossils and botanical specimens.

Clear scientific documentation from the *Endeavour* voyage held in the UK and Australia supports the provenance of this botanical paratype as one of the first described species of Australian flora. This makes the specimen of great significance in this country's scientific and social history.

This specimen of *Angophora*, held by the NSW Herbarium in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, was among the first examples of Australian flora to be collected by Joseph Banks and his botanist Daniel Solander at Botany Bay during the time Captain Cook and the crew of the *Endeavour* spent there in April 1770. It is a paratype, a specimen from a type series other than the holotype, which is a single specimen chosen to represent a new series by the first person to describe it. The holotype, as is the case with the vast bulk of the botanical material collected on the *Endeavour* voyage, is held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, United Kingdom. Nevertheless, this paratype is of great importance in Australia, as it is accessible here, unlike the holotype held at Kew. It is of great significance in the history of Australian botany as the paratype of one of the earliest classified species of Australian flora. This paratype's provenance to Banks and Solander and the *Endeavour* voyage, considering the crucial role played by Banks in the foundation of the British settlement of Australia, also gives it enormous historical significance.



Herbarium specimen *Angophora Costata*, 133470 (Gaertner) Britton collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander at Botany Bay in April 1770  
Photo: Copyright: Botanic Gardens Trust, Sydney

In 1961 Frederick McCarthy, one of the first professionally trained anthropologists/archaeologists to work in an Australian museum, visited the Indigenous community at Aurukun, Queensland. He recorded, filmed and photographed forty-three traditional dance dramas and collected and documented sculptures that formed part of the ceremonies. The sculptures, which are works of considerable aesthetic and spiritual significance, are now part of the collection of the National Museum of Australia. The extensive documentation of this collection, in films, photographs and notes, is now held in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS); and correspondence relating to the formation of the carvings collection is held in the National Museum of Australia. The richness of the documentation provides an extensive provenance to the entire Aurukun collection held in these two organisations, which are co-located on Acton Peninsula, Canberra. Frederick McCarthy became Foundation Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (which later became AIATSIS) in 1964. The association of the collection and its donor, a significant personality in the history of Indigenous scholarship, in the material held by these two national organisations, enhances the significance of the whole collection.

## Provenance and Indigenous culture

Provenance is of critical importance in relation to Indigenous art and artefacts, both for historical material and contemporary art. Provenance has been a key issue in recent debates and legal cases over the authenticity of some works attributed to noted Aboriginal artists. There is also growing concern about the exploitation of some contemporary Aboriginal artists working outside established art centres and the network of reputable dealers. Part of the dealers' role is to maintain visual and documentary records of the art produced and sold, which in turn underpins an artist's *catalogue raisonné*. This is the key point of reference and research for the future and acts to verify the provenance and authenticity of the artist's work.

The rich documentation of this collection, held in AIATSIS, provides a comprehensive provenance for the Aurukun carvings collection, and enhances its significance.



Wood sculpture of a dingo  
Aurukun carvings  
Photo: George Serras  
National Museum of Australia

## Provenance and works of art

The provenance of a work of art is documented in its passage from the artist's studio through a chain of owners and collectors to the latest owner. It may also include the exhibition history of a work of art. A firm provenance verifies the authenticity of the work and establishes whether the current owner has secure title.

Works of art with a strong provenance generally attract a premium at auction, particularly if the work was owned by a noted collector or family, or is fresh to the market. Many Australian art galleries have researched the provenance of works of art in their collections to ensure that they are not provenanced to Jewish-owned collections looted or forcibly sold in the Nazi era.<sup>31</sup>

Letters between Streeton and the portrait's subject, Dr Ewing, not only establish the provenance of the painting, but also assist in understanding Streeton's concern for the future condition of his works of art.

Arthur Streeton, one of the members of the Heidelberg School of Australian artists credited with establishing a distinctively Australian artistic style in the nineteenth century, painted this work in Venice in 1908. By then an established artist who lived for long periods in London, Streeton was criticised by some for what they saw as his pandering to a commercial market. Careful analysis of this painting, though, 'shows a mature artist who retains a strong interest in the oil painting process and whose work reflects an ongoing interest in the technical difficulties of translating light and mass into the painted image'.<sup>32</sup>

The provenance of this painting is impeccable. It was purchased by Dr Samuel Ewing at the Victorian Artists Society exhibition on 19 June 1914 for £63. In 1937, Ewing opened negotiations with the University of Melbourne to gift his collection to the University of Melbourne Union. This is one of five Streeton works from Ewing's collection. As it needed restoration, Ewing approached the artist to carry out the necessary restoration and Streeton recommended a framer to undertake reframing. 'Streeton's concern for the appearance of his works was total.'<sup>33</sup> All these letters, as well as those from Ewing to the University, have survived. As well as Streeton's work and the corroborating letters, the University collection also holds a portrait by John Longstaff of the donor Dr Samuel Ewing.



Arthur Streeton  
*The domes of St Mark's* 1908  
Oil on canvas  
86.8 x 99.4cm  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing, 1938  
1938.0023



John Longstaff  
*Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing* c. 1922  
Oil on canvas  
108.6 x 88.6cm  
The University of Melbourne Art Collection  
Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938  
1938.0012





Solomon Islands man with traditional woven shield and axe  
Reproduced courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre and South Sea Islands Museum, Cooranbong, New South Wales  
Detail of photo by Roslyn Russell



The same shield in the South Sea Islands Museum  
Reproduced courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre and South Sea Islands Museum, Cooranbong, New South Wales  
Photo: Roslyn Russell

## Provenance across the collections of an archive, library and museum

A group of Seventh-day Adventists arrived in Australia from the United States in 1885. In 1898, Adventist missionaries opened a small health food business in Melbourne, which grew into the Sanitarium Company, the creators of an Australian icon, Weet-Bix breakfast cereal. Later that year, Sanitarium relocated to Cooranbong, NSW.

Adventist missionaries commenced work in the islands around Australia, beginning in 1886 with the remote community on Pitcairn Island, then moving on to the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and Kiribati.

The records of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia and the Pacific region, spanning over a century, are held in the Adventist Heritage Centre at Cooranbong, NSW. The nearby South Sea Islands Museum also holds a large collection of items that have been donated by former missionaries and Church members. The entire collection has been assembled as a direct result of the Church's many activities, and has high provenance integrity as a result.

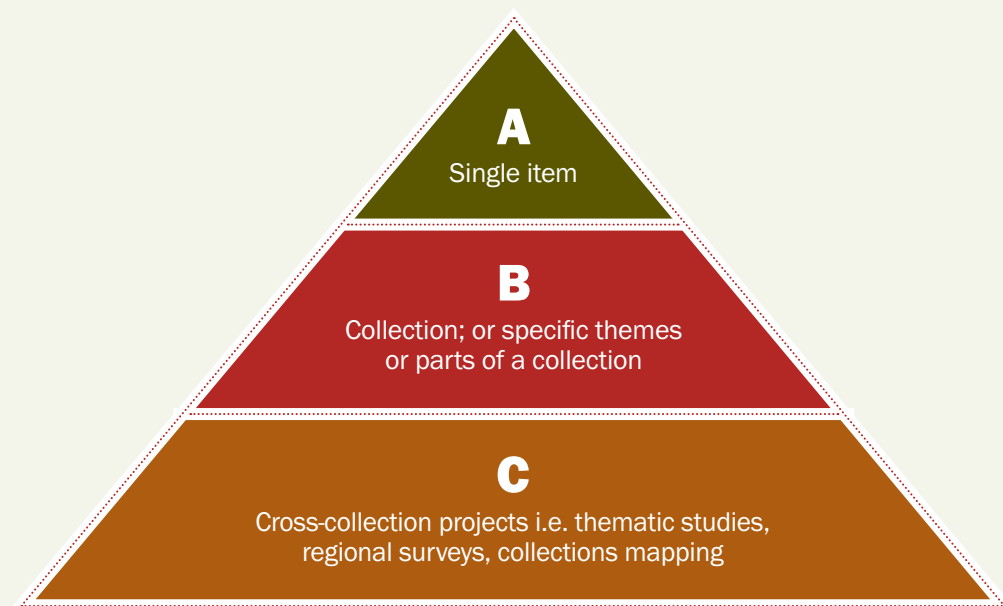
The Church's Heritage Centre provides evidence to build a very sound provenance for the items in the Museum. The archives and library in the Heritage Centre contain large numbers of photographs, movies, historic books, teaching materials, Church publications and reports from the various churches and mission fields documenting the Church's missionary activity in the Pacific Islands and in Indigenous Australia. Some photographs show particular items with their creators or owners. These rich and diverse records of provenance add to the significance of items in the museum. These in turn can be used as a point of reference and comparison for similar undocumented artefacts from the region.

## Part 4 The significance assessment process

### Introducing the significance assessment process

Significance assessment is the process of researching and understanding the meanings and values of items and collections. There are three variations of the process for assessing significance: for single items; for a collection or parts of a collection; and for cross-collection projects.

#### Significance assessment variations



**Figure 2.** Three variations of significance assessment—single items to collections. Cross-collection projects may include single item and collection components.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter outlines step-by-step methods recommended for use with each variation of the shared process. The steps can be adapted and reinterpreted to suit the needs of specific types of collections or collecting domains.

Each method includes research, consultation, analysis, comparison, assessment, and summary in the form of a 'statement of significance'. Many of the steps are already part of collection documentation practice, although not all collecting organisations summarise the information and analysis in a statement of significance.

Choice of method and particular steps depend on the item or collection under assessment and how the assessment will be used.

In a complex single item assessment it may be helpful to include a scoping step, such as those proposed in collection ('review') and cross-collection ('plan') methods. The single item assessment method may be used before conservation of an item; the collection assessment method may be used in revising a collection policy or to support a grant application; and the cross-collection method may be used for collections mapping.

The different methods may be used together. A collection assessment may entail assessment of a number of highly significant items within the collection (using the single item method).

Those who are new to significance may find it easier to build their skills by undertaking a single item, or 'basic', assessment first.

This chapter includes two illustrated examples that show each stage of the step-by-step methods for a single item and for a collection. These are condensed examples that highlight some of the findings in each step of the assessment process.



## A. Single item significance assessment

Start the process of assessing significance by collating an item file with copies of all available information about the item. This provides the basis for further research. Write notes under each step in the process as a reference point for considering the criteria and drafting the statement of significance. Not every step in the assessment process will be relevant to the item in focus. The notes act as prompts and may be revised as the work develops.

### Single item: step-by-step significance assessment

#### 1. Collate

##### Collate a file with all the information about the item and its history

This may include acquisition date, donor or vendor, notes made when the item was acquired, photos, copies of letters and reference materials, and information about related items and places.

#### 2. Research

##### Research the history and provenance of the item

This may include the date when the item was made or created, information on the creator, photos of the item in context or use, notes about the owners or the place where the item was created, used, or purchased, and the general history of this type of item. Research previous owners of the item.

#### 3. Consult

##### Consult donors, owners, and knowledgeable people

Identify those with an interest in or knowledge of the item. Ask questions about the context, provenance and potential social values. Encourage informants to make notes about the creation, function, history and meaning of the item, or record this information in other ways. Consult people who may have information about the item or maker, or know about similar items, work practices or associated places.

#### 4. Explore

##### Explore the context of the item

Consider how the item relates to wider historical themes, patterns, movements, developments or industry. How does it relate to the history, geography or environment of the place where it was created or used? Consider its function and purpose, and relationship with other items. Wherever possible, record the item in its context of use and original location, or document similar items *in situ*. Include maps where relevant.

#### 5. Analyse

##### Analyse and describe the fabric and condition of the item

This may include notes on the appearance or nature of the item, the materials, marks, processes of design, creation or manufacture, patterns of wear, repair, changes and adaptations. Record the item's condition.

#### 6. Compare

##### Compare the item with similar items

How is the item similar or different to comparable items? Check to see if cultural heritage websites<sup>35</sup> list similar items. Where possible include photos for comparison. Check reference books and the Internet. Consult colleagues and other knowledgeable people, and collecting organisations with similar collections.

#### 7. Identify

##### Identify related places and items

This may include heritage places associated with the item, or the environment or location of its origin. Identify related items or collections, such as items from the same owner or organisation. Consider the relationships between places, people and the item.

#### 8. Assess

##### Assess significance against the criteria

Assess the item against the primary criteria: historic, artistic or aesthetic, scientific or research potential, and social or spiritual. Determine the degree of significance by assessment against the comparative criteria: provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness, and interpretive capacity. See Part 5 for more information about the criteria.

Consideration of the criteria helps define the item's significance. Look back at notes developed under the preceding steps to consider which criteria are relevant.

#### 9. Write

##### Write a statement of significance

Summarise the item's values and meanings by reviewing relevant criteria identified in Step 8. Refer to notes made at each step in the process. Don't just say the item is significant—explain **how and why** the item is significant and what it means. Discuss this with others who know about the item.

##### Sign and date the assessment

Significance can change over time, so it's important to record the authorship and date of the assessment.

##### List references

Cite the important sources for the research. Also indicate the sources not consulted, as this provides direction for future review and research.

##### List and acknowledge contributors

Significance assessment is a collaborative process and this information recognises contributors who may be consulted if the assessment is reviewed in the future.

#### 10. Action

##### List recommendations and actions

Consider policies arising from the assessment and advice on management, conservation, further research, access or interpretation.



Cabbage tree hat made by Mrs Lionel Hurry for her nephew Albert Denniss, about 1900  
Reproduced courtesy of the Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong



George French Angas  
Britain/Australia, 1822 - 1886  
*Cabbage Palms, Dapto, Illawarra*  
1844-05, Dapto, New South Wales  
watercolour on paper  
32.8 x 23.5 cm  
Gift of Miss EM Johnson  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

## Single item: illustrated step-by-step process

### Cabbage tree hat, c. 1900

#### Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, NSW

##### 1. Collate a file with all the information about the item and its history

The exact acquisition date is not known, however the Society has detailed notes about the history and provenance of the hat. It was a gift on behalf of the late Miss AR Hurry, daughter of the maker of the hat, around 1969.

##### 2. Research the history and provenance of the item

Notes associated with the hat record that it was made by Mrs Lionel Hurry, née Sarah Denniss, for her nephew Albert Denniss, son of her brother George, when he was a small boy holidaying with her at Vine Cottage, Flinders Street, Albion Park. It was probably made in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

##### 3. Consult donors, owners, and knowledgeable people

The Society's notes associated with the hat were presumably written at the time it was donated from information supplied by the donor. These notes include information about the family's arrival in Australia, their home and work. They record Mr WA Denniss making a small tool to strip the cabbage palm leaves into narrow widths before plaiting.

Additional information collected by the Society from local sources builds up a picture of the patterns of manufacture of cabbage tree hats by people in the Illawarra. Of particular note is the reference that other members of the Denniss family used Aboriginal people to climb the cabbage trees to collect the palm 'hands' for plaiting in exchange for a 'halfmoon' damper. Other information records the Tibbles family making quantities of hats to sell twice a year at their stand at the Sydney markets, and Mrs Brooks of Kangaroo Valley putting the palm hands on the laundry roof to be bleached by the sun and frost.

##### 4. Explore the context of the item

Cabbage tree hats were a characteristic feature of the dress of men in the Australian bush in the nineteenth century. First recorded in 1799, the hats were worn by convicts, shepherds, poets, explorers, larrikins and the well to do. They are described in the works of writers such as Henry Lawson and Mary Gilmore, and in numerous paintings and photographs of daily life on the goldfields and in the bush. Later in the nineteenth century, the larrikins of Sydney's Rocks area were also marked by their cabbage tree hats and known as the 'cabbage tree mob'.

Straw plaiting was a rural craft in Britain. It was taught to convicts awaiting transportation on the hulks, and it remained a prison craft in Australia throughout the nineteenth century. Straw plaiting was done by shepherds in the bush, who were often emancipated convicts. The craft was suited to occupations and circumstances where there was plenty of time and limited resources. By the second half of the nineteenth century the hats were made by men and women in many circumstances, from factories in Sydney and regional towns, to housewives and rural workers supplementing farm incomes. They were sold to drovers and other travellers along the main roads of NSW. Sometimes the plaits were sold separately to be later made into hats. Very fine cabbage tree hats were exhibited in numerous international exhibitions.

The cabbage palm, *Livistona australis*, is a distinctive feature of the Illawarra landscape. The palm figures in many nineteenth-century illustrations and travellers' descriptions of the region. Every part of the cabbage tree palm was exploited by early settlers for housing, food, furniture and hats. The reference to Aboriginal people gathering the palm 'hands' for plaiting offers an important insight into the coexistence and cooperation of Aboriginal people and European settlers in the Illawarra. The notes kept by the Society highlight some of the ways women supplemented income by making and selling hats, and they point to trade routes and cultural relationships that are not documented in other sources.

## 5. Analyse and describe the fabric and condition of the item

Like other cabbage tree hats, this example is made by first boiling and bleaching the palm leaves. They were then stripped into narrow widths using a variety of tools and blades; the width of the strip affects the fineness of the plait and the quality of the hat. The strips were then plaited together, this one with five strands. To make the hat, the plait was wound from the crown out, overlapping the plait beneath, and then sewn down to make the high crown and wide brim of this example. Additional blocking and steaming refines the shape. This example has a worked band of plait around the crown. It is lined and has the owner's name inside the crown with a leather thong for fastening under the chin.

## 6. Compare the item with similar items

There are about ten cabbage tree hats in museum and library collections in Australia. About half are provenanced to particular owners (for example, Marcus Clarke's hat in the State Library of Victoria), but this example is the best provenanced known at present, with specific and contextual history from the region. Comparison also highlights the quality of the straw plaiting. Other examples show the same type of band around the crown and a variety of shapes, from this style to boater types.

## 7. Identify related places and items

The cabbage palm, *Livistona australis*, is a much loved feature of the Illawarra escarpment and rainforest gullies. Stands of cabbage palms are still prominent landmarks in the Illawarra.

