

HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

PLACE NAMES OF HERITAGE VALUE; A HERITAGE COUNCIL POLICY



NSW
Heritage Office

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Introduction

Place names don't just tell us where we are, they can be clues to understanding significant stories or signposts to a place's history. The Heritage Council of NSW has developed a policy to provide guidance on the place names of State Heritage Register items. This policy was adopted on the 4 August 2004.

Policy Statement - Place Names of Heritage Value

Place names and place name patterns are an integral part of the heritage of the people of New South Wales. Place names form part of the inheritance passed from one generation to the next, and should be respected for their inherent historical, linguistic, aesthetic and social values.

Place names allow the meanings and associations of a place to be explored and better understood, and their continuing use should be supported through ongoing research, conservation and interpretation. Place names should not be changed for reasons of fashion or expediency.

Place names, from those for individual structures to broad landscapes to entire divisions of the State; vernacular and official; Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have the potential to be of heritage significance in their own right or as part of place name pattern or by association with a heritage item.

The potential significance of a place name should be investigated and assessed before any change is made to an accepted place name, especially where such a place name is part of, or associated with, a listed heritage item.

Proposals for new place names, especially for listed heritage items, should acknowledge earlier place naming practices associated with the place.

A place name that is assessed as being of heritage significance in its own right or as part of place name pattern or by association with a heritage item can be referred to as a 'place name of heritage value'.

The Heritage Council may refer any place name that it considers to be a place name of heritage value to the NSW Geographical Names Board for its consideration for listing on the Geographical Names Register.

Guidelines for Working with the Heritage Place Names Policy

1. Investigating heritage place names

Place names should be investigated to understand their role in the course or pattern of NSW history or the history of a local place or in a historical association when any change, abolition or relocation of an existing place name, or application of a new place name, is proposed.

Investigation of place names should accord with accepted methods for such research and investigations, including consultation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge holders and communities.

2. Assessing place names for their heritage significance

The significance of a place name should be assessed using the State Heritage Register criteria.

The significance of a place name should include its ability to demonstrate or otherwise relate to the significant historical patterns, periods or phases of a place.

The significance of interactions between obsolete or disused place names with an existing place name should be assessed as part of any proposal for a new place name.

The significance of place names that may currently be considered distorting, misleading, offensive or obscure should be assessed for their historical and associational values as part of any proposal for a new place name.

A proposed new name for a place with no recorded or otherwise known existing or previous place name should acknowledge the significant historical patterns, periods or phases that have shaped the place.

3. Matters to be considered in developing conservation policies for heritage place names

Should an existing heritage place name be retained?

Should a previous place name be re-instated?

Should a dual-name or variant name approach be adopted?

Should there be consultation with knowledge holders and communities about any proposal to change, re-instate or otherwise vary a place name?

Should a heritage place name be retained as evidence of, or as part of the interpretation of, a former site feature or element no longer in existence?

What appropriate adjectives (if any) can be used to qualify a heritage place name; and how will they support its assessed significance?

Should the heritage place name be specifically referred to as an element of a listed heritage item?

Should any interpretation policies be developed for the heritage place name?

Appendix

Glossary of place name (toponymy) terms used for the purposes of this policy

class name or *generic name* – generally, common nouns that describe a particular type of place, such as ‘the River’ or ‘the Mountains’ or ‘the House’ (see also ‘specific name’).

dual name – a name, indigenous to the local area, for a geographical feature where there is definite evidence, preferably historic in the form of written or oral tradition, that the feature has two names, which is indicated on a map by the non-Aboriginal name in plain text, and the Aboriginal name in italics, for example Dawes Point *Tar-ra*.

Old, New, First, Former, etc - adjectives often used to qualify a place name - in general >old=, >new=, >first= etc qualify the physical state of a place, for example Old Market, First Government House; >former= qualifies the function of a place, for example the former market place, former vice regal home - as in the sentence >The Old Woolshed (place) contains several former shearing stands (function)=, or >The Old Kings School (place) is a former school (function)=.

place – means a site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views (Burra Charter, 1999).

The Geographical Names Board of NSW defines a place as ‘any geographical or topographical feature or any area, district, division, locality, region, city, town, village, settlement or railway station or any other place within the territories and waters of the State of New South Wales but does not include any road, any area (within the meaning of the *Local Government Act 1993*) or area of operations of a county council (within the meaning of that Act), any electoral district or subdivision under the *Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act 1912*, any school or any place or place within a class of places to which the provisions of this Act do not apply by virtue of the regulations’.

place name – the given name of a place, depending upon a sense that such a place is an entity possessing a character that differentiates it from another place to such a degree that it is worth naming.

