

Just because it's old: museums and galleries in heritage buildings



NSW
Heritage Office

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1 Introduction

Museums and heritage places are important elements in our cultural landscape. They document who we were, who we are now, and tell us about what we may become. Museums do this by displaying the material evidence of how we have changed over time: the machinery, the clothing, the artworks; even ordinary things like bus tickets and telephone cards. Buildings and other places are the spaces in which cultural change happens. They are also material evidence of technological, social and spiritual change through the way they are built, the way their spaces are arranged and the people who have used them. We need museums and heritage buildings to remind us that we are part of a cultural continuum and that we have a responsibility to our descendants to preserve past and present knowledge and understandings.

More than 65% of NSW's museums are housed in heritage buildings. In many cases this has been a successful arrangement that puts the building to good use and highlights the significance of the collection. In others it is an uneasy partnership that benefits neither the building nor the collection. Just because a building is old, it isn't necessarily a wise choice for a museum.

This publication will help you understand the issues involved in setting up a museum, and the problems and the advantages of using an old or heritage building. You may decide after reading this guide that you would be better served to either relocate your museum elsewhere or to consider construction of a new building that takes account of all the needs of a museum from the ground up. You may also decide that the building is such an attractive proposition that you are prepared to proceed with your plans for a museum, but that you need to modify your ideas about the kind of museum or collection you will deal with. Whatever your situation, there are many people and organisations that can assist you with expert knowledge. Contact details for some of these are located in Appendix 2.

1.1 What is a heritage building?

Buildings can be divided into three main levels of heritage significance:

A non-heritage building

A non-heritage building is one that is regarded by the community as having low historical importance or significance.

Heritage building

A heritage building may be regarded as having some aspects that are considered important or significant by the community.

Heritage-listed building

A heritage-listed building has been assessed as having aspects that are so important or significant that it is considered essential to preserve it. This does not mean that the building cannot be changed, but it does mean that there are parameters guiding the way the building can be treated

or used.

Even if a building is not considered of heritage value, it is still worthwhile having a qualified and experienced heritage consultant assess it for its interesting or unusual features.

Generally, the heritage consultant will prepare a detailed report called a Conservation Management Plan. This document explains the history and significance of the building and what can be done to reveal and highlight its interesting features. It also analyses the condition of the building fabric and outlines works that the building needs to remain structurally sound and to preserve its significance.

See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the Conservation Management Plan.

1.2 What kind of museum?

Australian museums range from large cultural institutions with a staff of several hundred, such as the Australian Museum or the Art Gallery of NSW, to small local museums run by dedicated volunteers. They can be contained in a new purpose-built structure, in an imposing colonial sandstone building in extensive grounds, or in a tiny one- or two-room house located on the outskirts of town.

This wide spectrum of museums can be broadly divided into several categories:

Heritage sites

Buildings such as houses, shops, prisons, mines, schools, factories and workshops can all be developed as heritage sites. In this instance it is the building or the site itself which becomes the artefact or collection and the museum's aim is to tell the story of the building and the people who lived or worked in it. These museums can also contain in situ 'closed' collections of material, which are related to the site's original use or inhabitants. If the collection is closed, little or no further material can be added and all the material is displayed on site. The major challenge for this type of museum often revolves around how to move people through the site and provide the infrastructure to run the museum without damaging its integrity.

Collection-based museums

These museums focus on one or several themes as the basis of a collection that may, but not necessarily, relate to the building. Such museums need flexible spaces to house temporary exhibitions and allow a good flow of visitor traffic. Providing good display and storage environments, as well as facilities for public programs, are central to the development of a successful collection-based museum.

Art galleries

Galleries generally have their own collections but may also have an emphasis on travelling exhibitions. This places particular demands on buildings, such as flexibility of exhibition areas and the provision of spaces for delivery and storage of transport crates. Large bare wall areas and a capacity to support the display of multimedia are also a necessity for galleries wishing to exhibit contemporary art.

Combination sites

Very large sites can combine some or all of the above, such as artist Arthur Boyd's property Bundanon near Nowra. It consists of several residential buildings spread over a large area, all the natural bushland and paddocks in between, an important collection of Boyd family artworks, and Boyd's painting studio, which has been set up as it was when he used it.