The Society has many items in its collection related to the Denniss and Hurry family homes. Also associated with the hat are three rolls of cabbage tree plait, possibly left over from making the hat.

## 8. Assess significance against the criteria

Primarily historically significant. The hat is both rare and representative of vernacular bush dress, in excellent condition and well provenanced. Its provenance means this example is a reference point for studying unprovenanced cabbage tree hats. It may also have some artistic value for the quality of its craftsmanship as a fine example of straw plaiting. The hat interprets a distinctive feature of the Illawarra environment.

## 9. Write a statement of significance

This cabbage tree hat is a fine well-provenanced example of a hat that was characteristic of bush dress in nineteenth-century Australia. Such hats are historically significant as the only distinctive item of Australian dress entirely made from Australian materials. The hats have a special place in the developing mythology of bush life, described by authors such as Henry Lawson. It is typical of such descriptions that one could not determine the wealth and status of the wearers under their battered and sun-darkened cabbage tree hats. The wearing of cabbage tree hats by convicts, shepherds, settlers, miners on the goldfields, explorers in the outback and larrikins in the inner city, highlights the egalitarian character of nineteenth-century men's vernacular dress in Australia. This cabbage tree hat and its history help tease out the relationship between Aboriginal people, settlers and the environment in the Illawarra. The hat exemplifies exploitation of local materials, and informal ways of supplementing incomes. Cabbage tree hats demonstrate the adaptation of traditional British skills to the raw materials available in the environment, driven by climatic needs. This example is significant for being provenanced to a particular locality, with the capacity to interpret the distinctive history and character of the region.



Detail showing the interior lining of the cabbage tree hat with the owner's name in ink  
Reproduced courtesy of the Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong



Kerry and Co., Sydney, Australia c. 1884–1917  
Cabbage palms, Illawarra  
Glass negative  
Photo: Charles Kerry Studio  
Reproduced courtesy of the Tyrrell Collection  
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Boater style cabbage tree hat, c. 1860–1880  
Photo: Andrew Frolows  
Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney  
This style of cabbage tree hat is shown in sketches by the artists ST Gill and William Strutt





## B. Collection significance assessment

For many collecting organisations it is impractical to assess single items except in particular circumstances, such as nominating an item to a register. An alternative to the single item assessment method is to assess the whole collection, or parts of the collection. This method is an effective way of feeding collection needs into strategic planning for collecting organisations. It is also used for collection policy reviews, as a way of taking stock of the strengths and weaknesses of the collection, and for *in situ* collections in heritage places. These steps can be adapted to suit the characteristics of the collection in focus. As for single item assessments, not every step will be relevant for every assessment.

### Collection: step-by-step significance assessment

#### 1. Collate

##### Collate records and information about the history and development of the collection

This may include information from establishment documents, official published histories or local council records.

#### 2a. Research

##### Research the history of the collection

Many established collecting organisations already have a published history but it may not be well related to the development of the collection. Consider the role of former directors, curators or scientists in developing the collection. Many collections will reflect aspects of the changing history of collecting in society. Identify developments in the organisation's history that have impacted on the collection, such as important gifts or acquisitions, new buildings or extensions.

#### 2b. Review

##### Review the scope and themes of the collection

Identify the most significant themes and items in the collection. Consider how the collection reflects or serves the mission and purpose of the organisation. In local or regional history collections, ask how well the collection relates to key themes in the history of the locality or region.

#### 3. Consult

##### Consult knowledgeable people

Talk to people associated with the collection such as previous office bearers, important donors, experts, volunteers or staff and community interest groups. Consider to whom the collection is important, as well as the community's relationship with the organisation and sense of attachment to the collection. Survey or hold an event to understand how the community values the collection. Are there important items or themes in the collection that the community feels strongly about? What role does the organisation have in the community? Have there been times when the community has rallied to support the organisation? This is important in considering the social value of the collection.

#### 4. Explore

##### Explore the context of the collection

Understand the collection in the period of its development, its building, environment, use and historical context. Consider how the collection reflects the history and identity of the community and its city, town or region. How have broader historical patterns shaped the collection? Assess the relationship between the building and collection, particularly if it is in a heritage building. Are there items associated with the organisation or building's history that should be accessioned? Are there collections associated with the place, such as original furniture or equipment?

#### 5. Analyse

##### Analyse and describe the condition of the collection

Consider if there are significant items or parts of the collection that need particular attention. This can help to set future conservation priorities and actions for the strategic plan.

#### 6. Compare

##### Compare the collection with similar collections

Look for collections of similar size, type or subject. How is the collection different or similar to comparable collections? This helps to identify particular strengths and characteristics of the collection.

#### 7. Identify

##### Identify related places and collections

Is the collection related to a particular place, environment or site? Are there associated collections held by other organisations?

#### 8. Assess

##### Assess significance against the criteria

Primary criteria: historic, artistic or aesthetic, scientific or research potential, and social or spiritual. Determine the degree of significance by assessment against the comparative criteria: provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness, and interpretive capacity. See Part 5 for more information about the criteria.

#### 9. Write

##### Write a statement of significance

Summarise the values and meanings of the collection by reviewing relevant criteria identified in Step 8. Also refer to notes made at each step in the process. Don't just say the collection is significant—explain **how and why** the collection is significant and what it means. Discuss this with others who know about the collection.

##### Sign and date the assessment

Significance can change over time, so it's important to record the authorship and date of the assessment.

##### List references

Cite the important sources for the research. Also indicate the sources not consulted, as this provides direction for future review and research.

### List and acknowledge contributors

Significance assessment is a collaborative process and this information recognises contributors who may be consulted if the assessment is reviewed in the future.

## 10. Action

### List recommendations and actions.

Identify policies, strategies, recommendations and priorities for action. These points can be incorporated in the organisation's annual work plan or strategic plan. Draft policies to aid management of the collection. Some policies may be included in the organisation's collection policy. Consider if particular items or themes need research and significance assessment. Recommendations might include improvements to storage or further research on particular aspects of the collection.

Identify strategies to redress weaknesses and omissions in the collection and plan ways to make collecting less passive.

Explore opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to build complementary collections. Consider issues arising from the assessment of the relationship between the building and collection, such as the fit between the two, or the need for interpretation.

The following example illustrates the steps in the collection assessment process. See also the whole collection significance assessment for the James Cook Museum in *Significance* (2001), pages 62–63 at: <[http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/5](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/5)>, which is of a collection not integral to the building in which it is housed.

## Collection: illustrated step-by-step process

### Movable Collections in the Cathedral Church of St Saviour, Goulburn, NSW

This is a highly edited edition summary of an assessment that was more than twenty pages long.

All images reproduced courtesy of the Cathedral Church of St Saviour, Goulburn.

#### 1. Collate records

As part of the assessment, Cathedral volunteers developed object files to document and research the history of key items in the collection, as well as searching the archives for information about the design and commissioning of particular works, and finding historic photos showing objects in use. The following notes are edited from a longer assessment.

#### 2a. Research the history of the collection

The Cathedral interiors and the collection have evolved over its 125 years since the Cathedral was dedicated in 1884. Virtually all the items were gifts from people with particular associations with the Cathedral, the Diocese and the Anglican Church. The history of the movable collections and their provenance describe important relationships and connections between St Saviour's and its clergy, congregation, members of the Diocese and friends and supporters of the Cathedral. From the time of its dedication to the present, gifts of sculpture, furniture, metalwork and textiles have embellished the Cathedral, given expression to the liturgy and worship, and commemorated people's associations with the Cathedral and the Diocese.

The addition of new furnishings and ornaments to the Cathedral is a considered decision that requires a written petition to the bishop for 'the granting of a Faculty', a process of formally granting authorisation or licence, with provision for objections to the application. In the Anglican Church, which encompasses 'high' and 'low' church practices, the addition of certain items, like the crucifix made by Edmund Blacket in 1842, can be contested, as some members may consider it too suggestive of Roman Catholicism. Over its 125 years, the design, location and iconography of all the objects, sculptures and decorative schemes in the Cathedral have been carefully considered and planned to communicate the beliefs and liturgy of the Anglican Church. Sensitivities around the appropriateness of items such as the crucifix underline the importance of movable heritage in the Cathedral in giving expression to shared beliefs, as well as representing the nuances of 'high' and 'low' church Anglicanism.



View of the nave of the Cathedral Church of St Saviour, Goulburn NSW, designed by Edmund Blacket. Blacket was deeply involved in the design of the interior and its fittings. The Cathedral is said to be his favourite work and a commission where he had a relatively free hand in its design. Photo: Wesley Granger



Crucifix carved by Edmund Blacket in 1842 on board ship to Australia, presented by his granddaughter Gladys Blacket in 1935. Photo: Wesley Granger



The magnificent baptismal font made by John Roddis in Birmingham in 1883. The font cover of Queensland maple was made later in Sydney by Frederick W Tod in 1920 and reflects a trend to Australian commissions in the twentieth-century. Photo: Wesley Granger



One of the vestments from the collection of the Cathedral Church of St Saviour  
Photo: Kylie Winkworth

## 2b. Review the scope and themes of the collection

The movable collections include altars, pulpit, baptismal font, lectern, choir stalls, chairs, organ, communion vessels, pews, vestments, textiles for use on the altar, kneelers, commemorative hangings, paintings and a model of the Cathedral possibly made by Blacket's daughter Edith. The impressive bishop's throne or cathedra was designed by Blacket, as was the organ. Two major pieces of sculpture, the font and pulpit, were made by John Roddis of Birmingham of white Caen stone, from the same quarries used for the great French and English cathedrals. The Gothic-inspired font canopy of Queensland maple was made later by the Sydney woodcarver Frederick Tod and was a gift from the Seaborn family in memory of Mary Foster and Harriet Marsden. The inscription records them as 'faithful workers in the original parish of Goulburn'.

## 3. Consult knowledgeable people

Comments in the Cathedral's visitors' book, and provided during community consultations, underline the importance and esteem the community feels for the Cathedral and its collections. The font, lectern, pulpit, reredos, High Altar and organ are particularly valued.

In response to a questionnaire about the Cathedral's collections and how they are valued by parishioners, some of the textiles were singled out for special mention, such as the kneelers and embroideries, valued because of the 'hours of love and devotion that must have gone into making them. They give warmth to the Cathedral.' Many women were involved in making these items. The textiles continue to give pleasure, to serve a practical purpose and to commemorate those involved in their creation.

Another parishioner writes: 'all the woodcarvings and textile items enchant me, firstly for their own beauty, and secondly as they represent such devoted commitment from a diverse range of worshippers'. Apart from the kneelers and cushions, the whole Cathedral is a place of remembrance and its walls and movable heritage are marked with the names of church figures, parishioners and loved ones. Many parishioners have long family associations with the Cathedral, volunteering in many capacities. The Cathedral is intertwined in the family histories of many local residents, and is the place for marking spiritual events and family milestones.

## 4. Explore the context of the collection

The movable heritage of St Saviour's is an integral part of the history and design of the Cathedral. It is the movable items that enable the Cathedral to fulfill its purpose as a place of worship. There is a high degree of consistency between the design (Gothic Revival) of the building and its contents. Key pieces acquired at the time the Cathedral was dedicated reflect the spirit and design principles of the Gothic Revival style of the building's design.

The building has evolved over 125 years with the creation of new chapels and the donation of furniture and new works of art. Changes and developments within the building, such as the creation of the Soldiers' Chapel after World War I, are in keeping with its original design. However, later changes also represent an evolution from the first phase of the building's development, where many items were designed and made in Britain. Over time, greater use has been made of Australian materials, local artists and craftspeople, and local imagery.

As the most visible symbol of the Diocese, the Cathedral Church of St Saviour is linked to the prestige and civic history of the city of Goulburn, and its role in the administration and development of the country south of Goulburn. The physical proximity of the civic and religious centres of Goulburn underlines this intertwined history.



## 5. Analyse and describe the condition of the collection

The movable items in the collection are generally in good, original condition. Furniture items retain their original finish and patina. The textiles generally need conservation assessment and would benefit from improved storage and regular monitoring. The most fragile textiles are the Sowerby memorial altar frontals, which show the wear and tear of nearly a century of active use. Unlike many collections in heritage buildings, the St Saviour's collection is remarkably intact.

## 6. Compare the collection with similar collections

The movable heritage of St Saviour's Cathedral is broadly comparable in its scope and content with collections in cathedrals in other Australian cities. The building itself is larger and more architecturally significant than other cathedrals in regional cities, and the movable collections mirror this, particularly the fine Blacket designed cathedra, the font and pulpit and many of the well provenanced textiles.

Some work was done in the course of the assessment to compare collections in other cathedrals, but a more detailed comparative assessment requires site visits and access to detailed catalogue information.

## 7. Identify related places and collections

The Diocese gave the original Blacket plans to the Mitchell Library in Sydney, which holds the Blacket family papers.

Many of the Diocesan records are on permanent loan to the National Library of Australia, which also has historic photographs of the Cathedral. St Mark's National Theological Centre Library also has historic photographs and records. See also other Blacket churches, such as St John's Anglican Church in Newcastle, NSW.

## 8. Assess significance against the criteria

Historically significant with many items linked to key figures in the history of the design and development of the Cathedral, and in the history of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The collections have particular associations with the Cathedral's bishops and other clergy. There are also important associations with women and women's groups in the history of the Anglican Church.

The creation of the Diocese and development of the Cathedral is intertwined with the history and prestige of Goulburn as an important civic and religious centre.

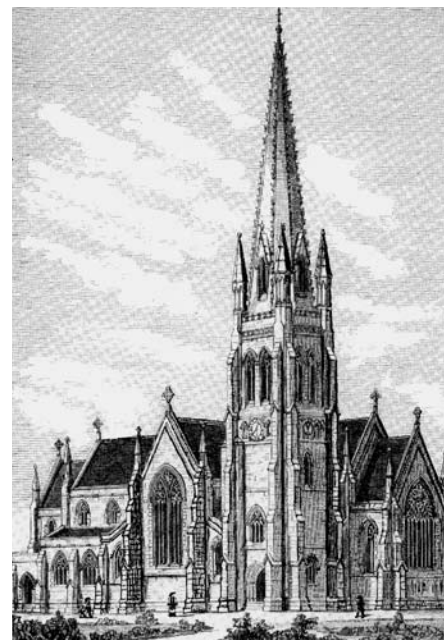
Many items are of outstanding artistic significance for the quality of their design and craftsmanship.

The collection is of high spiritual significance to the parishioners of St Saviour's, to the people of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, to members of the Armed Services, and particularly those families with associations with the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment and HMAS *Goulburn*; and to the many visitors to the Cathedral.

Many items are well provenanced to known designers and makers and important historical figures.

The movable heritage of St Saviour's Cathedral is in many ways representative of items found in other Anglican cathedrals, given their shared heritage and common forms of worship and function, but it also has a number of rare and unique items.

The collection shows remarkable integrity and intactness and it has interpretive capacity, demonstrating the history and development of the building and its associations with key figures in its history, including bishops, clergy and laity, and its architect Edmund Blacket.



Blacket's original concept for Cathedral showing the yet to be completed spire  
Photo: Wesley Granger



The extraordinary bishop's throne or 'cathedra' designed by Blacket and carved in oak. The chair symbolises the status of the Cathedral as the bishop's church. This remarkable example of Gothic Revival design with pointed arches, pinnacles, roof and spire is like a cathedral within the Cathedral. Above the seat of the throne is an embroidered hanging commemorating one hundred years of the Diocese, made in 1963 to a design by Mrs AB Turner of Goulburn.

Photo: Reverend Bill Wright



Detail of one of the four Sowerby memorial altar frontals, designed for the High Altar for use at specific times in the liturgical calendar and in regular use for one hundred years. The frontals were made by the Ladies' Working Party of St Paul's, Geelong, for the Cathedral Parish of St Saviour in 1895. They were commissioned by the Parish through funds provided by the Very Rev'd William Sowerby, the first Dean of Goulburn and his wife Hannah. The commission reflected personal links between clergy at St Paul's Geelong and St Saviour's.

Photo: Don Wheeler

## 9. Write a statement of significance

The altar, pulpit, baptismal font, lectern, choir, organ, communion vessels, pews and many other items are integral to the design and artistic significance of the Cathedral, reinterpreting the Gothic Revival style of the building. The interior is one of Edmund Blacket's greatest achievements and his skills are seen in the extraordinary architecture of the bishop's seat, in the decorative details of the organ, and in his fine carving of the crucifix above the pulpit.

The 1863 Letters Patent from the Crown, which created the Diocese, are the foundation items in the Cathedral's collection and are of high significance for the history of the Anglican Church in Australia, for the Diocese and for the city of Goulburn. The creation of the Diocese and development of the Cathedral are intertwined with the history and prestige of the city of Goulburn as a civic and religious centre.

The history of the movable collections and their provenance describe important relationships and connections between St Saviour's and its clergy, congregation, members of the Diocese and friends and supporters of the Cathedral. From the time of its dedication in 1884 to the present, gifts of sculpture, furniture, metalwork and textiles have embellished the Cathedral, given expression to the liturgy and worship, and commemorated people's associations with the Cathedral and the Diocese. Such gifts demonstrate the historic strength of Anglican networks between Australia and Britain in the late nineteenth century, and continuing links with clergy, families and parishioners across the Diocese.

The Cathedral is a place of memory as well as worship. Many items were made and given in memory of the Cathedral's bishops, clergy, parishioners and friends. The guidon and the ensign in the Soldiers' Chapel underline the importance of the Cathedral as a war memorial for the Goulburn community and the wider Diocese.

