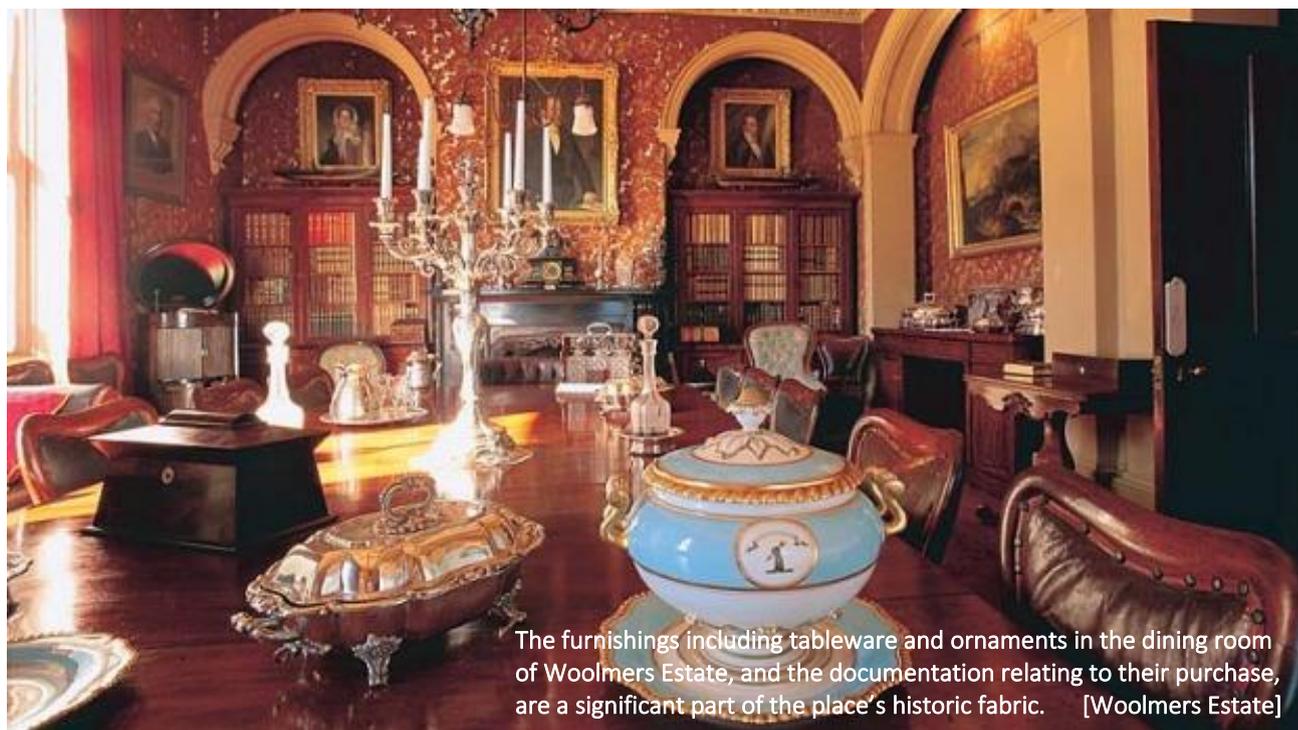




Practice Note No 7

CONSERVING MOVEABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



The furnishings including tableware and ornaments in the dining room of Woolmers Estate, and the documentation relating to their purchase, are a significant part of the place’s historic fabric. [Woolmers Estate]

This Practice Note provides advice on the conservation of items of moveable cultural heritage that are an integral part of any place that has been entered in the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

The advice of this Practice Note supports the Tasmanian Heritage Council’s Works Guidelines, which provides guidance on seeking approval for works to a place entered in the Tasmanian Heritage Register.

The Heritage Council recommends involving professionals with curatorial expertise when considering the conservation or relocation of any significant moveable heritage object.

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What is moveable heritage?

Moveable heritage forms an important part of our cultural identity. It is cultural material that is not fixed to one place, and it encompasses a wide range of objects of all sizes, types and materials.

Moveable heritage may include:

- Vehicles for transportation, inclusive of boats, aircraft, motor vehicles, horse-drawn vehicles, buses, and railway rolling stock.
- Tools and machinery, for example workshop contents, farm implements, and mining or sawmilling equipment.
- Domestic implements such as cooking equipment, storage vessels and eating utensils.
- Furniture, tableware, ceremonial or commemorative objects, textiles, soft furnishings and ornaments.
- Collections of books and archives.
- Collections of natural, historical or social meaning, produced for utility, ceremony or art; in private or public museum collections.
- Collections of archaeological material that has been excavated from a place.
- Items that were not originally meant to be moveable, such as small building structures, parts of buildings, farm yard infrastructure or large garden ornaments.