Management of these kinds of sites requires careful monitoring of visitor movements and numbers, and excellent security to ensure that vulnerable spaces are secured if there is no-one

available to supervise them. Car and bus parking also require management to ensure that gardens and open spaces remain in good condition.

Where the collection is related to the building a synergy develops allowing the building's interpretation to be enhanced by the collection's presence and the collection's context interpreted through the building. For example, a shop is far more interesting when it has the stock, scales, cash register and receipt book in place and a cash register has greater meaning when viewed in the context of a shop.

A building may also accommodate other unrelated uses. Many successful museums and galleries have been housed in a building that offers other services such as libraries, council chambers, even a golf club. This can be a wonderful synergy but it can also create unseen difficulties. For example, if visitors need to pass through the library to reach the gallery, this may be disruptive for the library and inconvenient for the gallery visitors.

1.3 Should you use a heritage building?

Advantages

Heritage buildings come in all shapes and sizes: lighthouses, banks, electricity powerhouses, schools of art, post offices, mining offices, train stations, railway sheds, hospitals, government offices, convents, schools and workshops. All of these have been used somewhere in Australia as a museum or an art gallery.

Sometimes a particular building is an obvious choice for a museum because the collections and displays relate directly to the building's original use. However, in many cases the choice of building is based on other factors, usually availability and economics: the building is publicly owned and vacant, and the historical society is looking for a home; or the art society's leading patron has left her home to the group in her will. Often the building is chosen because it has some heritage value and this is seen as a compatible use of the site. There are certainly advantages in using a heritage building for such a purpose:

- A building recognised for its heritage value already has an acknowledged role in the community's life. This can be a great asset for a building that will require community involvement for its survival.
- Many heritage buildings have great character that can be used to promote them in the community.
- Heritage buildings are often well-located near the centre of town. This is an advantage both in terms of attracting visitors to the site and providing ease of access.
- Heritage buildings can enrich the interpretation of historic collections by providing an appropriate physical setting or historical context for the collection.
- While there are plenty of examples that refute the fact, many heritage buildings are solidly built and provide a stable physical and climatic environment for collections.
- The ambience and spaciousness of some heritage buildings, such as powerhouses and railway workshops, is such that they lend themselves to use as gallery spaces.

Disadvantages

There are also however, disadvantages in using heritage buildings as museums. Many of these disadvantages relate to the substantial costs of adapting an existing building for a new purpose and the risk of downgrading the building's integrity and heritage value in the process.

One of the first steps in assessing the appropriateness of the building as a museum or gallery is to look at what sort of building it is, in relation to how you want to use it. In some cases, the type of

museum/gallery you want to develop may not be suitable for the building you are looking at. A contemporary art space, for instance, would be a challenging use for a one-room slab hut, while an old schoolhouse isn't the most appropriate place to display farm machinery.

A building that has a firmly established role in the community may mean that people don't respond well to its new use. It may take years to change peoples' perceptions of it and in the meantime the expected community support that means the difference between success and failure may not eventuate.

Room sizes and layouts, access and circulation through the building, and light and climate control, can all complicate your plans for a museum and work against the kind of museum you have in mind. Remember also that if it is a heritage-listed building, you can't change some of these parameters.

The building may be in poor structural condition and require a great deal of remedial work to make it weatherproof and able to withstand increased visitor traffic. You need to consider whether the cost of work will be worth the effort or whether it would be more appropriate to start from scratch with a new purpose-designed building.

1.4 Asking the critical questions

Some aspects of a building can be changed or adapted, but others, such as location, simply cannot. Before you engage consultants or carry out detailed studies, consider the following questions:

What is the heritage status of the building?

Any building that is heritage-listed has a number of conditions attached to its use. These may include what changes can be made to the building, what uses it can be put to, even what can be put around or near it.

Check its heritage status by consulting your local council, or the State and National Heritage Registers. This can be done either by contacting the relevant bodies directly, or by looking up the registers on the Internet. You will probably also need to crosscheck with local councils to ensure that the register is up to date.

A listing of all levels of heritage items in NSW is located on the NSW Heritage Office website at www.heritage.nsw.gov.au, or you can ring (02) 9635 6155.

Most local councils have a local heritage adviser or officer. You can contact them through your local council and they will be able to advise you about local and regional listings such as Local Environment Plans (LEP). Other non-statutory lists are also available through such bodies as the National Trust of Australia, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), and the Institute of Engineers.

