

# HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

## MOVABLE HERITAGE PRINCIPLES



## MOVABLE HERITAGE PROJECT

The Movable Heritage Principles were developed as part of a Movable Heritage Project, managed jointly by the NSW Heritage Office and the NSW Ministry for the Arts. They were written by John Petersen, NSW Heritage Office, in collaboration with a Movable Heritage Reference Group providing expert advice. Its members were Meredith Walker, Australia ICOMOS, Kylie Winkworth, heritage consultant and author of an earlier Heritage Council of NSW taskforce report on movable heritage, David Ellis, Ministry for the Arts, Ian Stephenson, National Trust of Australia (NSW), James Broadbent, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Ian Arthur, Institution of Engineers Australia, Lisa Newell, Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council, Pat Townley, Powerhouse Museum, Kay Söderlund, Museums Australia, Maisy Stapleton, Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW, Dennis Gojak, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Phil Gordon, Arts Advisory Council Museums Committee and Vanessa Mack, University of Sydney Macleay Museum. NSW cultural institutions also provided input through the Ministry for the Arts.

The Heritage Council of NSW endorsed the Movable Heritage Principles in December 1998.

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Front cover graphics:

Aboriginal hand stencils, South Coast. *Photograph courtesy of National Parks and Wildlife Service*  
Interior of Belltrees shearing shed, built near Scone in NSW in 1879 by architect J. Horbury Hunt.  
Artefacts from the site of first Government House Archaeology Collection. *Photograph courtesy of Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House*

Grose Valley, Blue Mountains, NSW. *Photograph courtesy of National Parks and Wildlife Service*

Back cover graphics:

Australia Square, Sydney

Entrance to the central temple, Sze Yup Temple, Glebe. *Photograph by Karl Zhao*

Lands Department Building, Sydney

The bow of iron steamer, *Merimbula*, wrecked near Currarong in 1928. *Photo by David Nutley*

Snowy Mountains Scheme. *Photograph courtesy of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority*

St Mark's Anglican Church, Darling Point, Sydney. *Photograph by Stuart Humphreys*

Belltrees Shearing Shed, near Scone, NSW.

Detail from the crypt floor of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. *Photograph courtesy of St Mary's Cathedral*

## **MOVABLE HERITAGE PRINCIPLES**

The aim of the Movable Heritage Principles is to assist New South Wales Government and community organisations to manage their movable heritage items and collections and to develop appropriate conservation policies.

### **INTRODUCTION**

“Movable heritage” is a term used to define any natural or manufactured object or collection of heritage significance.

Responsibility for movable heritage is shared by private owners and government and community organisations. The Movable Heritage Principles will underpin efforts to identify and care for movable heritage objects and collections in their context. They will strengthen partnerships, co-operation and focus policies to achieve good practice in NSW.

The principles recognise the importance of:

- researching, understanding and retaining the significance of movable heritage as an integral part of the heritage and cultural diversity of New South Wales;
- documenting provenance, physical context, associations and ownership and conserving movable heritage as part of our heritage legacy to future generations;
- promoting the value of movable heritage to the community through access, education and interpretation programs;
- managing movable heritage items and collections in their significant place and community context;
- recognising the role of private individuals and community custodians in caring for movable heritage;
- establishing partnerships between owners of movable heritage and the government, professional and community organisations which can assist them.

## THE PRINCIPLES

### ***1. Movable heritage relates to places and people.***

Movable heritage exists in a variety of contexts in addition to museum, library and archive collections. It may be associated with places, regions, people and communities. It is often best to care for items and collections in this context.

### ***2. Educating the community about how to identify and manage movable heritage assists in conserving items and collections.***

Community education is an effective way to protect movable heritage in the long term. Private owners and community custodians have information and knowledge about movable heritage and why it is important. Communities need to be involved in managing and interpreting their cultural material.

### ***3. Assess the heritage significance of movable items and collections before making decisions on managing them.***

Decisions on managing movable heritage, including acquisition, should be based on their significance, including their relationships to places and people. The wishes of private owners and community custodians should also guide decisions.

Where relevant, conservation management plans should include policies that integrate the management of heritage places and their significant items.

### ***4. Recognise the significance of indigenous movable heritage to indigenous communities and its unique role in cultural maintenance, cultural renewal and community esteem.***

It is important to respect indigenous intellectual property rights and the cultural traditions of indigenous people, including cultural restrictions.

Consult with the relevant indigenous community and key indigenous bodies and use their advice to guide decisions

on identifying and managing movable heritage, including access and interpretation. \*

**5. Retain movable heritage within its relationship to places and people, unless there is no prudent or feasible alternative to its removal.**

Movable heritage often derives significance from its relationship to a region, building or site. Removing items from a place can diminish or damage the significance of both the items and the place. Explore opportunities for conserving movable heritage in its context where this is possible.

**6. Remove movable heritage from its relationship to places and people only when the items and collections are under threat and this is the only means of safeguarding or investigating significance.**

Moving items and collections may alter and diminish significance and cause damage. However, it may not always be possible, practical or desirable to retain movable heritage in its context. It may be necessary for the cultural custodian to relocate the items and collections for cultural reasons or to remove them for research. It may be necessary to remove them temporarily for conservation treatment, exhibition or during works to a building or site. Removing items may be the only means of ensuring their security and may be necessary for health and safety or to protect the place. Minimise the impact on heritage significance if moving items. Where possible and culturally appropriate, keep movable heritage in another location at the place.

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\* Museums Australia has a policy guidelines document entitled *Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Peoples*.

**7. Provide community access to movable heritage and encourage interpretation.**

Community access to movable heritage is important because it helps people to understand and maintain cultural traditions and practices. Its also encourages the conservation of significant movable items. Interpret movable heritage and places and educate people to understand uses, functions, community history and cultural practices.

**8. Document movable heritage.**

Documentation includes researching history, assessing significance, recording provenance, physical context, associations with a building, site, region or community and the history of conservation and exhibition. Documenting items and collections can assist in exploring conservation options to return or reinstate movable heritage to places or people should circumstances change. Keep systematic records of the subsequent location of items both with the site or building records and with the items and collections themselves.

**9. Acquire movable heritage where there is no alternative to removal, where this serves clearly defined collecting policies.**

Organisations acquiring items and collections should identify their collecting intentions in cooperation with other bodies in their region. Where possible, movable heritage should form part of a collection that can be interpreted to promote an understanding of its significant place and community associations.

**10. Reinstate or return items and collections to places and people when circumstances change.**

It is important to understand the heritage significance of items and collections before making decisions about moving, relocating, disposing or giving them away. If possible, and if culturally appropriate, reinstate or return the items and collections to their significant context. Relevant community and cultural groups should inform such decisions.