Many items are associated with key people in the history of the Cathedral. For example, the 1895 Sowerby memorial altar frontals are historically significant as the oldest textiles in the Cathedral, and for their associations with Dean William Sowerby and his wife Hannah. The vestments and altar frontals are of spiritual, historic and aesthetic significance, occupying a prominent place in the religious life of the Cathedral. The vestments as a group have important links with both the history of the Diocese and its clergy, and with the long history of ecclesiastical textiles in the church. Taking ancient forms and designs, and traditional materials, techniques and symbols, they represent a great continuum in the history of the church. Textile items created by women of the Diocese, and from Goulburn in particular, reflect centuries of Anglican tradition to beautify a place of worship through the creation of handmade items for use by the clergy and congregation. They also demonstrate the creativity of women in the congregation of St Saviour's and in the Diocese, and their regard for the place of St Saviour's in the spiritual and community life of the Diocese and Goulburn.

## 10. List recommendations and actions

Recommendations covered funding, conservation, storage, a database, volunteer training, commissioning new works for the collection, interpretation of the Cathedral and its collections and a conservation management plan for the Cathedral.



## C. Cross-collection significance projects

Significant collections can be explored and assessed through cross-collection projects such as thematic studies, regional surveys and collections mapping projects. The steps below describe a thematic study. This is a cross-collection comparative survey related to a particular theme, subject or region. A thematic study is a process or framework for collecting organisations to collaborate, assess, document and analyse collections, and present more coherent stories online, in serial exhibitions, promotions and publications. Two examples of thematic studies are provided in Part 6.

### Thematic studies: step-by-step significance assessment

This is a template, not a definitive prescription. The methodology can be adapted to suit the needs and resources of the study, the participants and collections.

#### 1. Plan

##### Develop a project plan

Develop a brief with clearly stated rationale, aims, anticipated outcomes, and method. Identify a project co-ordinator and work out how the study will be undertaken: budget, time frame, process etc. Studies can be done in stages. Allow enough time if working with museum volunteers who have other obligations. Hold a meeting with museums, historical societies, libraries, galleries, archives, heritage and history organisations and other interested community groups and individuals to discuss the project, plan the work, share information, and agree on the aims, project outline and further use of the anticipated outcomes of the study.

#### 2. Research

##### Commission a contextual history by an historian

The history should be strongly linked to movable items and collections, including photographs, maps, paintings, places and original source material.

#### 3. Identify

##### Identify key themes

Themes identified in the history act as a framework for assessing movable items and collections. Consider a checklist of the main categories or types of items likely to be encountered. For regional surveys, identify key themes in the history and identity of the region. These may be specific to the region or drawn from state or national thematic frameworks developed by heritage agencies.

#### 4. Survey

##### Survey movable items

Survey items in museums, galleries, libraries and archives, and *in situ*, to identify the most significant items and collections.

Use the themes and checklist to search out the less obvious items. Develop object files to focus research on significant items. Undertake further research on the history and provenance of the items. For regional surveys, map significant items against key themes to see how effectively the collections represent and interpret the history of the region and significant places.

#### 5. Assess

##### Assess significance

Hold workshops in significance assessment, with participants presenting their research and case studies on significant items. The aim is to assess the significance of the most important items and collections.

#### 6. Review

##### Review what's missing from the collections

Review items against the identified themes to consider the scope and representativeness of the collections. Analyse the items against the thematic framework to see what's missing from the collections.

#### 7. Produce

##### Produce outcomes from the project plan

Outcomes may include exhibitions, a catalogue, website and weblinks, and promotion, as per the project plan.

#### 8. Action

##### List recommendations and actions

Summarise the work and develop strategies for the conservation of collections and to raise awareness of their significance. This might include:

- conservation funding for significant items and collections
- conservation plans where relevant
- coordinated strategic planning for collections across a region
- further training of collections staff and volunteers
- community education and awareness campaigns to give advice to families and community organisations holding significant items and collections
- improved interpretation and upgrades to displays
- promotional projects like a website or driving tour map to encourage exploration of the region
- grant applications to fund further work recommended by the study
- a policy framework for the theme that can be adopted by participating organisations

The policies might include strategic collecting, coordination of collecting, joint strategies to address neglected collection themes, or work on other areas related to the subject as recommended by the study.

# Context

Context is an important step in assessing significance. It builds on research in the step-by-step method to place the item or collection in a wider historical, geographic, artistic or environmental context. This means exploring how the item or collection relates to broader themes or patterns. Like provenance, context will have different shades of meaning or interpretation depending on the type of item or collection. This section explores the important role of context in different domains and with different types of material.

Understanding context is vital to assessing significance. In significance practice, context places an item or collection within wider historical patterns or themes, or within an environment or physical locality. Context can include relationships with other items or with the place where an item was used, made or created. Contextual studies can also reveal how an item was used or how it functioned.

Context builds on information explored in earlier steps in the significance method, including provenance, history, community associations, and for natural history, environment. For items without such information, looking at the wider context of that class of items helps build a picture of their general development, use, function and historical context. This feeds into the statement of significance, and helps to give a fuller understanding of an item's meaning and importance.

Exploring the context of an item or collection taps into information, knowledge and ideas that are not always part of formal collection documentation practice, although experts inside collecting organisations understand contextual knowledge well. The significance assessment process recommends documenting this knowledge.

Recording provenance and context can be related processes. How an item is documented when it is collected can be vital to understanding its context. An item's significance and its future research potential may depend on a well-documented context. Collecting organisations are placing more emphasis on the contextual documentation of items in a variety of media, such as photography, photogrammetry, written reports and oral history recordings.

As with the concept of provenance, context has different shades of meaning and interpretation depending on item or collection type, or on collecting domain or professional discipline.

For example, **context for natural history specimens** may include detailed recording of the environment in which the specimens were collected. The absence of a provenance or a recorded context may render items and collections insignificant. Confiscated bird egg collections, for example, are occasionally offered to science museums by Customs or the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, but if no contextual or provenance information is available, notably when and where the eggs were collected and by whom, they will not be accepted into the collections of state museums or universities.

Following are illustrated examples of 'context in action' across some collection types.



'Airzone' wireless radio belonging to Prime Minister Chifley and his wife is displayed *in situ*, thereby retaining its full context and meaning  
Reproduced courtesy of the Chifley Home, Bathurst Regional Council

The High Court of Australia decides constitutional matters and cases of special federal significance. It is the highest court of appeal for federal, state and territory cases. Although the High Court of Australia was established in 1901 by Section 71 of the Constitution, the appointment of the first Bench awaited the passage of the *Judiciary Act 1903*.

The vast collection of the High Court of Australia, held at the National Archives of Australia and by the High Court, includes judges' notebooks, correspondence between members, reports, and records of judgments. It illustrates the development of Australia's common law practices and principles and includes images and film of the opening of the original Court and of the new High Court of Australia building in Canberra. The records provide an insight into landmark judicial decisions affecting Australian society, democracy and government. Issues covered include Commonwealth versus State powers (the *Engineers Case* of 1920 and the Tasmanian *Franklin Dam Case*, 1983), economic regulation (the *Bank Nationalisation Case*, 1948), freedom of speech and subversion (the *Communist Party Case*, 1951), the separation of powers doctrine (the *Boilermakers Case*, 1956), Native title (the *Mabo Case*, 1992), and anti-homosexuality laws and human rights (the *Toonen Case*, 1994).



The High Court of Australia, Canberra  
Photo: Roslyn Russell

## Context and archives

Archivists look first at context when deciding to take records into an archive. They examine the significance of the creating entity itself, the events and phenomena associated with it, and the quality of the records themselves. Once these are identified, the question becomes one of how useful the records can be for researching these events.

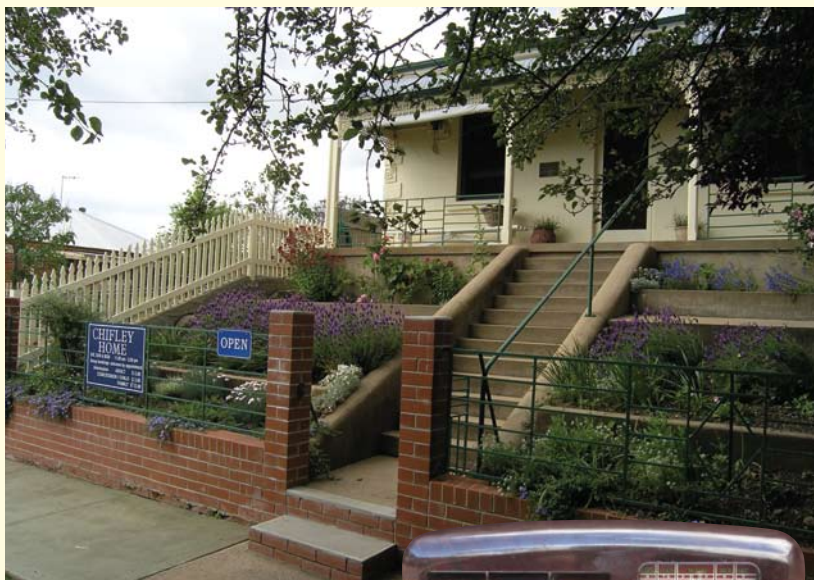
The historical context of the place of the High Court in the development of Australian common law and the interpretation of the Constitution is crucial to understanding the significance of the records it has created.

## Context and *in situ* collections

Context is central to the meaning and significance of *in situ* collections. Keeping items in their place of use, and understanding their context within it, and also in relation to wider social and historical movements and events, broadens understanding of their significance. Collections that survive intact in their place of use and context are of particular significance. Individual items that are still *in situ* may be a reference point for the research and assessment of similar unprovenanced items.

The radio in the Chifley Home, while interesting for its association with Ben and Elizabeth Chifley, would lose much of its significance as part of the *in situ* collection on display in their former home if it were to be removed from its physical and historical context.

Joseph Benedict ('Ben') Chifley, Labor Prime Minister of Australia from 1945 to 1949, and his wife Elizabeth lived in a modest home in Bathurst, NSW, for all their married life. Ben Chifley was often absent for long periods in Canberra, so Mrs Chifley had wirelasses set up in several rooms so that she could hear her husband speaking in Canberra during parliamentary sessions or when he addressed the nation. This wireless, along with the other contents of the house, has a strong provenance to one of Australia's best loved prime ministers and his wife. The wirelasses in the Chifley Home demonstrate the importance of radio for keeping in touch with the outside world. They attest to the increasing use of wireless by prime ministers to communicate directly with Australians in their homes during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. Both the physical context in which the radio is to be found and the broader historical context are key elements in its significance.



The Chifley Home, Busby Street, Bathurst, NSW  
Photo: Roslyn Russell  
Reproduced courtesy of Bathurst Regional Council



This 'Airzone' wireless radio is kept *in situ* in the sitting room of the Chifley Home in Bathurst, NSW  
Reproduced courtesy of the Chifley Home, Bathurst Regional Council

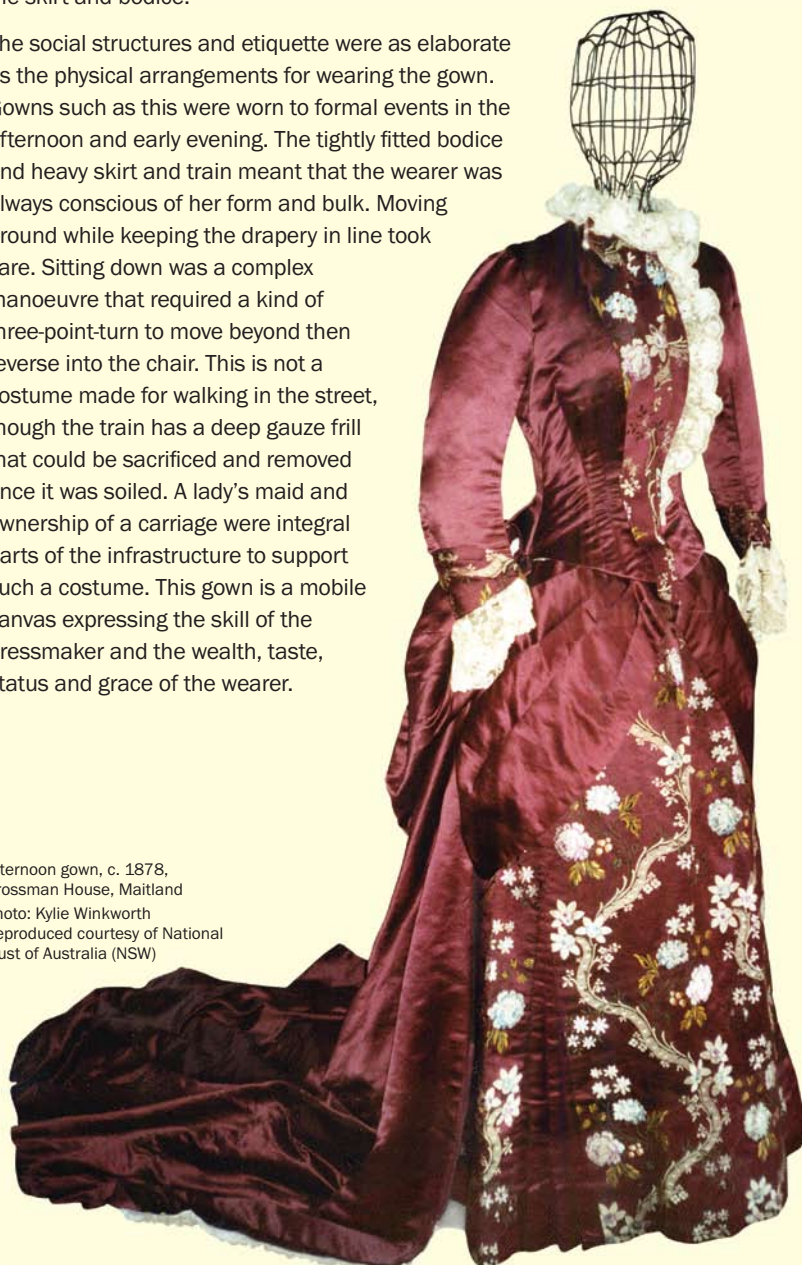


### Excerpt from the discussion of context in the significance assessment about this gown

In the 1870s and 1880s, the formal gowns of wealthy and upper-class women became increasingly elaborate. Complex arrangements of drapery and trimmings, the use of contrasting and toning fabrics and pattern on pattern were underpinned by a highly engineered arrangement of undergarments to support a dress's architecture.

The increasing availability of textiles and new technologies, such as the sewing machine, were just two of the factors driving the increasing elaboration and complexity of women's dress in the 1870s and 1880s. The jacquard looms and textile factories in Britain and France were producing beautiful brocades in styles reminiscent of the eighteenth century. In this costume, contrasting fabrics and elaborate drapery show off the expensive material and the wealth of the wearer. The development of the sewing machine facilitated an increasingly complex arrangement of frills, pleats and detail, with the labour saved from hand sewing displaced to create more detail and complexity in the trimming and arrangement of the skirt and bodice.

The social structures and etiquette were as elaborate as the physical arrangements for wearing the gown. Gowns such as this were worn to formal events in the afternoon and early evening. The tightly fitted bodice and heavy skirt and train meant that the wearer was always conscious of her form and bulk. Moving around while keeping the drapery in line took care. Sitting down was a complex manoeuvre that required a kind of three-point-turn to move beyond then reverse into the chair. This is not a costume made for walking in the street, though the train has a deep gauze frill that could be sacrificed and removed once it was soiled. A lady's maid and ownership of a carriage were integral parts of the infrastructure to support such a costume. This gown is a mobile canvas expressing the skill of the dressmaker and the wealth, taste, status and grace of the wearer.



Afternoon gown, c. 1878,  
Grossman House, Maitland  
Photo: Kylie Winkworth  
Reproduced courtesy of National  
Trust of Australia (NSW)

### Context and historic significance

For historical items, context may include the historical processes or themes that shaped an item, as well as related places, settings, functions and issues such as social and technological change.

For items of technology, context may include the way that the design of an item fits within the evolution and design of that class of items and the work that they performed.

Many items in history collections lack a recorded provenance or specific context. Exploring the broader historical context of that class of items can draw out the wider meanings and significance of the object.

Australian collections contain many items of historic costume that have no specific provenance or history. Exploring the historical context of the type of garment places it within the evolution of fashion, design and the social history of the period. This can tell us much about the social conditions in which it was worn, even if we lack detailed knowledge about the wearer.

## Context and works of art

For works of art, context may include the place of a particular work within an artist's *oeuvre*, or within an art movement.

In the case of public art, the physical context is often an integral part of the conception and design of the work, and is an important element of its significance.

*Kangaroos* was created for a specific poolside context. Both design and production combine to make the art work important in Jan Brown's *oeuvre*.

Jan Brown is a Canberra sculptor who has achieved national recognition, but whose work is best known within the Australian Capital Territory. She was trained in Sydney, and at London's Chelsea Polytechnic School where internationally famed British sculptor Henry Moore was one of her teachers. Brown is a masterly interpreter of animals through sculpture and has managed to convey a sense of their poignant vulnerability, even in this work where she has exaggerated the kangaroos' bodies to emphasise their muscularity and strength. Brown's larger-than-life bronze sculptures of a mother kangaroo and her joey poised to drink at the Mirror Pool in Canberra's Commonwealth Park are perfectly crafted to suit their physical context. *Kangaroos* is also significant as the first major bronze cast by Peter Morley in Australia. Morley worked with another celebrated British sculptor, Barbara Hepworth, at a London foundry before emigrating to Australia, where he established the Meridian Foundry in Melbourne and began a long-term collaboration with Jan Brown.



Jan Brown  
*Kangaroos* (detail)  
 1979–1980  
 Photo: Roslyn Russell

### Excerpt from the statement of significance about this shirt

The shirt is significant for understanding aspects of convict history. It is historically significant as the only known example of what was the most common garment issued to convicts and assigned servants. It is one of the few items of convicts' clothing reliably provenanced to a particular site and is significant in the context of the whole archaeological collection from the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney.

The shirt and the Barracks reflect developments in penal policy in the colony, aimed at containing and controlling the behaviour of convicts by confining them at night and clothing them in regulation marked garments. Research in archives and written records shows how this system was open to subversion.