For more detailed discussion of the requirements for heritage-listed buildings, see Appendix 1.

Is the building easy to get to and around?

Vehicle and public transport access

- Is the building in a location that is easy to find?
- Is there sufficient and appropriate carparking space?
- Is there public transport to the area? How frequently does it run and is it available on weekends?

Visitor access

- Can visitors easily get to the site?
- Can disabled visitors move around it and see everything that a more mobile visitor can?
- Can collection material, exhibitions, and office and catering supplies be delivered to and around the site with ease?

Are there any environmental factors to consider?

One thing you can do little about is the external environment. Some of the factors to consider include:

- Is the area vulnerable to bushfires or flooding?
- Are there neighbouring businesses or activities which will have a negative impact on the museum?
- What are the climatic conditions of the area, what impact will this have on the building and collection?

What are the council zoning and legislative requirements for the area?

Is the building located in an area with appropriate zoning for the activities associated with a museum or gallery?

Many local councils have Local Environment Plans and Development Control Plans, that outline what is possible in different areas of the municipality or shire. Your heritage consultant should be familiar with these documents and advise you on how to proceed.

The Building Code of Australia outlines standards for all aspects of building construction. It covers such issues as toilets, disabled access, fire regulations, even the quality and dimensions of building materials. Note that there is some leeway in the Code for heritage buildings.

What does the community think?

While it is not always a legislative requirement, one process that can help you overcome a lot of hurdles is to consult with the community you are going to become part of. It may be simply a matter of talking with your potential neighbours, or it may require a series of community consultations with different stakeholders to establish the range of opinions about your proposals. Community consultation can be highly productive in generating solutions to problems, and since the ideas have come from community members, that sense of participation in and ownership of the project that will be crucial to its success, is already in place.

Have you got the funds to sustain the museum once it is developed?

You will require funds both to set up of the facility and run and maintain it. The collection will also have ongoing needs. Ensure that your funding is well-secured and that you are planning and budgeting well beyond your opening date.

1.5 Alternative uses for a heritage building

Having read these preliminary remarks, you may find yourself reconsidering your plans. Remember that there are many alternative uses for a heritage building other than a museum. The sort of alternative you consider will depend on the type of building you have. In the first instance consider a use which maintains its current or original use. For example if the building was a post office, could it have a business which provides postal or courier services, or perhaps a business transaction centre? If it was a house, could it remain as a home or provide accommodation for visitors to the area?

Camden Head

The Camden Head Pilot Station is an intact group of buildings including the Pilot's residence, no longer in use. While a significant building, its isolated location makes it difficult to attract tourists and costly to protect from vandalism. Its new use as a nature writer's residence maintains the building's use as a home and minimises adaptations.

Have you considered:

- Bed and breakfast accommodation?
- A restaurant?
- A studio and retail facility for local artists?
- A private residence or professional rooms?
- A different kind of museum?
- A tourist information centre?
- A bookshop or library?

Finally the option always remains of selling the building or site and finding a more appropriate location for your museum.



Camden Head Pilot Station
Photo: Elaine Van Kempen

2 Building Fabric Assessment

2.1 General issues

When assessing the building fabric, there are a number of key issues which may need to be addressed including:

- Gutters and drainage- depending on the type that you have, these can be a constant source of trouble, particularly in terms of ongoing maintenance.
- Visitor impact on fragile surfaces- while the flooring and wall coverings may be perfectly adequate for domestic use, how are they going to withstand the constant wear of visitors through the building?
- Hazardous materials- are there any components of the building which are hazardous such as asbestos, lead paint or flammable materials (such as some of the early ceiling insulations)?

2.2 Internal environment

The internal environment of the building is critical to the wellbeing of the collection and the comfort and enjoyment of visitors. It is dependent on a range of factors, some of which can be easily manipulated by simple changes to the building, while others require significant alterations and consequential expenditure.

Much of this assessment will appear as a component of the Conservation Management Plan (See Appendix 1), which will provide you with an insight into the condition of the building and identify work required to stabilise the structure. The assessment will also help you determine what sort of collections the building can safely accommodate and what sort of adaptations may be required for more sensitive collections, such as bark paintings, archaeological material and photographs.