Examples of Tasmanian places with significant moveable heritage collections include Home Hill in Devonport and Woolmers Estate in Longford which retain many of their original owners' furnishings and personal objects, the blacksmiths shop at Inveresk Railyards, the archaeological collection at Port Arthur Historic Site, the Ida Bay Railway with its rolling stock, the Carn Brae mining site with its battery, and the Alexander Tennis Racket Factory in Launceston which has a collection of sporting equipment made at the factory.



The 1917 Wolseley at Woolmers Estate reflects the affluence and aspirations of the Archer family who established the property.

The significance of moveable heritage

Moveable heritage items are important components of many heritage places, providing material detail that can complement the place's buildings and landscape. These items make a heritage place more complete. In many cases, the moveable heritage of a place will afford unique insights into the place's history, enhancing its significance and making aspects of this significance more accessible and understandable. By preserving a fuller extent of a place's fabric, the experience of interacting with the place can be more meaningful.

Objects in their own right can be significant, but the importance of some moveable heritage is that it forms part of a suite of values that make a place significant.

Tips on understanding significance

Just as places can be significant, moveable heritage can be too.

A 'significance assessment' analyses and articulates the meaning of collections, informing future management and resourcing.

Provenance, the chain of custodianship is vital to understanding the significance of an object.

Protecting moveable heritage objects

The *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* facilitates the protection of moveable heritage where it is an integral part of the fabric of a registered heritage place.

The definitions that the Act provides for place include:

- Any item in or on, or historically or physically associated or connected with, a site, precinct or parcel of land where the primary importance of the item derives in part from its association with that site, precinct or parcel of land; and,
- Any equipment, furniture, fittings and articles in or on, or historically or physically associated or connected with, any building or item.

The Heritage Council is interested in protecting those moveable heritage objects that are located at and contribute to the historic cultural heritage significance of a registered place. While the objects at a place may not necessarily be highly significant in themselves, collectively they may contribute to a place being of significance to the whole of the state.



Plasterer's cornice moulds still in the house in which they were used in the early 1840s. These objects reflect the diversity of the moveable heritage that one may encounter.

Approvals

Under the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*, heritage approval is required for any physical intervention (i.e., works) to a registered place which may result in a change to the nature or appearance of the place's fabric. The alteration, removal, or destruction of moveable heritage that contributes to the significance of a registered place are regarded as 'works' that require heritage approval. For heritage places of elevated importance, such as public buildings or long established institutions, the historic contents of the place are likely to also have a higher level of significance and any works to the moveable heritage of such a place will potentially have a more substantial impact on the place's historic cultural heritage significance.

Movement within a place of items that have traditionally been moved about within the place will not need approval. For example, in most cases furnishings may be moved or re-arranged within a building or farm implements within a property, without need for approval.

Where the proposed works have no impact or only negligible impact on the historic cultural heritage significance of the relevant registered place or heritage area, the Heritage Council may grant approval in the form of a certificate of exemption. There is no fee charged for requesting a certificate of exemption, and applications are usually processed within 7 days.

Removal of significant moveable heritage from a place will require a discretionary permit application. In such cases, it will assist the Heritage Council in making its assessment if it can be demonstrated why it is not viable or appropriate to retain the moveable heritage objects at the place.

Information on how to seek heritage approval is provided on page 7.

Temporary removal of an item for exhibition, repair or storage will not require approval if an undertaking is given that the item will be returned within a specified timeframe.

The *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* does not cover historical objects in collections where these objects do not relate to the historic cultural heritage significance of the place where the items are located.

Neither does the Act extend protection to objects that are significant only for their natural values, nor to objects that are primarily of significance to Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture. The latter are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975*.

The Heritage Council may choose not to enforce the provisions of the Act in relation to moveable heritage items in privately owned property except where the items have been identified in the Heritage Register entry for the place. Nonetheless, it encourages the retention of such items in places where they have historically been located.

St John's Anglican Church, Ross

When in 2019 an inventory was prepared for the contents of St John's Church in Ross, numerous interior furnishings were identified as items that contributed importantly to the place's historic cultural heritage significance. An original framed photograph of a benefactor whose financial assistance enabled the church to be built was one item deemed to be significant to the place.