Apart from the names of places recognised by the Geographical Names Board, the names of schools are recognised under s27(2) of the *Education Act 1990*, the names of local government areas and county councils are recognised under s207 and s387(2)(a) of the *Local Government Act 1993*, and the names of national parks and other reserves created under the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974* are recognised under s30A(2) of that Act.

Place name of heritage value - a place name that is assessed as being of heritage significance in its own right or as part of place name pattern or by association with a heritage item can be referred to as a 'place name of heritage value'.

place name pattern – scatterings of names that can be explained by linguistic, typological, functional or other historical layers that connect such names in a discernable pattern – *pattern* means 'layers of context from which meanings can be drawn' (SHR Criterion A Guideline, 6th draft)

Place name types - a way of classifying place names by usage (these examples are all listed on the NSW Geographical Names Register):

- *Descriptive names* - uses a specific indicating a particular quality of the generic, e.g. Fish River, Boundary Creek, Thirty Mile Gums, The Rocks, Black's Ladder, Broken Hill, Frog Hole Creek, Moonlight Lake, Pitt Town Bottoms;
- *Incident names* - arise from a memorable incident at a place, e.g. Murder Island, Wreck Bay, Burnt Bridge;
- *Possessive names* - come from the idea of ownership, e.g. The Glebe, Native Waterholes, Millers Point, Chinaman's Creek, Blackman's Swamp, Yellow Woman's Gully;
- *Commemorative Names* - consciously given in honour of something, e.g. St James, Federation Valley, Bourke, Parkes, Royal National Park, Queenscliff, Dead Womans Hole, Tumbledown Dick;
- *Transfer names* - consciously given to associate a place with the qualities of another place, e.g. Vale of Clwydd from rural Wales to rural NSW; Pymont from a German spa to Sydney Harbour;
- *Euphemistic names* - consciously given, sometimes ironically, to bestow favourable conditions, e.g. Mount Pleasant, Happy Valley, The Plains of Heaven;
- *Manufactured Names* - constructed from variously recombined sounds or letters, e.g. Ashbury (Ashfield + Canterbury), Belfield (Belmore + Strathfield);

- *Shift names* - a shift of the specific from one generic to another, e.g. Dorset Road and Dorset Trig have been given their name because they are near Dorset Farm, Kayuga - a group of shift names is a *name cluster*;
- *Folk-etymology names* - from an assumption that an obsolete or foreign word is something different from what it really is, e.g. Wallamoula (Cadigal for kangaroo, and a 'foreign' word to English speakers) to Woolloomooloo - the anglicisation of many Aboriginal place names in NSW fall in this class;
- *Mistake names* - from a failure in the transmission of information, e.g. River Lett from a misinterpretation in a surveyor's note book of 'riverlet'. The local Aboriginal name of 'Thenambulet' is applied to a small gorge close to Evans' route, and the local Wywandy people think that Evans' recorded his misheard version of this place name in his notes. It may even be possible that both stories are correct, with Evans' mistaken interpretation of the Wywandy speech further mistaken in the transcription of Evans' hand written notes.

place number - the number or other non-nominal identifier given to an element of a larger place, such as an industrial or military complex, where buildings and other elements are known by numbers rather than names – such place numbers are often the key to historical records associated with the place or its elements, and should be retained.

specific name – a naming element that distinguishes between two or more examples of the same type, such as 'Nepean River' and 'Hawkesbury River' (see also 'class name or generic name').

toponymy - study of place names [from Greek: *topos* place + *onuma* name]

variant name – an unofficial (sometimes formally discontinued) name, involving the application of two place names, of equal historical validity but differing historical contexts, to a single place, indicated by plain text, with a less significant name enclosed in brackets, for example Strickland House (Carrara).

Note:

It is necessary for the origins of a place name to be researched to determine its correct 'place name type', rather than making assumptions from the current form of the name – for example, 'Blackman's Swamp', a former name for Orange, was a commemorative name derived from an early European settler, John Blackman, and not a descriptive name for a place where Aboriginal people had been seen by Europeans. The publication *Orange & District Illustrated*, published in 1928 and re-published in a facsimile edition in 1989, provides some discussion of how these place names developed, and illustrates the need for adequate historical research.