In very general terms, collections require environments which provide:

- Stable relative humidity and temperature with slow seasonal shifts
- Controlled light levels with minimal direct sunlight
- Minimal airborne pollutants (including dust and volatile substances)
- Minimal pest and mould intrusion

It is likely that the environment will vary around the building. For example a damp cellar or a north-facing room with large unprotected windows can be damaging to most museum/gallery objects. Alternatively, there may be an interior room with no windows and a stable relative humidity that is an ideal collection storage space.

While the use of effective airconditioning (a system which controls both relative humidity and temperature 24 hours a day) is often seen as the solution for providing climate control in museums, it is expensive both to install and maintain and may have a detrimental impact on the heritage values of the building. Passive climate control, where non-mechanised tools such as the building fabric, siting and building furnishings are used to control/modify the internal environment, is often a more effective approach for museums in heritage buildings. Even if you are able to afford effective airconditioning, a building which utilises passive climate control will be more economical to run.

Some passive environmental control issues are:

- Is the building weatherproof?
- Are the spaces dry and well-ventilated?
- Is the building fabric (masonry, insulated ceilings, timber framing, etc) thermally stable?

Many older buildings contain elements which will have an impact in developing a passive climate control system such as:

- Material used for external walls
- Insulation (either in the ceiling or walls)
- Roof shape and ceiling height
- Verandahs and eaves (these can help with both temperature and light control)
- Curtains and shutters (these are useful for light control. External shutters are also useful for reflecting heat)
- Tree plantings (while these can be an advantage in controlling light, if the trees are too close to the building they can encourage pests and block gutters)

For a detailed discussion about these issues, refer to *Guidelines for Environmental Control in Cultural Institutions* (see Appendix 2 for details)

2.3 Internal spaces

The Conservation Plan can identify which internal spaces are suitable for museum/gallery purposes, as well as those areas that are significant to the heritage values of the place and which should remain intact. It will consider, among other things, the impact of visitors on the internal fabric of the building; security risks to fittings, and how adaptive reuse will change the ambience of the place.

Where the museum/gallery's needs cannot be easily accommodated without compromising the building fabric, you may need to investigate the possibility of either locating some services at another site, or constructing a new building within the site. However, the impact of a new building within the curtilage (area surrounding a heritage building) of the site should be considered. Frequently, the significance of the building includes the surrounding area. This could be severely compromised by the addition of buildings or carparking.

3 Collection Assessment

3.1 Introduction

Whether you already have a collection or are in the process of collecting, you need to identify its requirements in terms of display, environment and storage. To determine the type of collection ask:

- Is it a closed collection that directly relates to the building's original use?
- Is it an existing collection that is to be rehoused in the heritage building?
- Are you going to continue to acquire collection items on specific themes that have been identified in your collection policy?
- Will the museum include touring exhibitions, that specify stringent control of the environment, security and storage facilities?

These questions will guide what level and type of adaptation is required of the building. For example, the introduction of an airconditioning system into a house museum would not sit well with the domestic atmosphere. By contrast, a travelling exhibition space requires a very controlled environment with bare walls and the capacity to withstand the impact of changing hangings, showcases moving in and out, and a specialised lighting rig.

When developing a theme-based museum, assess the collection in relation to the building at the outset. This may help identify themes for collecting and exhibiting and guide the museum's development.

For example, Kirkton is developing a museum in a convent school and have a collection including school uniforms, ink wells, basketballs, student's diaries, a rosary, photos of local events, military guns and equipment, locally made furniture, locally made tablecloths, documents from the local agricultural show and a tractor. When they assessed the collection they have identified three themes- 'schooldays', 'Celebrations and events in Kirkton' and 'Made in Kirkton'. Several rooms including a classroom, a dormitory and the chapel have been retained to tell the story of the school with material such as the uniforms and inkwells helping to provide context for the rooms. The school hall displays material related to the two Kirkton based themes, providing the visitor with further contextual information about the life of the town the building is located in.

The military items have been forwarded onto a museum in the next town who have a strong interest in military memorabilia.

3.2 Interpretation and exhibition spaces

Interpretation is the *raison d'être* of museums. Regardless of the nature of the collection, the kind of building it is in, or where it is located, the museum exists to communicate to visitors, otherwise it is just 'a bunch of stuff'. To successfully interpret a collection or a place, you must consider what needs to be said and how you will say it, and what kinds of spaces are available in which to present your material. You also need to have some understanding of your potential visitors and their needs. For example, are there rest spaces for more senior visitors or people with children, or for more contemplative enjoyment of the displays?