Places may also contain photographs or other material that have interpretive or research value but which as objects have limited cultural significance and do not contribute to the significance of the place in the way that the portrait does for St John's Church.



Portrait of Robert Kermode in St John's Church, Ross.

Image: Steve Robinson



A gas producer unit located outside a church in Ouse, presumably to make gas for lighting the church. Interpretation can assist in the heritage value of objects like this one being better understood.

Conservation principles

The *Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 2013*, provides a philosophical grounding for the conservation of heritage places including their contents. It explains that the aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of the place.

The most important principle in managing moveable heritage is to ensure that the objects remain connected to their historical context and preferably kept in their original place.

Other conservation principles applicable to moveable heritage are:

- Ensure that decisions that affect the significant fabric of a place are informed by an understanding of the place or object's significance. Retention of that significance must be a driver in the decision-making process.
- Where the use of a place is significant, seek to retain that use or, where that is not possible, find a use that is compatible with retention of the things that contribute to place's significance.
- Make use of all available knowledge, skills and disciplines that can contribute to the study and care of a place including its moveable heritage. Involve individuals and community custodians in the care of the things for which they have a special attachment to or understanding.
- Ensure that significant fabric receives an appropriate level and type of maintenance.
- Conserve heritage fabric in a condition that perpetuates its significance, preserving evidence of age and wear where this contributes to its authenticity or to other aspects of its significance.
- Avoid changes that are irreversible.

- Employ traditional techniques and materials for the conservation of significant fabric in preference to modern techniques and materials.
- Provide devices for the interpretation of an object's significance where this is not readily apparent, but doing so discretely so as not to intrude on the natural experience of a place.
- Record significant objects and any available information about them including about their maintenance history and care requirements.
- Keep track of items that have been removed from their historical context.

Collection management

For places that have a substantial collection of moveable heritage, this collection should be proactively managed to ensure the long-term safety and sustainability of the objects. An important part of collections management is documentation, recording details of the collection objects including their origins, significance, conservation needs and maintenance history. This may be in the form of an inventory.

Information that is helpful to record in a collection inventory includes:

- A clear resolution photograph of the item.
- Notes regarding any unique identifying marks (e.g., serial numbers, inscriptions).
- Provenance of the item (i.e., where has it come from, who owned it, and when it was brought to its current location).
- Relative significance of the item in terms of its contribution to the historic cultural heritage values of the place.
- The main materials of which the item is composed (e.g., paper, woven fibre, leather, rubber, ivory, wood, metal, stone, paint, glass, plastic, liquid).
- Any evidence of damage that the object shows (e.g., holes from insect attack, rust, staining) or previous conservation treatment that has been applied (e.g., rebinding of a book).

For suites of significant items such as furnished interiors, it may be helpful to supplement an inventory with a plan showing where items are located. The plan and inventory should be cross-referenced.

Ideally, an inventory should be entered into a database. This provides opportunity for a back-up copy of the data to be made and kept off site.

Care and maintenance

Objects of cultural heritage significance need to be kept in appropriate conditions to minimise their deterioration. Some objects will need periodic maintenance as part of their care.

The environment in which the objects are kept as well as their material composition will largely determine the threats that need to be addressed. Common factors that threaten the preservation of cultural material are:

- Pests such as rats and mice, and insects such as wood borer, silverfish, moth and carpet beetle.
- Exposure to light and ultraviolet radiation. of sunlight and heat. These can harm fibre-based material such as paper and textiles, leather, fur and feathers, and paper-based objects such as artworks and photographs. Rooms should be kept darkened when not in use, or the light filtered through UV screens.
- Extremes and fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity. They can cause irreversible damage to susceptible materials. The preferred controlled room temperature is 18-22 degrees Celsius.
- Excessive moisture (e.g., humidity or dampness). In natural fibre-based materials, ivory or wood, this may lead to biological decay from fungal rot or mildew, or increase susceptibility to pest damage. In metal objects, this may lead to corrosion.
- Dust and air-borne pollutants. These can have a damaging effect, particularly when occurring in combination with moisture. It can also harbour pests, which in turn can damage the object.
- Chemical agents, including oils, solvents, some cleaning aids, acids and salts. These can lead to the decay of a range of different materials including rubber, plastics and stone.
- Theft, fire, earthquake or impact damage (e.g., from building collapse, handling or transportation). These may result in total loss or irreparable damage to an object
- Poorly informed conservation treatments, particularly where the item is irreversibly altered by the treatment.