While this shirt is seen as a distinctly convict garment, we also know that blue and white striped shirts were issued to assigned servants, and were worn by shepherds, who were often emancipated convicts. The shirts are also widely depicted in images of the goldfields, and were listed in emigrants' guides as standard provisions for the colony. Indeed, this garment counters the popular image of convicts, with their clothes and countenance marked all over with the prominent stamp of convict infamy.



Convict striped cotton shirt  
Hyde Park Barracks Museum  
Collection, Historic Houses  
Trust of New South Wales  
Photo: Roger Deckker  
Reproduced courtesy of the  
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

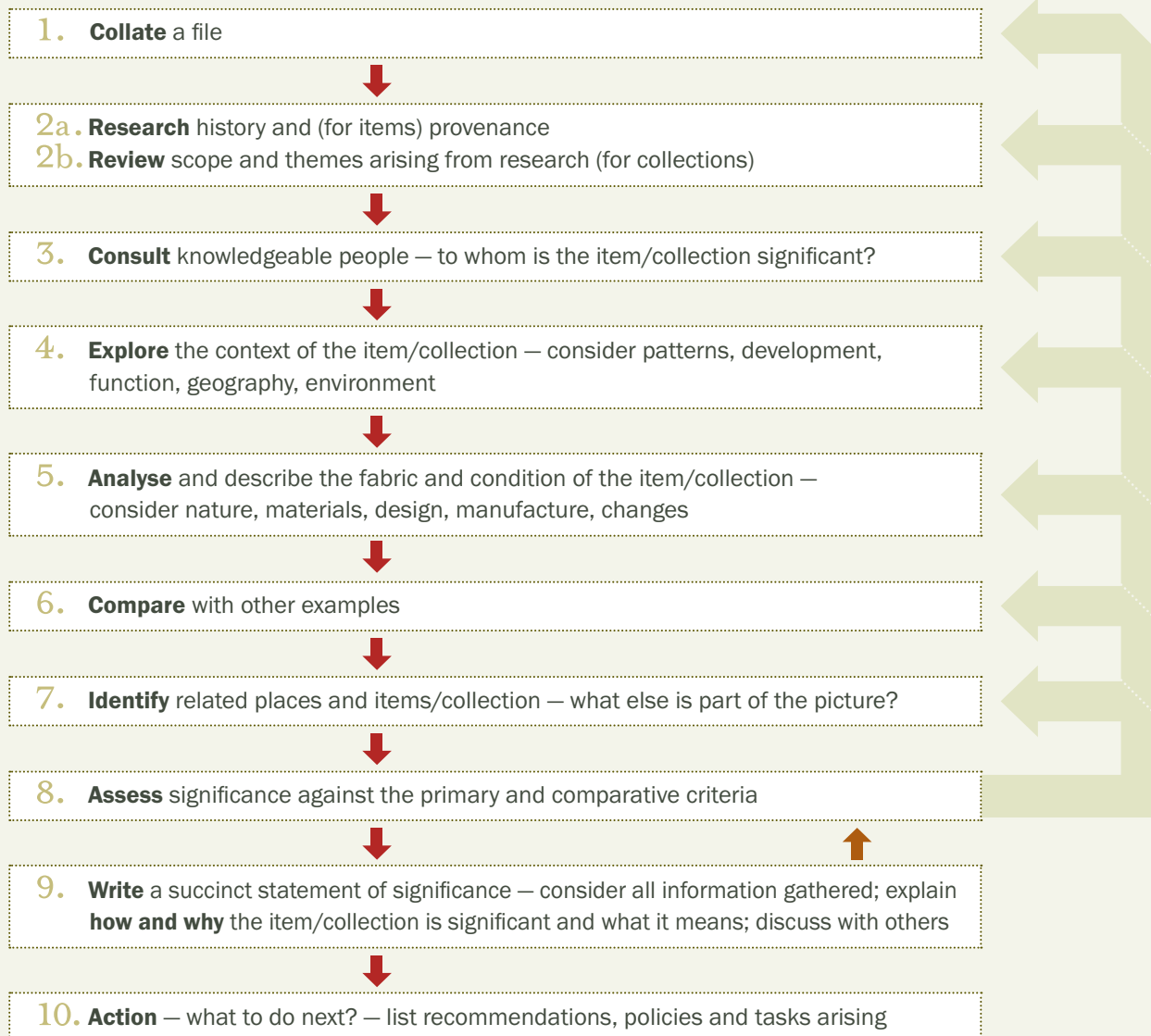
### Context in archaeological collections

'Context' in archaeological collections refers to the precise location where an artefact is found on a site and its relationship with other artefacts, such as its position in the stratigraphy or layers of an excavation. It is a crucial aspect of artefact analysis and is an important dimension of the significance of archaeological collections. The loss of provenance and context in archaeological artefacts seriously diminishes their significance.

In the case of the convict's shirt, excavated beneath the floorboards of the Hyde Park Barracks, context also relates the item to developments in the administration of the convict system as well as relationships with the site. This information and analysis contributes to a richer understanding of its significance.

## Part 5 The statement of significance

### Recapping the steps in the significance assessment process for items and collections



**Figure 3.** This diagram shows how the statement of significance is shaped by reference to the criteria and the preceding steps in the assessment process.  
Note: Step 2b is specific to the assessment of whole collections.

### How to use the criteria

In Figure 3, Step 8 is about using the criteria. A consistent set of criteria for assessing items and collections creates comparable assessments across all kinds of collections. The criteria seen on the following page are simply a framework to elucidate and describe **how and why** the item is important. Use the criteria to draw out the precise qualities of the item or collection's significance, rather than simply assert that it is, for example, historically significant.

The prompt questions that follow help to explore the special qualities and attributes of an item or collection's significance. They can be adapted or reframed to suit particular items and collections. Look back at the information gathered through the step-by-step process to consider how the criteria apply.

Assessment against the criteria feeds into the statement of significance, helping to synthesise the meanings and values of the item or collection.<sup>36</sup>



There are four primary criteria and four comparative criteria for assessing significance.

Note that one or more criteria may apply and be interrelated. It is not necessary to find evidence of all criteria to justify significance. An item or collection may be highly significant even if it is relevant to one primary criterion only. The comparative criteria interact with the primary criteria to modify or clarify the degree of significance. Items or collections may be more or less significant depending on the answers to the following questions.

## Primary criteria

### Historic significance

- Is it associated with a particular person, group, event, place or activity and how is this important?
- What does it say about an historic theme, process, or pattern of life?
- How does it contribute to understanding a period, place, activity, industry, person or event?

### Artistic or aesthetic significance

- Is it well designed, crafted or made?
- Is it a good example of a style, design, artistic movement or an artist's work?
- Is it original or innovative in its design?
- Is it beautiful, pleasing, or well-proportioned?
- Does it show a high degree of creative or technical accomplishment?
- Does it depict a subject, person, place, activity or event of interest or importance?

This criterion is most relevant to works of art, craft, design and decorative arts, but may also apply to items of technology, or mineral specimens or folk art. Items do not have to be art works to have artistic value. Some pictures may have little artistic significance but have historic value instead.

### Scientific or research significance

- Do researchers have an active interest in studying the item or collection today, or will they want to in the future?
- How is it of interest or value for science or research today or in the future?
- Is it of research potential and in what way?
- What things in particular constitute its scientific or research interest and research value?

This criterion only applies to items or collections of **current** scientific value, or with **research potential** such as archives, natural history or archaeological collections. Items such as historic scientific instruments are generally of historic significance.

### Social or spiritual significance

- Is it of particular value to a community or group today? Why is it important to them?
- How is this demonstrated? How is the item kept in the public eye, or its meaning kept alive for a group? For example, by use in an annual parade or ceremonies, or by maintaining traditional practices surrounding the item.
- Has the community been consulted about its importance for them?
- Is it of spiritual significance for a particular group?
- Is this spiritual significance found in the present?
- Does it embody beliefs, ideas, customs, traditions, practices or stories that are important for a particular group?

Social or spiritual significance is always specific to a particular, identified group of people. This type of significance only applies to items and collections where there is a **demonstrated contemporary attachment** between the item or collection and a group or community. Items or collections of social history interest are of historic significance. Religious items that are no longer used are more likely to be of historic or artistic significance. If the item or collection has spiritual or social significance, this should be demonstrated through consultation with the community or group.

## Comparative criteria

Four comparative criteria are used to evaluate the **degree** of significance. They interact with the primary criteria and may increase or decrease significance. For example, if the item is well provenanced it will generally be more significant; if it is in poor or incomplete condition, it will generally be of lower significance. Items or collections must be significant under one or more of the primary criteria. They cannot be significant if only the comparative criteria apply.

### Provenance

- Is it well documented or recorded for its class or type?
- Who created, made, owned or used the item or collection?
- Is its place of origin well documented?
- Is there a chain of ownership?
- Is the provenance reliable?
- How does the provenance shape the significance of the item or collection?

Provenance is part of the research in the assessment process as well as a comparative criterion.

### Rarity or representativeness

- Does it have unusual qualities that distinguish it from other items in the class or category?
- Is it unusual or a particularly fine example of its type?
- Is it singular, unique or endangered?
- Is it a good example of its type or class?
- Is it typical or characteristic?
- Is it particularly well documented for its class or group?

In some cases items may be both rare and representative, such as examples of nineteenth-century working dress. An item that is merely representative is unlikely to be significant. It has to be significant under one of the primary criteria.

### Condition or completeness

- Is it in good condition for its type?
- Is it intact or complete?
- Does it show repairs, alterations or evidence of the way it was used?
- Is it still working?
- Is it in original, unrestored condition?

In general, an item in original condition is more significant than one that has been restored.

### Interpretive capacity

- How is it relevant to the organisation's mission, purpose, collection policy and programs?
- Does it have a special place in the collection in relation to other items or a collection theme?
- Does it help to interpret aspects of its place or context?

## The statement of significance

A statement of significance is a reasoned, readable summary of the values, meaning and importance of an item or collection. It is more than a description of what the item or collection looks like. A statement of significance summarises **how** and **why** the item or collection is important. It is supported by research and evidence assembled through the assessment process.

The statement of significance incorporates all of the elements that contribute to the meaning of items and collections including appearance, fabric, design, context, environment, history, provenance, uses, function, social values and intangible associations.

Drawing all these values and attributes together into a statement of significance is an effective way of communicating and sharing knowledge about why an item or collection is important, and why it has a place in a public collection.

A statement of significance can be prepared for a single item, for a particular collection theme or subject, or for a whole collection. Significance is not set in stone and may change over time. From time to time it should be reviewed as circumstances change and knowledge develops.

### Why prepare a statement of significance?

- To summarise the meaning and importance of an item or collection
- To communicate these meanings to users and audiences
- To enhance access to and use of collections e.g. online
- To facilitate debate, discussion and understanding of the item or collection
- To synthesise knowledge and ideas about the item or collection
- To ensure that the provenance and associations of items and collections are fully recorded
- As a reference point when considering how best to conserve and manage the item, so that its important values and attributes are preserved
- As a resource for developing policies or actions towards further research, interpretation or collection management

### How to write a statement of significance

Collate all the information about the item or collection into a folder, including images, references to similar items and material from references of the period. Visual references are useful. These include historic photos, paintings, and advertising material from the period. Looking at images of similar items in use gives insights into its history, context and patterns of use.

Follow the step-by-step assessment process and develop notes under each heading or step. It is important to work through each step in the assessment process before starting on the statement of significance. That way the material functions as a reference point for crafting the statement of significance. It also means that the conclusions in the statement of significance can be substantiated by referring back to information assembled under each step in the assessment process.

While the statement of significance is best written as a readable paragraph or page, it doesn't have to be in perfect prose. Dot points are acceptable, e.g. *this item is significant because ...* It may be easier to start with dot points as a way of capturing the key elements of significance. The statement of significance may be as short as a few succinct sentences or several paragraphs, or it may be a page or more long. The length and level of detail will depend on the item or collection, the circumstances in which the assessment is carried out, and the available time, skills and resources.

Use the assessment criteria as a framework for refining ideas about the values, meaning and importance of the item or collection. Focus on explaining how and why the item or collection is important.

Some heritage registers structure the statement of significance by reference to each criterion. However, the statement of significance is more useful if it synthesises the whole story of the item or collection into a readable summary. That way it can be used in many different ways from in-house management to online access.

An interim statement of significance can be prepared pending further research.

If time is short, make sure the essential information about the item or collection's provenance and context is documented so that the statement of significance can be prepared later.

Assessing significance is a collaborative process. Confer with knowledgeable people to seek their ideas. Consider forming a small working group with each member drafting a statement of significance, then come together to discuss the work in progress and refine the drafts. This can be a very rewarding process that draws on the knowledge and insight of many people who share a passion for collections.

The statement of significance can encompass different points of view. It is rewarding to share ideas about what makes items and collections important. Skills and speed improve with practice.

## How the criteria shape the statement of significance for John Marsden's dress

This example shows how the criteria act as reference points in drafting the statement of significance, ensuring that the important attributes of the item are reflected there.

Other examples in Part 4 also show how the assessment criteria inform the statement of significance.

### Primary criteria

**Historic significance:** for its associations with a prominent colonial family; as a poignant keepsake of a domestic tragedy; as an example of an everyday child's dress worn in Australia; for its early date, just sixteen years after the beginning of European settlement in Australia.

### Comparative criteria

**Provenance:** reliably provenanced to John Marsden, and by descent through the Marsden family to Anne Hassall née Marsden, daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth Marsden, then to her daughter Eliza Hassall (1834–1917), and from her executors to the Royal Australian Historical Society which gave its collection to the Powerhouse Museum in 1981. The provenance is documented in a note written by Eliza Hassall and is verified in other sources. This is the earliest provenanced item of Australian dress.

**Rarity:** a very rare early example of an everyday child's dress

**Condition:** darned, stained and faded in places, showing the wear and tear of daily life.

### Statement of significance

A pink and white cotton child's dress worn in 1803 by John Marsden, the fourth child of Elizabeth and the Reverend Samuel Marsden. A note from the donor, Eliza Hassall, Elizabeth's granddaughter, accompanied the dress when it was given to the Royal Australian Historical Society. The note reads 'the dress Grandmother's little son had on when he fell into a pot of boiling water and died at the parsonage'. This little dress is a poignant keepsake of John Marsden's death. Its survival suggests the enduring grief of Elizabeth Marsden, who must have kept the dress until her death in 1835. A year after this terrible accident Elizabeth Marsden wrote 'the loss of those that I have parted from weighs so much on my mind that at times I am as miserable as it is possible to be'. The dress is a reminder of the dangers and risks that children faced in the home, and the tragedies that beset even the most powerful families in colonial society.

Everyday children's clothes rarely survive. This humble garment, with the darns and stains that evoke the hard wear of an active child, is a rare example of the ordinary clothes worn by children in the colony. In addition to its associations with the Marsden family, the dress is significant as the earliest provenanced item of Australian dress, dating from just sixteen years after the beginning of European settlement. As a well-provenanced garment, this is an important comparative piece for undated children's clothes.



A small child's pink and white printed cotton dress worn by John Marsden (1801–1803) when he died after falling into a pot of boiling water at the Parsonage in Parramatta in 1803  
Photo: Sotha Bourn  
Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

# Principles for good practice with significance

The principles opposite describe some important aspects of significance and underpin good practice for collections. They relate both to the assessment process and the management of collections. Many of the applications in Part 6 show the principles in action. The example below illustrates a number of principles for good practice with significance.

## Thomas Dick collection of photographs, 1910–20

The Thomas Dick photographs were taken around Port Macquarie from about 1910–20. These staged photographs show Aboriginal people in the bush, in traditional activities such as making a canoe and building a shelter, or posed with artefacts in typical arrangements that say more about the photographer and European conceptions of Indigenous people than about the traditional practices of Indigenous people themselves. The photographs are now scattered across collecting organisations in Australia and Britain.

Photographs by Thomas Dick are held in various collections in Australia and Britain, including those of the Birpai Land Council, Port Macquarie, members of the Dick family still living there and the Port Macquarie Historical Society; the Australian Museum and the State Library of NSW in Sydney; the University of Newcastle; the Western Australian Museum; the Queensland Museum; and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. Some of Dick's photos of Aboriginal people are held in the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, in Cambridge, UK.

In Port Macquarie, Council's regional museum curator and the Aboriginal development officer, who is a member of the Birpai Dunghutti group, are tracing the photographs, and researching and documenting the Aboriginal history and culture behind these well-known images. They have identified people and locations in the photographs and worked with families and descendants to understand the complex meanings of the images for them and the Aboriginal community in Port Macquarie. Information gathered through the research and consultations is changing the significance of the photographs and adding new layers of meaning.

The families and descendants are guiding the selection of images for a new exhibition and catalogue in 2009. Their knowledge and advice is shaping interpretation of the photographs. Networks developed through the project will ensure the continuing participation of descendants, and the use of the photographs for education and cultural renewal.



Thomas Dick  
*Aboriginal men on a waterway near  
 Port Macquarie 1910–20*  
 Reproduced courtesy of the  
 Port Macquarie Historical Society



## 1. Sustainability

### Manage items and collections to conserve their meanings and values

The obligation in managing public collections in trust for communities is to ensure that their meanings and values are conserved for current and future generations. Significance assessment is the key process to assist collection managers to understand and conserve the meanings and values of items and collections.

**Relevant case studies:** St Saviour Cathedral, page 27; 'Sustainability', online at Part 6.

## 2. Decision making

### Understand significance before making decisions about items and collections

Significance helps guide decisions about all aspects of the management of items and collections, including acquisitions, preservation, risk assessment, access, interpretation, return and repatriation. It makes sense to understand how and why an item is important before making decisions or taking action that could affect its conservation or meaning.

**Relevant case studies:** Clayton and Shuttleworth steam traction engine, page 51; 'Deaccessioning' and Menzies' Bentley, online at Part 6.