Heritage sites

When an entire building is considered a heritage site, the building and its contents become the display. The collection is usually closed, requiring minimal adaptations to the space for exhibition

purposes. However, other issues should be considered:

- How will people circulate around the building or site?
- Are barriers needed and where should they be located?
- How will you provide interpretation, ie by placing labels around the rooms, introducing interpretation panels possibly with images of the people who have been involved in the place, providing a tour or installing soundscapes or video images to invoke a feeling of the place in use?
- Do you need a separate display interpreting the building fabric as well as its contents?
- Are there collection items in vulnerable locations, such as paintings on exterior walls, original blinds on windows, items sitting above working fireplaces? Can these be rearranged within the space without destroying its integrity or is their deterioration acceptable.
- What labels or signage will you use and how will you fix them?
- How will people interact with the space: will they be able to handle objects? If not, how will this be controlled?
- How will you secure the collection without compromising visitors' understanding of the place?
- Are there items in the museum that will continue to be used, for example domestic ovens and cooking equipment, a radio, a blacksmith's furnace, or a piano? One of your critical decisions is to balance the need to interpret an object through continual use against the inevitable effects of that use, such as wearing out the object or using it up. If items are to be used, you will need to develop policy as to how this will be managed.

A heritage site often necessitates decisions being made about what period of its life will be reflected. In some cases it is possible to show the changing uses of the site. For example, Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney has had a long and varied life as a military barracks, convict quarters and law courts, amongst other things. Some areas of the building have been brought back to their original use as barracks, while others focus on their use as law courts. In a number of areas, the changing uses of the building are shown through cross sections into the fabric of the building.

Sometimes structural changes to a building and the extent of available information will influence decisions about the building's interpretation. Como House in Melbourne was first set up as a house museum of the nineteenth century. However, the management of Como has recently decided to reinterpret the site in the interwar period (1920s-1930s), for which there is more available contextual information and material.

Collection-based museums

For museums and galleries exhibiting material that is not directly associated with the heritage building and its uses, the challenge is to give the visitor an understanding of the place's history while still providing space for exhibitions.

For example, Don Bank house in North Sydney displays changing exhibitions about the history of North Sydney. One room has been set aside to interpret the history of the house, allowing other rooms to be used for changing exhibitions. Throughout the house there are brief allusions to the original use of the house and the process of restoration carried out in 1980.

The sort of interpretation you may want to provide in a collection based museum may include display panels with images of the building and the people who used it, an introductory video about the building and site, small interpretation panels throughout the building or a leaflet. In some case the fittings and fixtures such as exhibition cases, picture rails and signage can reflect something of the building's history in their design.

Important issues to consider are:

- Do you have any spaces large enough to display objects and still allow people to circulate freely?
- Are the doorways large enough to move exhibition furniture in and out easily, particularly if you intend to have short-term or travelling exhibitions?
- Are the spaces accessible for delivery of exhibitions? For example, if they are on the first floor how difficult is it going to be to get material up the stairs, or is there a lift available?
- What kinds of display furniture will you require: showcases, free standing supports etc?
- Do you need to light inside showcases, general floor items or items on walls?
- Do you need a lot of wall space to hang works?

You may also need to explore the issue of cultural appropriateness in relation to the building's use. If the building has had a religious/spiritual use; an association with an Indigenous group (either in the building or on the site); or an association with a particular cultural group or event, appropriate representatives should be consulted about the building's interpretation, and any other uses you are considering.

Galleries

While some artwork will have a direct link to the place in which it is displayed, others will have no connection. This may be a big issue with some heritage buildings. For instance:

- Many contemporary artworks require large bare undecorated wall spaces that may not be available in a house with cornice details, dados, heritage colours or picture rails. However, it may be a very appropriate use for an industrial building with vast wall spaces.
- Multimedia installations can require a number of electrical outlets; dark, intimate spaces; or vast walls for projection. This may be difficult to achieve in a heritage building with elaborate architectural detail and small inflexible spaces.
- As galleries tend to have a fast turnaround of exhibitions with varying exhibition requirements, the space needs to be able to accommodate changeable wall configurations and the ability to attach items to the wall without risk of damaging the wall. Fragile or solid brick wall surfaces are not readily adaptable.

