

Revealing the past



NSW
Heritage Office





**Historical archaeology
is an international
discipline concerned
with studying the past
using physical evidence
in conjunction with
other types of
historical sources.**

COVER:

A selection of artefacts unearthed during the Quadrant excavation at Broadway, Sydney's largest archaeological dig.
*Photograph by Scott Wajon.
Image courtesy of Australand.*

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Main picture:

Many important archaeological features are hidden from view. The Tank Stream, path of Sydney's first water supply and the principal reason for the siting of Sydney, is protected by listing on the State Heritage Register
Photograph by Trevor Lee

Top left:

Volunteers clean back the surface to reveal artefacts during excavation of the site of first Government House, Sydney
*Photograph by Peter Luck
Courtesy of Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House*

Top right:

Archaeologists record historic sites using surveying techniques
Photograph by Denis Gojak

Bottom left:

Archaeologists also study historical photographs, maps and plans as a means of finding out about our past
Photograph courtesy of Sydney Cove Authority

Bottom right

Cataloguing and studying artefacts found during excavation provides information about everyday life in the past. These artefacts are from the site of first Government House Archaeology Collection
Photograph courtesy of Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House

What is historical archaeology?

Historical archaeology is an international discipline concerned with studying the past using physical evidence in conjunction with other types of historical sources such as documents, maps, illustrations, photographs and oral history. It focuses on the objects used by people in the past and the places where they lived and worked. It can tell us about the way things were made and used and how people lived their daily lives.

In Australia historical archaeologists investigate sites and relics such as those left by early Asian fishing fleets and Dutch explorers, as well as the settlements of Europeans, Chinese and other cultural groups. The study of Aboriginal sites is another branch of archaeological research. However, historical archaeologists do study sites where interaction between Aboriginal peoples and invading cultures occurred. The study of industrial sites such as factories, mines and mills is a specialist area of historical archaeological study. For information on maritime archaeology see *Revealing the Past: An Introduction to Maritime Archaeology*.

What are historical archaeological sites?

Historical archaeological sites are physical evidence of the past and have the potential to increase our knowledge of earlier human occupation, activities and events. Some sites are wholly below the ground surface, others partially or wholly above ground. They can be in ruins, or intact and still functioning.

Types of physical evidence studied by archaeologists include:

- buildings (both ruined and standing);
- structures such as wells, mine shafts and bridges;
- objects of household use such as crockery, bottles, personal effects and toys;
- machinery and tools;
- pollen as evidence of past environments;
- parasites as evidence of human diet and disease.

Cultural landscapes, both rural and urban, are also important physical evidence of land use and are a record of the changing shape of our settlements.

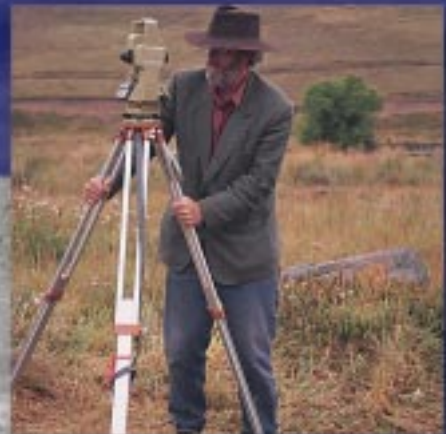
Physical evidence can sometimes be recovered by archaeological excavation, although it is important to remember that archaeology involves much more than excavation. Detailed survey, recording and the study of photographs, maps, plans and other historical sources are primary methods of studying past material culture.

Archaeological resources are irreplaceable. They have enormous potential to contribute to our knowledge of our history, providing information that is unavailable from other sources. It is important that archaeological resources are adequately investigated and recorded if they are to be disturbed.

Who are historical archaeologists?

Historical archaeologists are people who have completed tertiary training in archaeology, prehistory or a related field and who have specialist training and experience in historical archaeology. Historical archaeologists carry out archaeological assessments, do archival research and undertake survey recording and archaeological excavation.

There are also many dedicated non-professionals who are interested in historical archaeology and have contributed to our understanding of the past. They have developed their skills from researching and recording historical sites and from working on excavations under professional supervision.





Archaeological relics may be part of an historic building or site and can be used to shed light on its development, or add to our understanding of its past use.

How is our archaeological heritage protected?

Archaeological relics may be part of an historic building or site and can be used to shed light on its development, or add to our understanding of its past use. These relics must be protected to ensure they can contribute to a full picture of our past.

The *NSW Heritage Act 1977* protects the State's natural and cultural heritage and contains measures to protect archaeological resources.