## 3. Associations

### Every item and collection has associations with people and places

These associations can be an important element of their significance. Relationships with people and places are easily ruptured as items are moved into collections. Recognising and documenting the connections between people, places and collections illuminates their meaning and may inform decisions about how items and collections are managed.

**Relevant case studies:** Chifley wireless, page 34; *View of Geelong*, page 50; Documenting *Springfield*, online at Part 6.

## 4. Consultation

### Always ask 'To whom is the item or collection important?'

Collection managers can learn a lot about the significance of items and collections by consulting people and communities who have knowledge of how an item or collection was made, used or valued. This knowledge may not be available in the future so it is important that people and communities are consulted without delay, as an integral part of the process of assessing significance. Conserving the significance of some items may require the continuing involvement of interested people or communities.

**Relevant case study:** Documenting *Springfield*, online at Part 6.

## 5. Collections and Indigenous people

### Recognise and respect the relationship between Indigenous people and collections<sup>37</sup>

Collections may hold special values and meanings for Indigenous people, illuminating culture, country, beliefs, identity, and family and community history. Understanding the significance of items and collection made by or about Indigenous people requires consultation and the involvement of appropriate Indigenous people and groups. This helps to ensure that the significance of the item or collection is properly understood, and that the meaning and values of the item are conserved into the future.

**Relevant case studies:** Thomas Dick collection, page 42; Margaret Lawrie collection, page 56.

## 6. Record keeping

### Significance assessment is based on good records; they are the key to the meaning of collections, answering questions now and in the future

Preservation, access, research and the security of collections all rely on good records. The records of collections may be an important dimension of their significance, linking items with intangible meanings and enhancing research values.

**Relevant case studies:** Aurukun

carvings, page 19; Adventist Heritage Centre, page 21; Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, online at Part 6.

## 7. Research

### Research, in all its forms, animates and illuminates the significance of items and collections

It builds relationships between collections, custodians and those who have an interest in and knowledge of the material. Research may change understanding of significance and unlock the potential of collections to contribute to Australian life.

**Relevant case studies:** Thylacine specimens, page 8; Thomas Dick collection, page 42.

## 8. Perspective

### Communities and collection managers may have different views about what makes an item significant

Significance can encompass a range of ideas about how and why the item is valued. Different points of view about an item or collection can be considered and expressed in the assessment process and statement of significance.

**Relevant case study:** Thomas Dick collection, page 42.

## 9. Change

### Significance is not fixed in time but may alter with changes in communities, culture, politics, science and the environment

New research may lead to the reappraisal of the significance of items and collections. Statements of significance should be reviewed from time to time to take account of change and new research.

**Relevant case studies:** Thylacine specimens, page 8; palaeontological collections, page 59.

## Part 6 Significance in action—applications

### Significance assessment applications

Significance assessment is only the first part of the significance process.

Once an item or collection has been assessed as significant, a range of actions, called 'applications' here, flow from the assessment.

These two pages contain a snapshot of how collecting organisations have used significance assessment to better manage their collections, to make them accessible, and to advocate for their importance to the community.

Note: captions and acknowledgements for these images appear on page 46.

Please visit *Significance 2.0* online to see the full case studies for the applications of interest to you.

**Significance**<sup>2.0</sup>  
<http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>



#### ACQUISITION...

of the *Charlotte* medal

1



#### COLLECTION CARE...

of South Sea Islands artefacts

5



#### DEACCESSIONING...

of 6 000 items from the National Trust of Australia (WA) collection

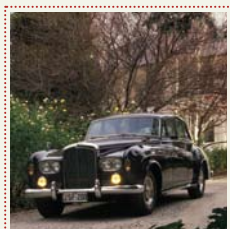
2



#### COPYING AND DIGITISATION...

of the James Gleeson Oral History Collection

6



#### CONSERVATION TREATMENT...

of Prime Minister Menzies' Bentley

3



#### COLLECTION ANALYSIS AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT...

at the University of Melbourne

7



#### COLLECTION RISK ASSESSMENT...

of Australian flag fragments for priority salvage

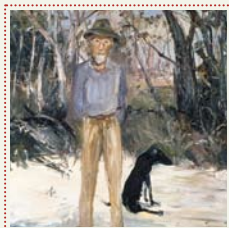
4



#### IN SITU COLLECTIONS...

documenting the *Springfield* sheep station collection before transfer

8



### SHARED COLLECTIONS...

managing the Manning Clark portrait between a private historic house and a government gallery

9



### ADVOCACY AND RESOURCING...

of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre

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### EXHIBITIONS AND INTERPRETATION...

of an art installation in a travelling exhibition

10



### FUNDRAISING AND PROMOTION...

for the Great Melbourne Telescope

17



### ONLINE EXHIBITIONS...

Bungaree lithograph in the *Objects Through Time* online exhibition

11



### FUNDRAISING AND PROMOTION...

for the *Nelcebee*

18



### ONLINE ACCESS AND EDUCATION...

at the Sydney 2000 Olympics website

12



### THEMATIC STUDIES AND REGIONAL SURVEYS...

*Her Story* at Port Macquarie

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### ASSESSING CULTURAL HERITAGE WEBSITE QUALITY...

for the Australian Government's Culture Portal

13



### THEMATIC STUDIES AND REGIONAL SURVEYS...

*Timber Stories* in the Hastings region

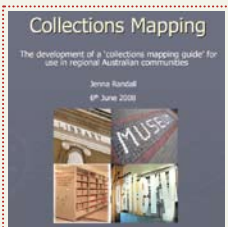
20



### NOMINATING TO A REGISTER...

Riawe to the Australian Register of Historic Vessels

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### COLLECTIONS MAPPING...

see <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/collections+mapping.aspx>

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### APPLYING FOR A GRANT...

Jilamara Arts and Crafts collection to the Community Heritage Grants Program

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### SIGNIFICANCE TRAINING...

across Australia

22

## Significance assessment applications—captions and acknowledgements

1

Attributed to Thomas Barrett  
The *Charlotte* medal 1788  
Photo: Andrew Frolows  
Reproduced courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney  
Purchased with the assistance of the National Cultural Heritage Account

2

Some of the over 6 000 items deaccessioned by the National Trust of Australia (Western Australia)  
Photo: Sarah Murphy  
Photo courtesy of the National Trust of Australia (WA)

3

Menzies' Bentley in front of The Lodge after conservation  
Photo: Heidi Smith  
National Museum of Australia

4

Re-enactment of the raising of the 1901 Australian flag in Townsville, 16 September, 1951  
Reproduced courtesy of the *CityLibraries*, Townsville City Council

5

Bark cloth cloak of the Kukukuku people, Papua New Guinea, draped over a roll of woven coconut fibre matting, adjacent to an access ramp  
Reproduced courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre and South Sea Islands Museum, Cooranbong, New South Wales  
Photo: Roslyn Russell

6

The National Library of Australia is digitising oral histories originally recorded on audio cassette to avoid format obsolescence

7

*Policy and minimum requirements for management of cultural collections* (2006)  
Report cover reproduced courtesy of the University of Melbourne

8

*Springfield*, Goulburn  
Photo: George Serras  
National Museum of Australia

9

Arthur Boyd  
*Portrait of Manning Clark* 1972  
Oil on canvas  
Reproduced courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

10

Danie Mellor, *The contrivance of a vintage Wonderland* (*A magnificent flight of curious fancy for science buffs, a china ark of seductive whimsy, a divinely ordered special attraction, upheld in multifariousness*) 2007  
Installation, mixed media, kangaroo skin, ceramic, synthetic eyeballs, wood and birds  
Dimensions variable 400.0 x 760.0 x 760.0 cm  
Reproduced courtesy of the artist and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

11

Augustus Earle  
*Bungaree: King of the Aborigines of New South Wales*, 1826  
Lithograph  
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, after an original painting on display in the National Gallery of Australia from the collection of the National Library of Australia

12

Olympic torch, used by Catherine (Cathy) Freeman Sydney 2000 Olympics, metal, designed by Blue Sky Design, made by GA & L Harrington, c. 2000. Part of the Sydney 2000 Games Collection. Gift of the New South Wales Government, 2001  
Photo: Marince Kojdanovski  
Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

13

Australian Government's Culture Portal website collection policy is described at <<http://www.culture.gov.au/policy/>>

14

*Riawe*, a motor launch built by shipwright Ned Jack in 1912, private owner, Tasmania  
Photo courtesy of private owner and Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney

15

Kitty Kantilla  
*Pupini Jilamara* circa 1990s  
ochre on bark  
Reproduced courtesy of Jilamara Arts and Crafts Association

16

Geological map accompanying report of John Henderson, Colliery Manager, 8 May 1827. 78/1/2, Private letters received by the Governor of the Australian Agricultural Company from the General Superintendent in Australia, ff. 186–189  
Reproduced courtesy of Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University

17

Part of the burnt-out 50-inch telescope at Mt Stromlo Observatory incorporating parts of the Great Melbourne Telescope, 2004  
Photo: Nick Lomb  
Reproduced courtesy of the Sydney Observatory, Powerhouse Museum

18

*Nelcebee*, built 1883, Australia's oldest powered ship now in need of restoration  
Reproduced courtesy of South Australian Maritime Museum

19

Cover of thematic study: *Her Story—a collection of women's stories, places and objects in the Hastings*, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, 2008  
Reproduced courtesy of the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council

20

Bill Boyd, with his broad axe at Timbertown at Wauchope, where he demonstrated sleeper cutting in 1979. Bill is a third generation timber worker, and one of the last vernacular timber craftsmen who can build and restore a slab hut using traditional tools. *Timber Stories* recorded the skills and work of men like Bill Boyd, connecting the collections with people and places.  
Reproduced courtesy of Fairfaxphotos

21

The Collections Council of Australia has commissioned work on collections mapping. Powerpoint slide: Jenna Randall

22

Jai Paterson, Roving Curator for Arts Tasmania, teaching museum volunteers at Oatlands Courthouse, Tasmania  
Photo: Elizabeth Adkins  
Reproduced courtesy of Arts Tasmania



## Part 7 National and international significance

### Introducing national significance

Some items and collections are more important for Australia and Australians than others, and at times the level of this importance, or significance, needs to be determined.

In making a significance assessment, a ranking scale or a 'tick-the-boxes' matrix is not the answer. Instead, a reasoned argument, based on research, analysis and comparison through the significance assessment process and criteria, is crucial to establishing national or international significance.

An agreement or decision about whether an item or collection is of national or international significance is required when:

- deciding whether or not to allow the export of an item or collection from Australia
- including an item or collection on a register of significant cultural heritage
- allocating a grant for significant material at the national level

Legislation (the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, and the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Regulations 1987* (PMCH)) protect Australia's heritage of movable cultural objects and supports the protection by foreign countries of their heritage of movable cultural objects. The PMCH Regulations set out the National Cultural Heritage Control List of objects covered by the legislation. Under the PMCH Act, an object that meets the criterion of being an Australian protected object under the National Cultural Heritage Control List requires a permit if the object is to be exported. Part of that process usually involves an assessment of significance by an 'Expert Examiner'.

Registers of significant items and collections promote awareness and appreciation of the material and its importance for understanding Australian history, environment, culture and creativity.

Grants to help preserve significant items and collections are based on assessments of their national significance.

An example of this type of grant is the Community Heritage Grants program (conducted by the National Library of Australia and supported by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, the National Archives of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive).

These mechanisms, programs and processes exist to ensure that highly significant items and collections are preserved for the benefit of all Australians today and for the future.

### Australia, the sum of its parts

Australia is a federation of states and territories, a big country made up of diverse communities, environments, and cultures. Each state and territory has a distinctive history, geography and pattern of development which form an important part of what makes Australia a nation. Australia's movable heritage collections reflect the diversity of its culture, environments and political systems. Similarly, no one Aboriginal language group is more important than another, each contributes to the rich heritage of Indigenous cultures in Australia. Therefore, items and collections may be of national significance if they are important to Australia, or to a particular part of Australia.<sup>38</sup>

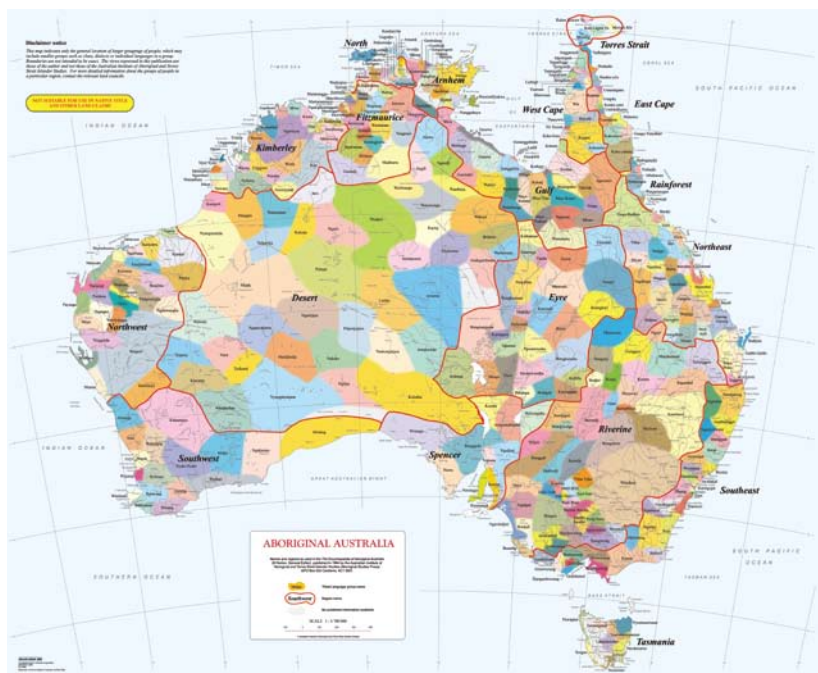
In Australia, assessment processes for the built or natural environment frequently consider and rank places according to national, state or local significance. This process is tied to legislative and planning regimes for land management and is associated with local, state and national heritage registers. Place-based heritage assessments are informed by decades of research through thematic studies and comparative assessments of various types of places, landscapes and environments. Some heritage practitioners now question the validity and consequences of the implied hierarchy of local, state and national significance.

The concept of national significance in regard to movable items and collections has received relatively little attention, and there are few coherent, accessible registers for aspects of movable heritage.

Only a small amount of comparative work has been done on subjects and themes across Australian collections, which can make it more difficult to substantiate assessments of national significance, because doing so requires careful comparison with similar items or collections.

Some items and collections are associated with themes, events and people significant in Australia's history e.g. items associated with federation or the early European settlement of Australia, and as such are more easily identified as being of national or state significance. But the patterning of Australia's regional development and its cultural diversity is also significant in a national context and many items of working life are all integral to the nation's story. So, items or collections may be of national significance if they are important to a certain region, or to its history, culture and people. Many nationally significant items are held in regional and community collections, and in family and private collections all over Australia. The local or regional context in which these items exist may be an integral part of their significance, so values and meanings are frequently intertwined. In current practice there is no conceptually valid hierarchy of national, state or local significance for items and collections,<sup>39</sup> and this is particularly the case for items and collections that are not of historic significance—for example, it makes no sense to try and ascribe state or local significance to certain scientific collections that have no particular association with state or local activities.

In future, as knowledge of Australia's Distributed National Collection develops, a more rigorous system of levels of significance may evolve. This might more sensibly be based on a system of gradings, rather than place-based levels of significance. Nevertheless, despite gaps in some areas of comparative knowledge of collections, there are occasions when it is important to establish national significance, and the following criteria are framed to assist this process.



Map of the main Indigenous language groups highlighting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait language groups in Australia. This patterning of people and places is reflected in the movable heritage and collections of Indigenous Australia. Each group and its movable heritage is an important part of Australia's national heritage and its significant collections.

Please note: This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988-1994, this map attempts to represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. This map is not suitable for use in native title and other land claims. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIASIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

Maps of Aboriginal language groups have been made almost from the beginnings of European settlement, by various people, including the anthropologist Norman B Tindale in 1940, revised in 1974.



Map of Australia showing state and territory boundaries. These historic and political boundaries contribute to the character of collections in each state and territory. Regional affiliations also shape the character of collections but are not so well recognised or mapped.

Design: Orbit Design Group

## National significance—criteria for national significance

Assessing national significance is a process that can be added, when needed, to the significance assessment process described previously. An item or collection's outstanding qualities and influence are important determinants of national significance, and are explored by research, analysis, comparative assessment and reference to the assessment criteria (opposite). This in turn shapes the statement of significance.

Like the standard assessment criteria, values may be interrelated. Items or collections of national significance will generally be significant under more than one criterion. In addition to meeting at least one of the 'threshold' questions for the primary criteria, the item or collection may also, for example, be in outstanding original condition, or have a particularly well-documented provenance.

Before considering the criteria for national significance it is essential to follow the step-by-step method, assembling research notes under each step in the assessment process. This ensures that consideration of the criteria is based on sound research and knowledge, rather than assertion, or 'talking up' the item or collection. Conclusions in the statement of significance should be supported by reference to notes and research developed through the assessment process.

Context helps to place the item or collection in a bigger national picture. A well-founded assessment of national significance entails high level research and a deep knowledge of the subject, and is supported by references, comparative examples and consultation with appropriate people.

Comparative assessment is a particularly important element in establishing national significance. It demonstrates how an item or collection compares with similar material.

The criteria on this page reflect earlier discussions in this book, especially in Part 5, pages 39 and 40. Some of the earlier text is repeated here in order to present a guide to the criteria for assessing national significance on one page.

## Primary criteria

### Historic significance

- Is the item or collection associated with an important historical event? Did it contribute to changing the course of national history or have an impact on the development of Australia or a part of Australia?
- Is the item an outstanding example associated with an important event, person, place, period, activity, industry or theme?
- Is the work an outstanding example representing the course or pattern of Australia's natural or cultural history?
- Is the item or collection associated with a pivotal discovery or innovation in the history of science, technology or design in Australia?