For example, Casula Powerhouse also expresses something of its current use as an art gallery and community space by the participation of artists in the interpretive process. During the complex's development, an artist worked alongside the architects to create a series of tiles incorporating early photos and blueprints of the original building. Graffiti and other evidence of the building's use have been left intact, allowing the building to tell its own story.



Photo: Peter Schardin

Light coloured timbers set into the floor of the Tweed River Regional Art Gallery identify the location of original walls. Visitors can therefore understand the original layout of the building while still enjoying the art in an uncluttered space.

3.3 Storage space

It is rarely the intention of a museum to display all of its collection material all the time. Apart from the issue of space, objects vulnerable to light damage will visibly deteriorate if exhibited for extended periods of time. Therefore, no matter what sort of museum you have, you will need adequate storage facilities. If you don't have the space in situ, it can be located off site, provided that there is a stable climatic environment, security and ease of access.

As with display, you will need to assess the particular needs of your collection to determine what your storage requirements will be. Look at the size of the collection and the type of material it contains. Then look at the space you have available and what sort of conditions it can provide. Think about whether the collection is closed or is expanding and will have growing needs. This will assist with longterm planning. Identify if there are highly significant areas in the building that cannot be adapted, as well as identifying areas of low significance where the use can be more flexible.

It is important that the area you use as storage is secure and is used exclusively to store the collection. For example, storing stationery in the same shelving or drawers as collection items can cause great confusion. Furthermore, if stationery or other non-collection material is stored with the collection, there will be more traffic in the area incurring greater risk of damage or theft.

4 Resources and Infrastructure Assessment

Once you have developed an understanding of the building's capacity and the collection's requirements you will need to look at all the other resources required for a museum/gallery. This will vary according to the scale and type of organisation you intend to run, but there are some basic requirements to make your venture successful.

4.1 Services

One of the big issues in a heritage building without cavity walls is the introduction of new services such as plumbing and electricity. New wiring or pipes may be difficult to lay without interfering with the fabric of the building and the surrounding landscape.

Electrical services

Heritage buildings often require rewiring, as older wiring may not be safe. However you also need to consider whether what is there is adequate for your needs: will you need extra electrical outlets for offices and public space, or for exhibitions? How will new electrical outlets affect the heritage fabric of the building? If there is no electricity in the building at all, will the introduction of electricity affect the significance of the site?

Lighting

What lighting installations or adaptations are required for exhibition and office spaces? If you have regularly changing exhibitions, you will need to provide flexible lighting adaptable to the different types and locations of display through control of light levels, position and number of circuits. Similarly, showcases can be difficult to light from the exterior. You might be considering showcases with interior lighting: these require easily accessible and discreet power sources.

Telephones

Is there already a telephone connection on the site and is the number of lines sufficient? If not, how and where are you going to introduce telephone cables?

Computers

Are you going to need a computer for cataloguing, which will also require additional space to work with objects? Are you going to need a computer for office work or administration and where are you going to locate this? Will you need to provide network cabling, and how can this be managed?

Security

You need to address both the security of the collection and displays during opening hours, and protection of the whole site when the building is closed. If the building is in an isolated location, are you able to install a 'back to base' system? Are security grilles appropriate and would exterior lighting be of assistance? Consider whether you need to protect small items sitting on open display. If there are a number of rooms, how are you going to monitor visitor activity and will you need to install a camera system? You may need to consider additional security staff to continually oversee such a system. This will in turn lead to additional staffing, facility and infrastructure costs.

Plumbing

What is the capacity of the current water supply and sewerage system? This is particularly

important for buildings in more remote locations where you may be relying on tank water, or may not have any water on the site. Are you going to need a water supply for public facilities such as toilets, kitchens or workshops? How are new plumbing works going to be installed and how will this effect the integrity of the building?

Delivery access

As with equitable access, you also need to consider occupational health and safety regulations and what sort of material is going to be regularly carried onto and around the site. If you have no lift access and a collection of large framed paintings that is regularly rotated on and off exhibition, storing them on the upper floor of the building would be inappropriate. You need to consider:

- the size of doorways
- whether you need a loading dock and how this is provided
- how new collection items are brought into the building and whether they can be kept apart for registration and pest inspection
- how food is brought in and rubbish disposed of and how this can be kept away from collection areas

Fire exits

For safety reasons all public buildings require easily identifiable exits. There are conditions that dictate sizes, numbers, and distances to be travelled by the public to reach the exits, as well as requirements regarding how and where they are signed. Consider where exits can be located and how their provision will affect other issues such as circulation around the museum.