An awareness of these and other relevant factors is important to ensure the safekeeping of moveable heritage items.

It is advisable to have a collection care manual prepared by a person with expertise in the conservation of cultural materials.

Moveable military heritage



“Moveable military heritage items may include cannons, guns, tanks and other objects obtained as war trophies. They are often located outside in parks or near memorials. However, just because they are large does not necessarily mean that they can withstand all conditions. Cannons are generally made from cast iron or bronze, and their carriages from cast iron or timber. Other guns may be from iron or steel. Tanks and other machinery are made of steel and other metals as well as rubber and plastic. Anchors are made from wrought iron. Aircraft are often made from aluminium, steel and fabric. To varying degrees, all of these materials will be subject to corrosive decay and will require regular maintenance in order to survive.”

Tasmanian Heritage Council: *A Guide to Preserving Tasmania's War Heritage*, page 3.

Arts Tasmania Roving Curator Program

Arts Tasmania offers museums, galleries and collections access to roving curators for up to 25 days. Staff can advise on storage, display, exhibitions, interpretation, policy and conservation. Annual funding round details are available from [Arts Tasmania](#).

Cultural Gifts Program

The Federal Government's Cultural Gifts Program offers tax incentives for donations of significant cultural material to endorsed public institutions. These include museums, libraries, galleries and archives across the nation. More information can be found on the [Office for the Arts website](#).

Caring for collections

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material [website](#) includes reCollections, a guide to caring for collections.



A nineteenth-century stamper battery used to crush tin-bearing rock at the Blue Tier near Weldborough. Only some of the more remote mines of this era retain their mechanical infrastructure. Whether it is a better heritage outcome to have such machinery in situ or displayed in a museum may differ from case to case.

Disaster preparedness

Places that have important moveable heritage are encouraged to have a strategy prepared for salvage and safekeeping of the most valuable items in the event of a fire, flood or structural failure of the building in which they are housed.

Prior recording of moveable heritage items in an inventory, as discussed above, can assist in the salvage and remedial treatment of objects in the event that they are affected by a disaster, and for the recovery of items in case of theft.

In the event of a disaster, it is important to seek professional assistance from a museum objects conservator at the earliest possible time to ensure that remedial conservation appropriate to the material composition of the objects is undertaken in time to arrest deterioration.

Blue Shield Australia

Blue Shield is an international network that assists in the rescue of cultural and natural heritage in the event armed conflict, natural- or human-made disaster. Their [website](#) has resources to help in flood or fire recovery situations, or to prepare for such situations.

Removal and return of objects

When moveable heritage is separated from its historic context, the heritage significance of both the objects and of the heritage place to which they belong can be diminished.

In some cases, relatives or descendants of a person who created, owned or donated an object may wish to claim that object when there is a change of use, management or ownership of the place at which the item is located. Decisions about the future of an object in such situations should have regard for the impact that acceding to a claim of this kind may have on the heritage significance of the place and of the object, the impact this has on the interests of the broader community that has attachment to the object or place, and the risk that the object may become permanently separated from the place.

Where a significant object is removed from its historic context, a lasting record should be made of it, including where it went. Consideration should also be given to tagging the object to indicate its provenance. Any such identification needs to be done with care not to damage, disfigure or devalue the item. These measures will enhance the prospects for relocated objects' future return or reinstatement should changed circumstances make this possible.



Abandoned farm machinery. Left undisturbed but exposed to the elements, the wooden parts of the machinery will decay leaving the rusted metal components to become part of the place's archaeological fabric.

Heritage approval process

Before initiating any action that may affect a place's moveable heritage, seek advice from Heritage Tasmania or from a suitably qualified heritage practitioner. This will assist in refining ideas and finding a solution that balances the desired change with protection of the historic cultural heritage significance of the place, including community attachments.

Under Part 6 of the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995*, approval from the Heritage Council is required for any works to a place entered on the Tasmanian Heritage Register. What actions relating to moveable heritage may be regarded as 'works' requiring approval is discussed on page 2 of this Practice Note.

Approval may be in the form of:

- a certificate of exemption where the proposed works are minor and will not affect the place's heritage values; or
- a discretionary permit for works that are likely to impact on the place's heritage values.

A discretionary permit application must be lodged with the local planning authority (i.e. local council) which will forward the application to the Heritage Council. The planning authority and the Heritage Council will work together to provide the applicant with a single decision.

How long before I receive a decision?

The development application process may take up to 42 days from the date it is lodged with the local council. If you do not provide enough information with your application it may take longer. Please contact Heritage Tasmania to check what information you need, or visit www.heritage.tas.gov.au and search for "what to lodge with your application".