### Artistic or aesthetic significance

- How important is the artist, writer, designer or creator?
- Is it an excellent example of a style, design, artistic movement or iconography?
- Does the work have an important or pivotal place in an artist's *oeuvre*?
- Does the work depict an important place, person, period, activity, story, idea or event?
- Does the work show outstanding artistic, design, innovation or technical accomplishment?
- Does the item have outstanding aesthetic value?

This criterion is most relevant to works of art, craft, design and decorative arts, but may also apply to items of technology, or mineral specimens or folk art. Items do not have to be art works to have artistic or aesthetic value. Some pictures may have little artistic significance but have historic value instead.

### Scientific or research significance

- Does the item or collection support research on an important, rare or endangered aspect of the natural environment?
- Does the item or collection have outstanding potential to yield information or knowledge that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history?
- How or why is the item or collection of outstanding scientific interest or research potential?

This criterion only applies to items or collections of **current** scientific value, or with **research potential** such as archives, natural history or archaeological collections. Items such as historic scientific instruments are generally of historic significance.

### Social or spiritual significance

- How is the item or collection of outstanding social or spiritual value for a group or community?
- Does the work embody beliefs, ideas, customs, traditions, associations, practices, places or stories that are highly important for a particular group?
- How is the important social or spiritual significance of the item or collection established or demonstrated?

Social or spiritual significance is always specific to a particular, identified group of people. Social or spiritual significance only applies to items and collections where there is a **demonstrated contemporary attachment** between the item or collection and a group or community. Items or collections of social history interest are of historic significance. Religious items that are no longer used are more likely to be of historic or artistic significance. If the item or collection has spiritual or social significance, this needs to be demonstrated through consultation with the community or group.

## Comparative criteria

Items or collections must be significant under one of the primary criteria, before considering the comparative criteria. The comparative criteria interact with the primary criteria to help clarify and elucidate whether the item or collection is important enough to meet the 'threshold' of national significance. The comparative criteria may **increase or decrease** significance, depending on how they interact with the primary criteria.

### Provenance

- Does the item have a particularly well documented provenance?
- How does this add to the meaning and importance of the item or collection?

Note: Provenance is part of the research in the assessment process as well as a comparative criterion.

### Rarity or representativeness

- How rare is the item or collection? Is it the only one that exists in the country or the world?
- Is the item an outstanding or iconic example, representative of its class or type?

In some cases, items may be both rare and representative, such as examples of nineteenth-century working dress. An item that is merely representative is unlikely to be of national significance. It has to be significant under one of the primary criteria.

### Condition or completeness

- Is the item in original or intact condition?
- Does the item or collection display outstanding integrity and completeness for its type?
- Does the condition of the item make an important contribution to understanding its use, history, creation or development?

### Interpretive capacity

- Does the item have a highly important place in the collection or in its place of context?



.....

The statements of significance for *View of Geelong* and the Clayton & Shuttleworth steam engine (opposite) demonstrate their significance to the nation. As a result of formal application to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, the acquisition of these items was supported by the National Cultural Heritage Account.

.....

## Case studies of national significance

### Eugène von Guérard, *View of Geelong*, Geelong Gallery

#### Summary statement of significance

*View of Geelong* was painted in 1856, five years after the discovery of gold in Victoria. It shows a sweeping view from the Barrabool Hills across a golden landscape to the young town of Geelong, and Corio Bay, with the You Yangs in the distance. The painting combines minutely observed details into a great romantic landscape bathed in a mellow golden afternoon light. It is a picture of fertility and promise, depicting the young settlement of Geelong at a turning point in its history as the busiest wool port in Victoria, and the port of arrival for the goldfields.

After its first exhibition it was purchased by Andrew Cruikshank, a partner in the Dalgety pastoral company. It was shipped to England in 1859 and remained in the Dalgety family until it was purchased at auction in 1996 by the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, leaving the Geelong Gallery and the community of Geelong as the disappointed underbidder.

On loan to the Gallery it became the focus of intense interest for the community. Visitor numbers increased, the posters sold out, and tours were taken to the hills above Geelong to see the view. Numerous press articles supported the Gallery's efforts to buy the work. In 2006, the Gallery acquired the painting following a widely publicised and passionately supported public appeal for funds.

*View of Geelong* is one the artist's largest and most accomplished paintings. Artistically, the painting is a triumph of the German Romantic style—and topographic accuracy—applied to a panoramic 'new world' vista in which the incursions of European settlement have only just begun to make their mark on a palpably fertile, ancient and dramatic landscape. It is a detailed and atmospheric document of the appearance from afar of the early township and port of Geelong depicted at a momentous time in Australian history, following the Victorian gold rush. The work is particularly significant to the people of Geelong for its accurate yet lyrical evocation of the beauty of the surrounding landscape and bay, and for the way it captures an important moment in Geelong's history and development.



Eugène von Guérard  
*View of Geelong* 1856  
 Oil on canvas  
 89.0 x 152.5 cm  
 Collection: Geelong Gallery

Purchased through the Geelong Art Gallery Foundation with the generous support of the Victorian Government, the Australian Government, the City of Greater Geelong and numerous community and other donors, 2006



## Clayton & Shuttleworth steam traction engine, Golden Memories Museum, Millthorpe

### Summary statement of significance

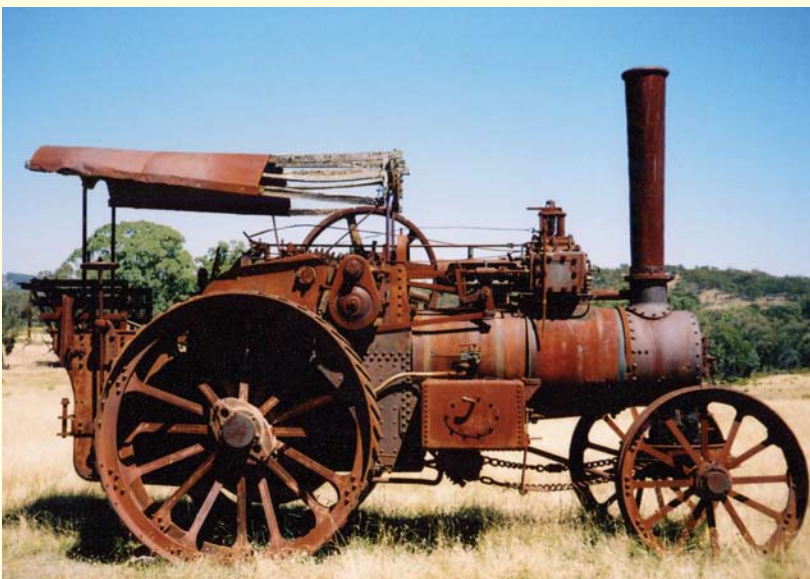
The engine was purchased by Frederick Rowlands of Cowra from Dalgety & Sons, for use in land clearing and other agricultural activities. In 1928 it was sold by hire purchase to the Henry family, who used it to power stamper batteries at gold mines in the Trunkey Creek area of NSW.

This Clayton & Shuttleworth compound 8hp engine is an outstanding example of the kind of steam traction engines that were imported and used for land clearing, powering chaff cutters and mining in Australia. Steam engines of this type powered regional economies, transforming the environment from bush into agricultural land and mining sites, creating tremendous wealth for the regions and the nation. The various uses of the engine in its working life highlight the adaptability of the steam traction engine for a wide range of tasks in rural Australia.

This is the most complete and original example of a Clayton & Shuttleworth traction engine in Australia, so it is a reference example for research in steam engineering history and for conservation and restoration projects on similar engines. The engine shows evidence of its hard working life and some post-manufacture adaptations to enhance its operation and to equip it for other work, such as chaff cutting.

The engine is well provenanced from the time of its original purchase, with documentation including the hire purchase agreement. Mining and agriculture are the two main enterprises in the development and prosperity of central NSW, and this engine is associated with both activities. The significance of the engine is enhanced by its presence in the region where it was used, particularly as the Museum has in its collection one of the stamper batteries powered by the engine.

The Clayton & Shuttleworth steam engine is historically significant as an outstanding example of a type of engine that helped to build regional economies and the wealth of Australia. Its detailed provenance and its original and complete condition, and its location in its region of use, act to enhance its significance for the Australian nation.



The Clayton & Shuttleworth engine before acquisition  
by the Golden Memories Museum, Millthorpe, NSW  
Photo: Kylie Winkworth

*The Aboriginal Memorial* is of national significance for its historical role as the first national commemoration of Indigenous people who died as a result of white occupation of Australia from 1788 to Australia's bicentenary in 1988. Its 200 log coffins symbolise both the number of years between these events; and the bone-burial ceremonies used in Arnhem Land to signify the soul's transfer from this world to the next. The log coffins in *The Memorial*, many of them created by outstanding Aboriginal artists, are also of great artistic significance. Its social significance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is expressed through its location within the parliamentary triangle.

### Ramingining artists, *The Aboriginal Memorial*, National Gallery of Australia

*The Aboriginal Memorial* is an installation of 200 painted hollow log coffins made in 1987–88 by artists from central Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory to mark the survival of Indigenous culture after two centuries of European settlement in Australia. It recognises the thousands of Indigenous people who died defending their land in the face of settlement, and for whom proper burials were not conducted; and it celebrates the survival of Indigenous cultures in contemporary times.

*The Aboriginal Memorial* occupies a prominent position in the National Gallery of Australia, and hence it is situated within the Canberra Parliamentary Triangle as was intended by its makers in recognition of its political nature and its national significance.

The form of the *Memorial* is also symbolic. The painted hollow logs are of a type used in Arnhem Land in bone-burial ceremonies that signify the transition of the soul of the deceased from this world to the next. As such, the *Memorial* presages a change in Australian society at large, from an intolerant and racist past to an egalitarian and just future.

The *Memorial* was originally shown as part of the Biennale of Sydney in 1988 before being unveiled at the National Gallery in September of that year. In 1999 it was toured internationally as the centrepiece of this country's representation of the art of its Indigenous people in the lead up to the Sydney Olympics when it was shown at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne. It was also shown at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, and the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, in 1999–2000.

The forty-three artists who created the *Memorial* include some major practitioners of Indigenous art in Australia: Jimmy Wululu, David Malangi, John Mawurndjul, Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, Elizabeth Djutarra, George Milpurrruru, Djardie Ashley, Paddy Dhathangu and Philip Gudthaykudthay. The shape of the installation imitates a map of country; it follows the Glyde River estuary in north-central Arnhem Land, and the log coffins are grouped on both sides of the central aisle or river according to the location of each clan.<sup>40</sup>



Ramingining Artists  
*The Aboriginal Memorial* 1987–88  
 Natural pigments on wood  
 Height (irreg.) 327.0cm  
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased with the assistance of funds from National Gallery admission charges and commissioned in 1987

## Australian women's suffrage petitions, Public Record Office Victoria and Parliament of South Australia

The Victorian women's suffrage petition of 1891 contains almost 30 000 signatures and addresses collected by members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Victorian Temperance Alliance and other women's suffrage groups, demanding the right for women to vote in the colony of Victoria. Presented with the support of Premier James Munro, whose wife was one of the signatories, it was the largest petition to be tabled in the Parliament of Victoria in the nineteenth century.

Comprising many fabric-backed sheets of paper glued together and rolled onto a cardboard spindle, the 'monster petition' is approximately 260 metres long by 200 mm wide. It bears statements 'that government of the People, by the People and for the People should mean all the People, not half', and 'that all Adult Persons should have a voice in Making the Laws which they are required to obey'.

It exemplifies efforts of grassroots Australian women's movements and was a catalyst for other Australian states' women to lodge petitions in their respective parliaments; while South Australia's suffrage petition was successful sooner than Victoria's, none was as large as the Victorian petition.

In December 1894 the South Australian Parliament became the first in Australia, and only the second in the world, to extend the suffrage to women. The 1894 Petition was presented to Parliament just as the third reading of the Constitution Amendment Bill, proposing to extend the suffrage to women, was being debated. It contained 11 600 signatures, two-thirds of them from women, and was the largest of several petitions presented on this matter. The 1894 petition was recognised as a significant factor in securing the passage of the *Constitution Amendment Act 1894–95* (SA).

The suffrage petitions are of research potential for the thousands of Victorian and South Australian names they contain and that can be followed up by historians interested in the individuals and groups comprising the suffrage movement.

These two suffrage petitions, are now inscribed on the UNESCO Australian *Memory of the World* Register.



1891 Women's suffrage petition. PROV, VPRS 3253/P0, original papers tabled in Legislative Assembly, Unit 851. Also known as the 'Monster Petition'. Displayed by Diane Gardiner, Public Record Office Victoria  
Photo: Asa Letourneau.

Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of Public Records, Public Record Office Victoria, Australia

## Development of registers

Registers are lists of places, items or collections that are considered to be significant in particular ways or, at specific levels. They are created for several reasons:

- to recognise and promote understanding of the value of places and collections to a wide audience
- to protect significant places or items, sometimes through associated legislation, or through community awareness
- to prioritise funding for conservation and interpretation
- to build knowledge of the subject, theme or category as the basis for sound decisions and planning
- to document the outcome of surveys, thematic studies or collections mapping

Examples of registers include national, state and territory heritage registers, registers kept by community organisations such as the National Trust, and international registers such as the UNESCO *Memory of the World* Registers for documentary heritage. Australian registers of movable items include the National Quilt Register,<sup>41</sup> the Australian Register of Historic Vessels,<sup>42</sup> and the NSW Migration Heritage Centre's *Belongings Register* of migration heritage items.<sup>43</sup>

The suffrage petitions are significant for their role in alerting Australians to the issue of votes for women; for their research potential; and as testimony to popular support for the movement as it progressed towards the achievement of its goal.

### Development of registers (continued)

Nominations to place-based registers often come through heritage and thematic studies. Some states and territories have the capacity to register movable items on heritage registers under their heritage legislation. An important benefit of registers, and the thematic studies that may underpin nominations, is that they provide comparative information for assessing the significance of items and collections. Comparative knowledge is essential in assessing the level of significance and evaluating whether an item or collection is of national significance. Registers such as *Memory of the World* are based on strict criteria and demonstrate the 'threshold' or level of significance through the nomination process and statement of significance for each registration. While place-based heritage has the benefit of almost forty years of work developing registers and knowledge of different types of items, this has not been the case for movable items and collections. This knowledge will take time to develop.

The unique footage by Ashmead-Bartlett is of national significance as the only contemporary film version of aspects of Australian participation in the Gallipoli campaign of 1915. This iconic event is commemorated annually on Anzac Day and is regarded by many Australians as the most sacred day in the year.

### Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's film of the Gallipoli campaign, Australian War Memorial

*With the Dardanelles expedition: heroes of Gallipoli* is a silent black-and-white documentary film made in 1915 by celebrated British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and official photographer Ernest Brooks. It features inter-titles by Australian war historian CEW Bean. The film has been digitally restored and runs for twenty minutes two seconds.

A remarkable achievement in film-making under difficult battlefield conditions, it is the only known moving imagery of the Dardanelles campaign in the Gallipoli Peninsula. Filmed at Imbros Island, Anzac Cove, Cape Helles and Suvla Bay, it features Australian, New Zealand and British troops in military operations and daily life, as well as showing Turkish prisoners of war and excellent footage of the terrain.

The film shows soldiers in action in frontline trenches using periscope rifles—an Australian innovation—and remarkable scenes of a firefight and Turkish shells exploding in the Allies' positions. It highlights the logistical challenges faced by the campaign, including scenes of a donkey being lifted over the water from a supply ship to land.

The national significance of the film led to its being inscribed on the UNESCO *Australian Memory of the World* Register in 2008.



Australian soldiers using periscope rifles  
Still Frame Capture Image From Australian War  
Memorial Film Number F00069  
Reproduced courtesy of the Australian War Memorial



### Mountford-Sheard collection, State Library of South Australia

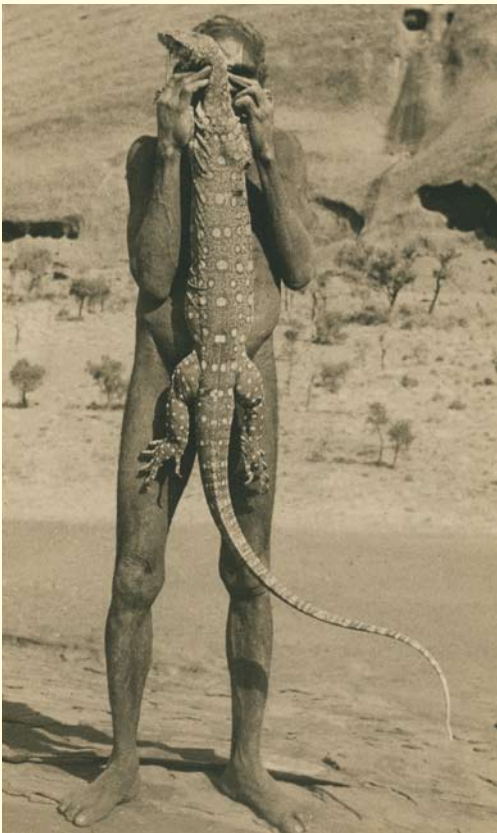
The Mountford-Sheard collection holds the wealth of material gathered by self-taught South Australian ethnographer CP Mountford (1890–1976) during a career spanning the 1930s to the 1960s. Included are field notebooks and journals, photographic images, motion pictures, sound recordings, artworks, correspondence and published works, along with his extensive personal library.

The collection holds items of great cultural significance to many Aboriginal communities in Australia, most particularly those in Central Australia, the Flinders Ranges, Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands. Mountford was a prolific note-taker and his journals provide a valuable insight into the practices of twentieth-century anthropology and ethnography.

The material produced by Mountford, particularly his photography, is significant because it is both respectful of and empathetic to the Aboriginal people and their culture. Such awareness and respect were absent from mainstream Australia at that time. The detail with which Mountford recorded artistic, religious and ceremonial life is of ongoing importance to the spiritual life of these communities.