Equitable (disabled and special needs) access

All public spaces are governed by regulations that require access to be provided in a dignified manner for people with disabilities and special needs. This includes access for the elderly, the sight impaired, those with wheelchairs, walking frames or sticks, and parents with prams. In some cases improved access can be achieved simply by the addition of a removable ramp. However, you may need to consider the impact of disability access on the heritage values of the building. If the impact is too great, you may want to consider alternative means of access such as a video or large format images of the upstairs rooms in a more accessible location. Some museums choose to limit public access to ground floor rooms, utilising upstairs areas for staff use.

For a detailed discussion about these issues refer to *Improving Access to Heritage Buildings- a practical guide to meeting the needs of people with disabilities* or *Heritage Technotes: providing access for people with disabilities* (see appendix 2 for details)

4.2 Office space

Every museum needs some office space to locate a computer, count the day's takings or answer the telephone. It may not need to be a large area, but it should be at the very least a space that is separate from the public areas of the museum.

Are there areas of less significance that can be adapted for offices?

Should the office be housed in another building?

Bathrooms and kitchens have often been used for offices, staff meeting areas or storage. This is often in direct conflict with the significance of these areas particularly in house museums where the kitchen functions as the 'hub of the house'.

4.3 Reception area

Providing an area for groups to congregate can be difficult to organise in smaller historic buildings, particularly house museums. It is particularly important if you are going to be accommodating school groups, coach tours or large social groups.

- Can it be housed in the building or do you need another location?
- What is the capacity of the space?
- Will you be able to provide an area to store bags, umbrellas, coats etc?

4.4 Cafe/restaurant/function centre

A cafe/restaurant/function centre can be a great asset to a site or a headache, depending on who runs it, the location of the site and the capacity of the facility. Think carefully about whether this is an appropriate enterprise for your place. A small cottage with a heritage garden is not going to support a full industrial kitchen. You will need to assess whether there is an area that can be adapted for this use without compromising the heritage values of the place. Alternatively, can you locate the facility in a new building, without effecting the curtilage curtilage (area surrounding a heritage building) of the site? You will also need to think about whether you have the capacity to run the centre yourselves or whether it is more appropriate to lease it out. Furthermore, while a food outlet can help generate additional revenue, it may not be appropriate to the cultural values of the place.

4.5 Shop

A shop can be another source of revenue for the museum. However, to be really efficient it needs to be located at the entrance or exit to your museum, either contained within the main building or immediately adjacent in another building. It needs power and light, a 'safe' area to deal with money, and sufficient space to display merchandise. Shops can also be themed to reflect the history of the building or site. For example a building with a significant garden may choose to concentrate on garden related material whereas a shearing shed may have wool based stock.

4.6 Public facilities

The numbers of toilets and washing facilities required for public spaces is prescribed by legislation. Depending on the size and type of museum/gallery, you may need to consider provision of:

- Toilets
- Disabled toilet
- Baby change area
- Cloaking
- Meeting room

4.7 Staff and volunteer facilities

Similarly, staff facilities are required for staff and volunteers:

- Toilets
- Lunch area
- Meeting area
- Kitchenette

4.8 Education and public programs

The kind of space you need for education and public programs will depend on the sort of facility you intend to run. In a small house museum, you may simply need a space for school groups to gather. For a larger facility or one with especially sensitive collections, you may need a space that has been set up specifically to cater for public programs. The types of events you may wish to provide include:

- activity programs for children
- exhibition talks or lectures
- performances or demonstrations

4.9 Collection management (including registration and conservation)

At various times you will need to look at and work on your collection in a secure, clean area. The size and layout of the area will depend largely on your collection. It is important that the space is not being used for other purposes, such as staff meals or meetings, during the time you are working on the collection. However, if there are 'down' times during the work on the collection it may be possible to make the space multi-purpose. Any plans for multi-purpose spaces should be undertaken only in consultation with museum staff to ensure that the processes of museum operations and their space requirements are completely understood.