Are there penalties for not abiding by the Act?

Yes. However, the Heritage Council tries to work proactively with owners to resolve issues through discussion and mediation, rather than by conflict, objection and using penalties.

Contact Details

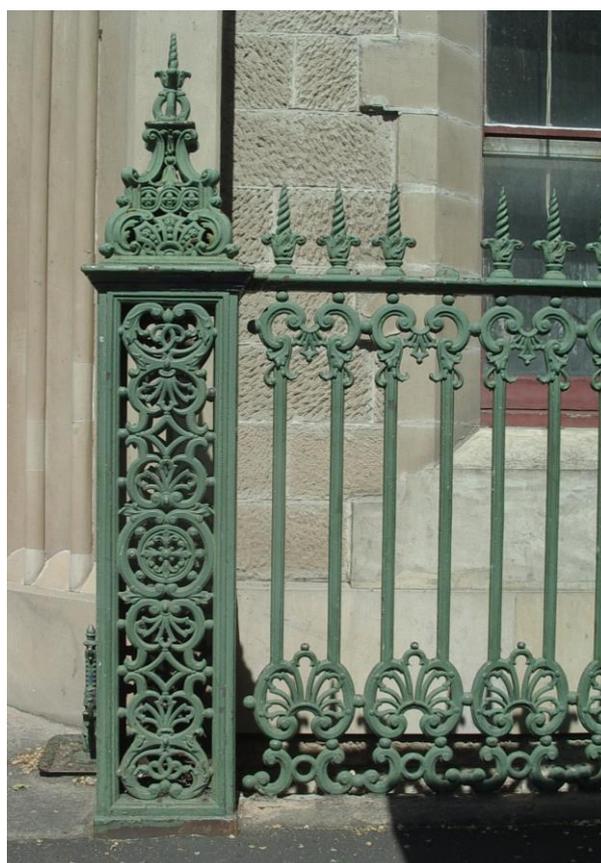
Tasmanian Heritage Council
Phone: 1300 850 332
Email: enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au
www.heritage.tas.gov.au

Buying and selling moveable heritage

While the Tasmanian Heritage Council cannot control the buying and selling of moveable heritage objects, it does require owners and custodians to obtain heritage approval before proceeding to relocate a significant item from a registered place (see page 2). If you are unsure, contact Heritage Tasmania for advice.

Conclusion

Moveable heritage objects and collections are often vital parts of the significant fabric of heritage places. In some instances they may be essential for the survival of traditional customs, practices or knowledge of that place. These objects can enhance a place's cultural heritage significance, and for that reason their retention and care deserves a similar level of consideration as is usually afforded to historic buildings and landscapes.



In Tasmania there are known cases of ornamental cast iron fences that were removed from public buildings prior to the inception of the Tasmanian Heritage Council, and some of these fences have been sold and re-erected at other places. It is desirable to retain knowledge of the history and current location of such moveable heritage.

Useful Resources

Tasmanian Heritage Council

Works Guidelines and Practice Notes for managing heritage places:
www.heritage.tas.gov.au/useful-resources/publications

Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013 (the '[Burra Charter](#)');
Australia ICOMOS Inc.

Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials

Information on collection management and conservation:
<https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/collection-care>

Australian Museums and Galleries Association

Collection management:
<https://www.amaga.org.au/my-collection>

Historic England (formerly English Heritage)

Collections conservation advice and guidance:
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/conservation/collections-advice-and-guidance/>

Blue Shield Australia

Resources to help in flood or fire recovery situations, or to prepare for such situations:
<https://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/>

Print publications

Significance: A guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections, Heritage Collections Council, 2001.

Townley, P. & Parris, R. *Caring For Heritage Objects: Guidelines on Establishing Significance, Object Care and Management*, Powerhouse Museum Research Series: No 3, Sydney 1994.

Lawson, E. & Carlin, S. *The Art of Keeping House: A practical and inspirational guide*, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 2004.

Objects in their place: An introduction to Moveable Heritage, NSW Heritage Office and Ministry for the Arts Moveable Heritage Project, 1999.

Moveable Heritage Principles, NSW Heritage Office and Ministry for the Arts Moveable Heritage Project, 2000.

Safe in the Shed: Caring for Historic Farm Machinery, NSW Heritage Office, 2001.

Recognising Victoria's Heritage Objects & Collections, Heritage Victoria.

Federal legislation

Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986.