The Mountford-Sheard collection was inscribed on the UNESCO Australian *Memory of the World* Register in 2008.

The Mountford-Sheard Collection is of national historical significance for its extensive documentation, over a thirty-year period, of the traditional cultural practices of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, the Flinders Ranges, Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands. The collection is also of great social significance to members of those communities.



Aboriginal man holding a  
Ngintaka lizard, 1940  
Photograph from the  
Mountford-Sheard collection  
SLSA: PRG 1218/34/1060c  
Photograph courtesy of the  
State Library of South Australia

The Margaret Lawrie collection is of historical and social significance for the Australian nation for its comprehensive documentation of the traditional life of the people of the Torres Strait Islands.

### Margaret Lawrie Torres Strait Island collection, State Library of Queensland

The flowers and pods of the mangrove tree are used in storytelling by children on the beach. In the story of Biuis (mangrove trees) well told in the western and central Badu Islands, the flowers and pods represent people.

In this image the open buds represent mother and daughters wearing grass skirts; the small closed bud represents a baby; and the dried brown flower (fruit pod) represents a wicked witch or Dogai.

The Margaret Lawrie collection of Torres Strait Islands material is the culmination of the life's work of Margaret Lawrie, a contemporary of noted Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal (formerly Kath Walker). They travelled widely together throughout the 1950s and 1960s. During this time they were both important influences on the development of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, documenting their history, languages and cultures.

Margaret Lawrie later became interested in the history and cultures of the Torres Strait Islander peoples and spent significant periods in various Torres Strait Islands communities. She gathered first-hand information and material about the myths, legends, languages, history, art and culture of the region.

Also in the collection are the manuscripts of her two published works, *Myths and legends of the Torres Strait* and *Tales from Torres Strait*. The former work was published in both Australia and the United States. Although out of print, it is still widely considered an iconic work.

The collection is the most significant relating to the Torres Strait since the one taken to the UK by the Cambridge University-sponsored Haddon Expedition of the 1890s. It was inscribed on the UNESCO Australian *Memory of the World* Register in 2008.



Flowers and fruit of the mangrove for kamu sagul  
Reproduced courtesy of State Library of Queensland

### Convict records of Australia—State Records Offices of New South Wales and of Western Australia; Archives Office of Tasmania

The forced emigration to the continent of Australia of some 165 000 people in the eighty years between 1788 and 1868 represents the beginning of the modern age of globalisation by government agency. Selected by the judicial apparatus of industrialising Britain, the convicts were sentenced to the punishment of exile; yet their forced labour ultimately resulted in the establishment of viable colonies. In 1901 these colonies became an independent federation of states—the Commonwealth of Australia—just over a hundred years after the first convicts landed at Sydney Cove in 1788.

The convicts' lives were minutely documented by a dedicated bureaucracy, generating a rare body of records of nineteenth-century working-class people, from their British roots to their Australian fates. These records contain information relating to all aspects of convicts' lives, including physical appearance, literacy level, trade or calling, crime and sentence, behaviour in incarceration, further punishment, pardon, ticket of leave and marriage. The forensic details about individual convicts have enabled historians to build a picture of the human capital that shaped the economy, demography and culture of early colonial Australia.

Nowhere else in the world do the complete records of the inner workings of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century penal system exist over such an extended period (for example, in Britain, only trial records exist for convicts transported to North America and the West Indies, 1615–1776). The occasional experiments in penal management had significant legal consequences for the freedom of all citizens. Rehabilitative and retributive approaches to crime and punishment are documented scrupulously in the convict records.

The significance of the convict records of Australia is further enhanced by their association with a suite of sites associated with the convict system across the country. These are listed on the National Heritage Register and have been nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage Register.



Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney, NSW, built to a design by convict architect Francis Greenway and listed on the National Heritage Register  
Photo: Roslyn Russell

### Items and collections of international significance

The same 'threshold' questions asked about criteria when assessing national significance can be used when making an assessment of international significance. In this case, the word 'international' should be substituted for 'national' on page 48. The 'impact' or 'influence' of the item of collection, or what it represents, must extend beyond the borders of a nation state (and preferably beyond a single global region e.g. Asia-Pacific) for items or collections to be regarded as internationally significant. When making a claim for international significance, it is good practice to consult experts outside Australia (or your own country), and if possible, in the nominated region.

#### UNESCO Memory of the World inscriptions

Australia currently has four inscriptions on the UNESCO *Memory of the World* Register of documentary heritage of world significance: the *Endeavour* journal of James Cook and the *Mabo Case* papers, inscribed in 2001; and *The Story of the Kelly Gang* 1906 and the convict records of Australia, inscribed in 2007. The *Memory of the World* program is the only one to date to compile registers of movable cultural heritage of world significance, but only includes documentary items.<sup>44</sup>

The convict records of Australia are of international historical significance as they document the demographic foundation of the Australian nation, and the nature and workings of the British system of transportation that created the first European colony in Australasia.

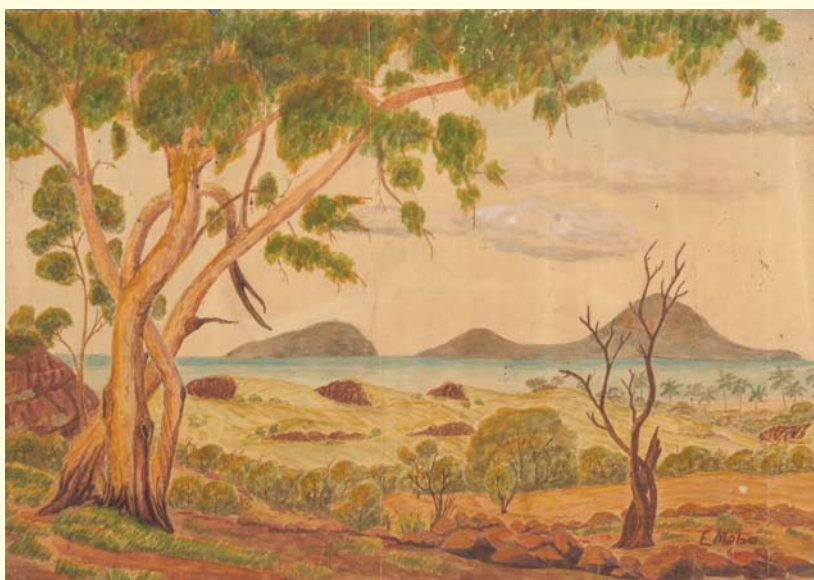
The *Mabo Case* papers are of international historical significance as a rare example in world history of pre-existing customary law being recognised as superior to the law of an invading culture, regardless of the economic and political implications.

### **Mabo Case papers, National Library of Australia**

In June 1992 the High Court of Australia, in its judgment in the *Mabo Case*, overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* — that Australia was an empty land owned by no one at the time of European colonisation. The judgment changed Australia's legal landscape, and influenced the status and land rights of its Indigenous peoples and race relations in Australia generally. It is a rare instance in world history of pre-existing customary law being recognised as superior to the law of the 'invading' culture, regardless of the economic and political implications. The *Mabo Case* papers, 1959–92, are significant for their documentation of a crucial period in the history of race relations in Australia, featuring a series of battles and legal cases over the ownership and use of land, growing awareness of racial discrimination, and the social and health problems of Indigenous peoples. The issues discussed in the papers bear on the rights of Indigenous peoples and the descendants of European settlers throughout Australia. The papers document much of the life, experiences and thoughts of Edward Koiki Mabo, who was 'the successful principal plaintiff in the landmark High Court ruling on native land title'.<sup>45</sup>

The *Mabo Case* papers were inscribed on the UNESCO *Memory of the World* International Register in 2001, along with the *Endeavour* journal of James Cook, the first two inscriptions from Australia on the Register.

Eddie Mabo's paintings and drawings of the Torres Strait, held in the National Library of Australia and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), are significant as visual depictions of the connection between land and sea that most Australians now associate with his name, and 'provide an insight into the many facets of his keen awareness of the world and his own environment'.<sup>46</sup>



Eddie Mabo  
*Duar and Waier Islands?*, Collection of Art Works by  
 Edward Koiki Mabo 1964  
 nla.pic-an24341106  
 Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia



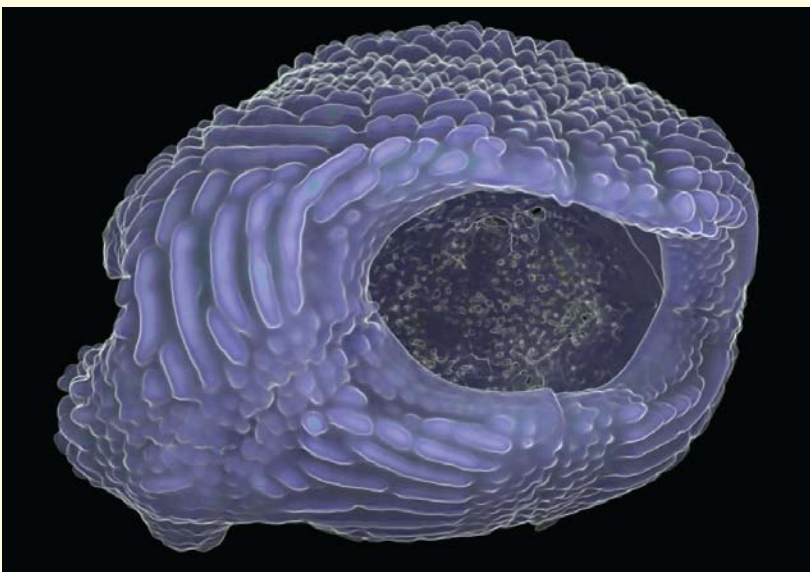
## Palaeontological collections, Department of Earth and Marine Sciences, Australian National University

The internationally significant palaeontological collections of the Department of Earth and Marine Sciences, Faculty of Science, Australian National University (ANU), hold in excess of 70 000 registered specimens, including Australia's largest collection of Quaternary marine microfossils.

The holdings of palaeozoic fishes from Australia are of international significance, and have been documented in numerous research publications and monographs by ANU scientists. They include the world's largest vertebrate collection from the famous early Devonian limestone deposits of Burrinjuck, NSW. This has been a focus of ANU collecting and research for over thirty years (the British Natural History Museum mounted two collecting expeditions to this area in 1955, 1963, when some 500 specimens were removed to London). ANU holdings include type material of some of the world's oldest lungfishes (*Dipnorhynchus*, *Speonesydrion*); some of the largest predatory placoderm fishes known from this geological period (*Cathlesichthys*, *Dhanguura*), and uniquely preserved acid-prepared specimens displaying internal structure from 400 million years ago of the primitive vertebrate braincase, including the oldest completely preserved vertebrate eye capsule. No comparable material is held in any other institution, in Australia or overseas. The collections contain the largest collection in existence of unprepared vertebrate material from Burrinjuck.

Other material of international significance includes samples of the world's oldest known fossil fish (*Arandaspis*, Ordovician, central Australia), oldest known vertebrate hard tissues (Cambrian, Queensland), oldest scales, teeth, and braincases of various chondrichthyans (cartilaginous sharks and rays, a major living vertebrate group), the only known Devonian amphibian (first land animals) from the entire Gondwana supercontinent (*Metaxygnathus*, central NSW), and extensive type material from the Aztec fish fauna of southern Victoria Land (the most diverse fossil vertebrate assemblage from the Antarctic continent).

The palaeontological collections of the Department of Earth and Marine Sciences, at the Australian National University include holdings of international significance for their outstanding scientific interest and research potential, and their historical significance as some of the oldest specimens of their types.



Oldest known complete fossil vertebrate eye capsule, perfectly preserved as acid extracted from 400 million-year-old limestones at Burrinjuck, New South Wales (see G Young, 2008, *Biology letters* 4: 110–114. Micro-X-Ray tomography by A/Prof. Tim Senden, Research School of Physics and Engineering; 3D rendering using 'Drishti' by Dr Ajay Limaye, Vizlab, Supercomputer Facility, Australian National University. Reproduced courtesy of the College of Science, Australian National University)

## Conclusion

*Significance 2.0* is based on the experience, knowledge and ideas of many people working with collections over the last decade and more. While this book covers the theory, process and many applications of the concept of significance, it is a highly compressed summary. It is not a compendium of every application or use of significance in collection management. Each section of the book could be the subject of a separate booklet. And each domain could usefully explore the practice and applications of significance with particular types of collections. The growing literature on significance is testimony to its capacity to engage people who are passionate about collections, to explore the big picture and the fine grain of significance in action.

In the time since the first edition was published in 2001, the assessment method and criteria have undergone subtle refinements. Many more applications and uses have been explored, for single items, collections and cross-collection projects. Significance assessment and practice is a dynamic process. It will continue to develop and adapt as the circumstances and demands on collecting organisations change.

Perhaps the next decade of work with significance will see it evolve with new uses and users outside collecting organisations, in the academy and wider community. The potential is there for significance to stimulate discovery and engagement with collections. It is hoped that future directions for significance will see it keep its democratic character: flexible, open to everyone and communicating clearly about what makes collections important for Australians.

## Glossary

### *Accessioning*

The process of registering an item or collection into a collection or collecting organisation. This generally includes entering the item or collection into a register or database with a sequential numbering system according to domain practice, briefly describing the item or collection so that it can be readily identified, and recording the details of the donor or vendor, including name, address and date of acquisition.

### *Acquisition*

Acquiring or gaining possession of an item or collection.

### *Aesthetic*

An item or collection with visual or sensory appeal, landmark design qualities, or displaying creative or technical excellence.

### *Appraisal*

The process of selecting items and collections for inclusion in an archive. Appraisal for recordkeeping purposes encompasses processes for determining what records to create and capture, and how long records need to be kept. Appraisal involves determining the different needs for records: legal, administrative, societal, cultural and historical. Appraisal may be done both retrospectively (for records that already exist) and prospectively (for records that do not yet exist).<sup>47</sup>

### *Archive*

Archives are documents created or received and accumulated by a person or organisation in the course of the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their continuing value. Historically, the term has often referred more narrowly to non-current records deposited or selected for deposit in an archival institution. The word 'archives' is also commonly used to refer to (a) the organisation, agency or program responsible for the selection, care and use of records of continuing value, and (b) the building or place dedicated to their storage, preservation and use. Archival documents do not come only as text on paper, but include every known form and format in which information can be fixed in the form of records.<sup>48</sup>

### *Botanic garden*

A collection of living plants, taxonomically classified and labelled.

### *Burra Charter*

Charter developed and adopted by Australia ICOMOS, which establishes nationally accepted principles for the conservation of places of cultural significance.

### *Cataloguing*

Creating a record according to specific principles of construction used in each collecting domain. Cataloguing usually includes details of any numbers assigned to an item; the item name; provenance, appearance, maker and details of manufacture; history and use; storage location; physical condition; and often some form of classification.

### *Collection*

A body of acquired items held by a collecting organisation, or the accumulated items held by a collector.

### *Collection policy*

A publicly accessible document that guides the development and management of an institution or organisation's collection, specifying why, what, where, how and when it collects, and how and why items may be deaccessioned from the collection. The collection policy includes a range of clauses or policy statements that provide an ethical framework for making sound decisions about the development and use of the collection.

### *Collections Australia Network (CAN)*

Collections Australia Network provides free online tools, resources and assistance to make information about Australian collecting organisations and their collections discoverable online. Collections Australia Network is an initiative of the Cultural Ministers Council at <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>>

### *Collections Council of Australia (CCA)*

The Collections Council of Australia Ltd is the peak body for the Australian collections sector. It has been established to ensure the nation-wide sustainability of collections by consulting with key stakeholders to resolve common issues and to promote the value of the sector.

### *Collections mapping*

A branch of cultural mapping practice focusing on movable cultural heritage. It is used to analyse and document attributes or themes associated with one or more collections (or parts of a collection) located at single or multiple sites, for example locally, nationally, regionally or internationally. Applications include collections management, promotion, access and community engagement and empowerment. It can contribute to cross-collection projects, thematic studies and regional surveys. Mapping information may take the form of inventories, databases, oral and video recordings or websites and may be represented using geospatial techniques. Analysis may focus on physical parameters such as item type or condition or values related to significance such as historic, artistic, scientific and social studies, the potential for research, provenance, rarity, completeness and interpretive capacity.

*Community*

A social group of any size whose members may reside in a specific locality, share government, or have a cultural and historical heritage. The term includes those who have common interests or form professional communities, such as archivists, librarians, curators, conservators, registrars, and scholars.

*Community Heritage Grants (CHG)*

The Community Heritage Grants Program aims to preserve and provide access to nationally significant, Australian cultural heritage material held by community groups across the country. It does this by providing grant funding; and intensive preservation and collection management training for first time CHG recipients in Canberra. The CHG program is administered by the National Library of Australia and also supported by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, the National Archives of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive.

*Connoisseurship*

The ability and competence to pass critical judgements on items or collections of cultural heritage, based on knowledge of history, style, technology and comparative examples.

*Conservation*

All the processes involved in looking after an item or collection to retain its cultural significance.

*Contextual history*

Commissioned history prepared as part of a thematic study. The history explores the background, events, processes and influences on a subject or theme related to movable heritage collections. It also identifies themes which then provide a framework for the history and for analysing the scope, strengths and weaknesses of the collections.

*Criteria (or assessment criteria)*

A broad framework of cultural and natural values used in the significance assessment process to draw out or elucidate how and why the item or collection is significant.

*Cross-collection projects*

Collaborative projects operating across collection boundaries where collecting organisations work together to assess the significance of collections through thematic studies or regional surveys.

*Cultural significance*

All aspects of significance, also termed heritage significance, or cultural heritage values, especially used in the *Burra Charter*. This includes scientific and natural history collections.

*Deaccession*

To de-register an item from a collection. Deaccessioning is the process of de-registering an item from a collection for clearly stated reasons, and disposing of it in accordance with approved policies and procedures spelt out in the collection policy or in a separate deaccessioning policy.