Any deposit, object or material evidence relating to the settlement of NSW, not being Aboriginal settlement, that is over 50 years old is classified as a relic under the Act.

The Heritage Act protects archaeological relics by requiring that any disturbance to those relics is carried out in accordance with an excavation permit issued by the Heritage Council of NSW.

If an archaeological site is of great significance, the Heritage Council can also place an Interim Heritage Order over it to prevent harm to that place and ensure its long term protection. Interim Heritage Orders remain in force for one year while further research on the site is carried out. Listing on the State Heritage Register provides indefinite protection. The requirements for excavation permits still apply to sites on the State Heritage Register.

There are also a number of non-statutory ways to protect archaeological sites.

Archaeological zoning plans prepared by local councils are an important tool for identifying areas of archaeological potential that could be affected by development. Promoting public awareness, conducting public education programs, mounting archaeological displays and providing easy access to professional advice on the conservation of archaeological sites also play a vital role.

Excavation and archaeological relics

If you are excavating any land in NSW and know that you will expose or discover a relic, or suspect that you might, then you must apply for an excavation permit from the Heritage Council.

Once a site is excavated it is irretrievably altered. Strict permit requirements ensure that the site fulfils its full potential to contribute to our knowledge of the past and ensure that information is not unnecessarily lost.

Any relics found during work not covered by an excavation permit must be reported to the Heritage Council immediately, in accordance with section 146 of the Heritage Act, so that they may be investigated and recorded if necessary.

To find out more detailed information on archaeology and excavation permits, or to identify whether you need to apply for a permit, check the Heritage Office website:

www.heritage.nsw.gov.au

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Top left:

Evidence of mining techniques survives throughout NSW. This stamper battery is from Valentine's mine, near Hill End, one of the earliest reef mines in Australia
Photograph by Caitlin Allen

Top right:

Cottages at Carrington Row in Joadja, Southern Highlands, are stark reminders of how people lived in a mining town during the late 19th century
Photograph by Cameron White

Bottom left:

Rural buildings, such as Kinchega woolshed, can provide insights into early working and living conditions
Photograph by Catherine Macarthur

Bottom right:

Cemeteries and the information contained on headstones are a permanent record of past communities. Rookwood Necropolis, Sydney
Photograph by Murray Brown





Archaeological excavation is a specialised field which must be supervised by a trained archaeologist. However, many archaeologists need volunteers to help with excavations.

Penalties

The heritage of NSW is irreplaceable and heavy penalties exist for offences under the Heritage Act.

Excavating illegally on any land in NSW carries a maximum fine of \$1.2 million or imprisonment for up to six months, or both. Further, a landowner may be prohibited from using or developing that land for a maximum of ten years.

What can you do?

Archaeology is a specialised field and many activities, including excavation, must be undertaken or supervised by a trained archaeologist. Volunteers and enthusiasts, however, can make a valuable contribution to archaeological research and site conservation.

You can help by:

- carrying out surveys of towns, suburbs or districts to identify important buildings, structures, sites or traditional industries and events;
- making photographic records or measured drawings of items and places of significance to the local area, showing how they were used and how they worked;
- collecting historical plans or photographs about industries, places and people. These are often destroyed or lost by the people or companies that owned them, but local or state archives are often glad to receive them;
- recording the memories of people who are familiar with aspects of our history or people who worked using technology that has since become obsolete;
- researching themes in Australian social and economic history to provide information for archaeological studies;
- researching particular subjects which have contributed to the development of an area and which have affected its appearance, for example, mining, market gardening or transport systems.

Such projects are the backbone of future archaeological study and will help to identify and conserve our heritage. It is important to remember to lodge this research in a public archive so that others can use and benefit from your work. Places to consider include: your local historical society, a state government archive, your local library's history collection, or Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Left:
Lake Innes House near Port Macquarie following conservation work
Photograph by Denis Gojak

Top right:
Members of the public on a guided tour of the former Hope Farm Granary in Cattai National Park
Photograph by Denis Gojak

Middle right:
Trestle bridge for Taylor's timber railway near Wootton
Photograph by Damaris Bairstow

Bottom right:
Open area excavation at Grace Bros Broadway, the site of more than a dozen houses, shops, pubs and other industries dating to the mid-nineteenth century
Photograph by T. Jenna

Other ways to help include:

- immediately reporting to the Heritage Council the discovery of relics unintentionally uncovered without an excavation permit;
- nominating sites for inclusion on the State Heritage Inventory, maintained by the NSW Heritage Office;
- lobbying through local heritage groups to ensure that the value and knowledge of sites is recognised before there are imminent threats;
- volunteering to assist with an archaeological excavation;
- joining your local historical society.





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