*Distributed National Collection (DNC)*

The sum of all heritage collections of significance to the nation.<sup>49</sup> These are held by a wide range of organisations and individuals, and found across the country.

*Documentation*

The process of record keeping for each item in a collection. Documentation includes registration, cataloguing and research notes.

*Domain*

Field of interest within a broader sector. The collections sector includes four major domains — archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

*Fabric*

Physical material of an item or collection.

*Gallery*

A museum of art. See also 'Museum' on page 63.

*Herbarium*

A collection of preserved plant specimens arranged according to a classification system, and retained for research and identification of plant taxa.

*Heritage collections*

Cultural heritage collections and items in the custody of a wide range of organisations and individuals, including governments and the private, community and non-government sector. These collections include historic, artistic and ethnographic objects, documents, images, natural history and geological specimens, and archaeological collections.

*Heritage Collections Council (HCC)*

Established from 1996 to 2001 by the Cultural Ministers Council, and responsible for the coordination of a national conservation strategy for preventive conservation, and the development of the former Australian Museums On-Line, predecessor to CAN.

*Historic themes*

Often derived from a contextual history, historic themes identify the main activities, processes or subjects that have shaped the history of a region or industry. They provide a framework for analysing collections and movable heritage, and help to identify significant objects and the strengths and weaknesses of collections.

*In situ*

Latin for 'in place'. Refers to items or collections (or 'ensembles') which remain in their original context of use or discovery.



<i>Interpretation</i>	All the ways of presenting the significance of an item or collection, from simple object labels to exhibitions, education programs and web-based resources.
<i>Library</i>	A collection of information, sources, resources, and services, and the structure in which it is housed: it can be owned, organised and maintained by a public body, an institution, or a private individual. The term 'library' can both mean the collection and the building that houses it.
<i>Movable cultural heritage</i>	Any reasonably portable item or collection of historic, aesthetic, scientific or social significance.
<i>Museum</i>	A non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. <sup>50</sup>
<i>Nomenclature</i>	The naming of objects, items or organisms according to accepted rules.
<i>Preservation</i>	All actions taken to retard deterioration of or prevent damage to cultural material. Preservation involves controlling the environment and conditions of use, and may include treatment to maintain an object, as nearly as possible, in an unchanging state. Preservation also includes activities taken to prevent or delay material becoming damaged i.e. preventive conservation.
<i>Provenance</i>	The documented chain of ownership of an item or collection, or more broadly the life history of an item including previous owners, origin, and context of use.
<i>Reconstruction</i>	Actions taken to recreate, in whole or part, cultural material, including movable heritage items, by the introduction of new or old materials into the fabric.
<i>Regional survey</i>	A survey and assessment of heritage items designed to review the scope, strengths and weaknesses of collections within a region and assess the significance of the most important items. Themes are used to see how effectively the collections represent and interpret the history and heritage of the region. Results assist strategic planning, co-ordinated collecting and priorities for conservation and access.
<i>Registration</i>	The process of entering an item into the recording systems of a collecting organisation, by assigning a unique number, physically numbering the item, recording that number in a register and noting brief details of the item and its acquisition. In museums, registration is the first step in documentation, preceding cataloguing.
<i>Restoration</i>	Actions taken to modify the existing material and structure of an item to represent a known earlier state.
<i>Risk assessment</i>	As it applies to cultural material, risk management is concerned with the identification, analysis, evaluation and assessment of threats to items or collections from natural or human causes (for example from fire, flood and earthquake to conflict, theft, vandalism, and neglect). Risk management aims to minimise such threats through preventive strategies and actions so that overarching business objectives can be achieved. Significance statements for items and collections provide the key input for setting priorities for risk assessment, mitigation and review.
<i>Significance</i>	The meaning and values of an item or collection, or what makes it important. Significance is the historic, aesthetic, scientific and social values that an item or collection has for past, present and future generations.
<i>Significance assessment</i>	The process of studying and understanding the meanings and values of an item or collection, enabling sound and reasoned statements and judgements about the importance of items and collections, and their meanings for communities. The outcomes of a significance assessment should guide decisions made about the management of an item or collection into the future.
<i>Species</i>	The smallest unit of taxonomic classification, a species consists of individuals capable of interbreeding and producing fertile offspring.
<i>Statement of significance</i>	A reasoned, readable summary of the meaning, values and importance of an item or collection. A statement of significance makes the importance of items and collections accessible to a wide audience.
<i>Sustainability</i>	A state or situation that meets 'the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' <sup>51</sup> It has been suggested that the three traditional 'pillars' of sustainability, economy, environment and society, be augmented by culture as a fourth pillar. <sup>52</sup>

*Taxon (plural taxa)*

Taxonomic group of any rank, such as a species, genus, family or class; an organism contained in such a group.

*Taxonomy*

The theory and practice of describing, naming and classifying organisms; or classification by tightly defined categories of material culture.

*Thematic framework*

Set of themes and sub themes relating to a subject or activity that provide a framework for analysing heritage items. It is used in a thematic study to aid critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of collections. The thematic framework may be derived from the contextual history, a heritage study where the subject is a regional survey, or from state or national frameworks developed by heritage agencies.

*Thematic study*

Survey of heritage items related to a particular theme or subject, designed to develop an understanding of the significant items, collections or heritage places associated with the theme. A thematic study establishes the significance of key items, identifies priorities for conservation action and strategic planning, and helps to improve access and interpretation.

*Threshold*

Point at which an item is either included or excluded from listing on a heritage register, based on assessment of its significance. Thresholds may be set by inclusion and exclusion guidelines for each criterion. The concept has evolved from heritage place assessment.

*Type specimen*

A designated specimen of a taxon to which its name is permanently attached, and on which the description that satisfies the requirements of valid publication is based.

*Vernacular*

Traditional cultural expression, unschooled.

## Acronyms

**AIATSIS**

Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

**AMOL**

Former Australian Museums (and Galleries) On-Line  
Now see Collections Australia Network, CAN, at <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>>

**ANMM**

Australian National Maritime Museum

**ANU**

Australian National University

**Australia ICOMOS**

Australian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites

**CAN**

Collections Australia Network

**CCA**

Collections Council of Australia

**DNC**

Distributed National Collection

**HCC**

Heritage Collections Council

**ICOM**

International Council of Museums

**ICOMOS**

International Council on Monuments and Sites

**NGA**

National Gallery of Australia

**PMCH**

Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage

**TMAG**

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

**UNESCO**

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The first edition (entitled *Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections*) was published in 2001 by a predecessor body, the Heritage Collections Council. For more information about the development of significance in Australia, please see Part 2 'How significance evolved'. The Collections Council was established by the state, territory, and federal governments of Australia (via the Cultural Ministers Council) to represent all collection types.
- <sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Collections Council of Australia Ltd, revised 21 November 2006, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/corporate+documents.aspx?DMXModule=544&EntryId=807&Command=Core\\_Download](http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/corporate+documents.aspx?DMXModule=544&EntryId=807&Command=Core_Download)>.
- <sup>3</sup> Examples of other types of collecting organisation are keeping places, knowledge centres, resource centres, historical societies, herbaria, scientific data sites, historic sites.
- <sup>4</sup> Collections Council of Australia, *SWOT analysis of Significance 1, toward the development of Significance 2*, Collections Council of Australia, 2008, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/SWOT%20analysis%20of%20Significance%20\(2001\)\\_PUBLIC.pdf](http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Portals/0/SWOT%20analysis%20of%20Significance%20(2001)_PUBLIC.pdf)>.
- <sup>5</sup> Thanks to Mr Adrian Cunningham of the National Archives of Australia for proposing these guiding statements. They are documented in Mr Cunningham's comment on K Anderson, 'The archives industry perspectives on significance as a collections management tool', a paper presented to the *Significance 2.0 Workshop*, Collections Council of Australia, 2008, viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/articles.aspx?articleType=ArticleView&articleId=79>>.
- <sup>6</sup> Illustrated case studies that focus on the significance criteria have been omitted, but will remain accessible via the text of the first edition, published online by the Collections Australia Network, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/5](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/5)>.
- <sup>7</sup> As at April 2009 these supplementary resources are still in development. Visit <<http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>> for updates.
- <sup>8</sup> Currently, these resources are available at the Collections Australia Network: <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>>.
- <sup>9</sup> For a fuller listing of the differences between the first and second editions of *Significance* please visit: <<http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>>.
- <sup>10</sup> A recent set of Australian guidelines for sustainability policy and practice in museums and galleries demonstrates how collecting organisations can contribute to cultural, social, environmental and economic sustainability by adhering to a number of general sustainability principles: Museums Australia, *Museums and sustainability: guidelines for policy and practice in museums and galleries*, Museums Australia, Canberra, 2003, viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/sustainability.pdf>>.
- <sup>11</sup> Heritage Collections Council, *National conservation and preservation policy and strategy: Australia's heritage collections*, Commonwealth of Australia on behalf of the Heritage Collections Council, Canberra, 1998, p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup> VM Bullock & M Birtley, 'Will collections vanish in the urge to converge? Observations on "convergent evolution" in the collections sector', paper presented to *Archives: Discovery and Exploration*, the Australian Society of Archivists conference, Perth, 6–9 August 2008, viewed 6 May 2009, <<http://www.archivists.org.au/conference-papers>>.
- <sup>13</sup> See K Anderson, 'The archives industry perspectives on significance as a collections management tool' and M Burn, 'Significance and libraries', papers presented to the *Significance 2.0 workshop*, Collections Council of Australia, 2008, viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/fifth+announcement+2+july+2008.aspx>>.
- <sup>14</sup> M Walker & P Marquis-Kyle, *The illustrated Burra Charter: good practice for heritage places*, Australia ICOMOS Inc., Burwood, 2004.
- <sup>15</sup> For more information on the HCC and the evolution of significance, see I Cook, 'A background to significance: some key milestones in the significance story', paper presented to the *Significance 2.0 workshop*, Collections Council of Australia, 2008, viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/articles.aspx?articleType=ArticleView&articleId=82>>.
- <sup>16</sup> The first Objective reads (in part), 'To develop criteria for determining significance and identifying items and collections of significance'. See Heritage Collections Council, *National conservation and preservation policy and strategy*, p. 14.
- <sup>17</sup> See Collections Australia Network, <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>>.
- <sup>18</sup> Network Creative Services, Ironoutlaw website, viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.ironoutlaw.com/index.html>>.
- <sup>19</sup> The State Library of Victoria has a digital copy of the Jerilderie letter on its website, as well as a transcript: E (Ned) Kelly, *Jerilderie Letter 1879*, Australian Manuscripts Collection, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/jerilderie\\_letter/jerilderieletter1.html](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/collections/treasures/jerilderie_letter/jerilderieletter1.html)>.
- <sup>20</sup> Victorian Heritage Database, 'Glenrowan heritage precinct: statement of significance', Heritage Victoria, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/places/result\\_detail/4073?print=true](http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/places/result_detail/4073?print=true)>.
- <sup>21</sup> The Kelly papers are inscribed on the *UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register* for significant documentary heritage.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Story of the Kelly Gang* film was inscribed on the international UNESCO *Memory of the World Register* in 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> K Winkworth, 'Trading patterns: skin rugs and cross-cultural craft traditions in the work of Beth Hatton', in B Hatton, *Selection: textiles by Beth Hatton*, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra, 2003, p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> S Irvine, 'Michael McWilliams, pranksters, players and performers', Bett Gallery Hobart, 2007, viewed 9 March 2009, <<http://www.bettgallery.com.au/artists/mcwilliams/pranksters/essay.htm>>.
- <sup>26</sup> D Owen, *Tasmanian tiger: the tragic tale of how the world lost its most mysterious predator*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2003, p. ix.
- <sup>27</sup> Ms Anna Gray, in an email to the Project Manager on 13 May 2008, advised on behalf of the Council of Australian Art Museum Directors that, 'Art museums make judgements based on aesthetic significance, in designated collection areas, and to predetermined levels of comprehensiveness'.
- <sup>28</sup> National Archives of Australia, *Keep it for the future! How to set up small community archives*, National Archives of Australia, Belconnen, ACT, 2007, p. 20.
- <sup>29</sup> R Atwood, *Stealing history: tomb raiders, smugglers, and the looting of the ancient world*, St Martin's Griffin, New York, 2004, p. 201.
- <sup>30</sup> C Howarth, *Gods, ghosts and men: Pacific arts from the National Gallery of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Parkes, ACT, 2008, pp. 5, 11.

- <sup>31</sup> See for example, National Gallery of Victoria, *Provenance research project*, National Gallery of Victoria, (n.d.), viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/provenance>> or Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Provenance*, Art Gallery of New South Wales (n.d.), viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/provenance>>.
- <sup>32</sup> R Sloggett, 'Making "The domes of St Mark's"', *AICCM Bulletin*, vol. 29, 2005, p. 47.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 56.
- <sup>34</sup> Figure adapted from a slide developed for a presentation by Ian Cook titled 'All artefacts are not created equal' at the 60th Anniversary Meeting of the Canadian Museums Association, March 2007, Ottawa. The idea arose from a discussion with Kylie Winkworth prior to the meeting in Ottawa.
- <sup>35</sup> Try the Collections Australia Network at <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/collections>> or the websites of large collecting organisations with online catalogues such as the Powerhouse Museum at <<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database>>.
- <sup>36</sup> Illustrated examples of the criteria were included in the first edition of this publication. The publication is available on the Collections Australia Network, viewed 23 March 2009, <[http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/5](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/5)>.
- <sup>37</sup> See the work of Museums Australia in this area. Museums Australia, *Continuous cultures, ongoing responsibilities: principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*, Museums Australia, Canberra, 2005, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/ccor\\_final\\_feb\\_05.pdf](http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/dbdoc/ccor_final_feb_05.pdf)>.
- <sup>38</sup> This point is recognised in the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, which in Part II, Division 1, s. 7 (1), p. 5 defines Australia's movable cultural heritage objects as 'objects that are of importance to Australia, or to a particular part of Australia...'.
- <sup>39</sup> A number of states and territories now register items and collections on their state heritage registers. Generally these nominations use the state heritage criteria which has evolved for places, rather than the criteria in *Significance 2.0*, although the research and assessment process is similar. Listing on state heritage registers has many benefits and may provide access to grant funds for conservation and interpretation.
- <sup>40</sup> This case study and statement of significance was compiled with the assistance of Wally Caruana, Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia at the time *The Aboriginal Memorial* came into the Gallery's collection.
- <sup>41</sup> Pioneer Women's Hut, *National Quilt Register*, Collections Australia Network, Sydney (n.d.), viewed 31 March 2009, <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/nqr>>.
- <sup>42</sup> Australian National Maritime Museum, *Australian Register of Historic Vessels*, Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney (n.d.), viewed 31 March 2009, <<http://www.anmm.gov.au/emuseum/code/emuseum.asp?newpage=ARHVWelcome&newprofile=ARHVObjects>>.
- <sup>43</sup> Migration Heritage Centre – New South Wales, *Belongings Register*, Migration Heritage Centre – New South Wales, Sydney (n.d.), viewed 31 March 2009, <<http://www.belongings.com.au>>.
- <sup>44</sup> Citations for all the Australian inscriptions can be found on the UNESCO website: <<http://www.unesco.org/webworld>>.
- <sup>45</sup> National Library of Australia, *Guide to the Papers of Edward Koiki Mabo*, viewed 4 May 2009, <<http://www.nla.gov.au/ms/findaids/ms8822/overview.html>>.
- <sup>46</sup> D Mellor, 'Koiki (Eddie) Mabo, Bay scene (with telegraph pole) 1970', in W Caruana (ed.), *Likan'mirri - connections: the AIATSIS collection of art*, an exhibition at the ANU Drill Hall Gallery 20 February–28 March 2004, Australian National University Institute for Indigenous Australia, Canberra, 2004, p. 18.
- <sup>47</sup> Australian Society of Archivists, Statement on Appraisal, Australian Society of Archivists, 2007, viewed 15 March 2009, <[http://www.archivists.org.au/files/Position\\_Papers/Appraisalstatementfinal2007.doc](http://www.archivists.org.au/files/Position_Papers/Appraisalstatementfinal2007.doc)>.
- <sup>48</sup> Australian Society of Archivists, website viewed 15 March 2009, <<http://www.archivists.org.au>>.
- <sup>49</sup> Heritage Collections Council, *National conservation and preservation policy and strategy: Australia's heritage collections*, Commonwealth of Australia on behalf of the Heritage Collections Council, Canberra, 1998, p. 36
- <sup>50</sup> International Council of Museums, *ICOM Statutes*, Article 3, para 1, International Council of Museums, Paris, 2007, viewed 11 March 2009, <<http://icom.museum/definition.html>>.
- <sup>51</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future*, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, viewed 22 March 2009, <<http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>>.
- <sup>52</sup> J Hawkes, *The fourth pillar of sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning*, Common Ground Publishing and Cultural Development Network, Melbourne, 2001.



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Australian Memory of the World Committee, *UNESCO Australian 'Memory of the World' program*: <<http://www.amw.org.au>>

Australian National Maritime Museum, *Australian Register of Historic Vessels*: <<http://www.anmm.gov.au/arhv>>

Collections Australia Network: <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net>>

Collections Council of Australia: <<http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>>

International Advisory Committee, *UNESCO Memory of the World programme*: <[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=37894&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.htmlTOPIC](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=37894&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.htmlTOPIC)>

Migration Heritage Centre—New South Wales, *Belongings Register*: <<http://www.belongings.com.au>>

Migration Heritage Centre—New South Wales, *Objects Through Time*: <<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/objectsthroughtime>>

National Library of Australia, *Community Heritage Grants program*: <<http://www.nla.gov.au/chg>>

Pioneer Women's Hut, *National Quilt Register*: <<http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/nqr>>

Powerhouse Museum Collection Search: <<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/>>

Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage: <<http://www.arts.gov.au/movable>>

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