The area will generally need a large, empty table, ergonomic chairs and good light, either natural or artificial, for examination of collection items. If you intend to provide a full-scale conservation facility, you will need access to a sink, a solvent cabinet, electricity and good ventilation.

4.10 Exhibition preparation

The amount of space required for exhibition preparation will depend on the type of exhibitions and how often they are changed over. You may be able to use the same space you use for collections work or you may require a separate workshop area. Some exhibitions require object mounts, framing of pictures, fitting-out of showcases, label preparation, or the preparation of additional display elements, such as dioramas. These processes can be messy and noisy, or require the use of hazardous materials such as paints and glues. You may even require an enclosed spray-booth.

4.11 Library and research facilities

Many visitors to museums and galleries want to research collections and archives held by the organisation. You may need an area where research can be carried out both by individuals within the organisation and interested visitors. This area should be set aside specifically for this purpose, away from food consumption, noise and visitor/staff traffic, as this increases the potential risk of damage to collection items and reference material.

5 Ongoing Maintenance

5.1 Introduction

One of the most common traps that organisations fall into when setting up a new venture is to forget that life goes on after the opening date. The environment will continue to affect the building and the collection, and the increase of activity in the building through the influx of visitors may speed up any deterioration of the building fabric. Ongoing display of collection items may also affect their condition.

Any planning of activities in your new museum or gallery should also include consideration of ongoing supervision and maintenance of the building and the collection.

5.2 Building

Most Conservation Management Plans include a section on building maintenance. This may include a schedule of works, giving timeframes for maintenance activities spanning the five or so years of the life of the Conservation Management Plan.

Some of the more common maintenance areas include:

- Gutters cleared
- Gardens maintained
- Outdoor fittings painted
- Light bulbs replaced
- Public areas cleaned and maintained

Your maintenance planning should include adequate allowance for the employment of qualified tradespeople on an ongoing basis to ensure that the building is properly maintained, in keeping with its heritage value.

5.3 Collection

The collection will also require ongoing care and maintenance. Items on display require regular inspection and cleaning, integrated pest management programs need to be implemented, outdoor displays need regular cleaning and maintenance and new exhibitions will require preparation of objects.

Trained conservators can advise you on the maintenance requirements for different materials and how they will respond to the kinds of conditions in your museum. It is critical that you work with experienced professionals and act on their advice.

5.4 Funding

The most important consideration underlying all of the above is that your project includes adequate funding to support the activities necessary to the ongoing survival of your museum or gallery. Nothing can kill a project faster than to starve it of money. Even the most enthusiastic volunteers will get discouraged if there is no funding to promote the museum, develop new exhibitions or organise activities. Nothing is more depressing than visiting a museum that obviously opened in a euphoria of optimism, and is now enveloped in layers of dust!

Since it is almost a rule of thumb that costs will increase annually, ensure that, whatever your source of funding, there is some flexibility in how you spend it. Make intelligent use of your maintenance schedule and plan to spend a little more in one area one year and less in another the next.

Appendix 1

The Conservation Management Plan

A 1.1 Introduction

A Conservation Management Plan is a special study report on a place or building that identifies and sets out clearly why it is important (its cultural significance) and how to keep that importance (conservation policy). *It is one of the legislative requirements of the NSW Heritage Office that any heritage-listed place (building or larger site) has a Conservation Plan before any work can be done on it.* The terms of the report must comply with the articles of the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS Charter of the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance, 2000. See www.icomos.org/burra_charter.html). It must also be written by qualified people, such as experienced heritage architects, historians, archaeologists and/or heritage landscape experts, and it must adhere to the format guidelines given in The NSW Heritage Manual produced by the NSW Heritage Office.

The report should:

- define clearly the cultural significance or importance of the place
- propose an action plan, policy or strategy on how to preserve this significance or importance

The Conservation Management Plan provides a guide as to how the building can be used and what sort of museum or gallery is appropriate for the place. For example, if the assessment of significance identifies most of the interior of the building as having high significance, it is probably more appropriate that the building be used to develop a museum telling the building's history (a site museum), although another use may still be deemed compatible if it preserves the interior. If, on the other hand, much of the interior is of lower significance, then you have the opportunity to develop a museum or gallery on a theme independent of, but compatible with, the history of the building.

A 1.2 Assessment of significance: how do we find out if and why a place is important?

The first step in assessing significance is to get a thorough understanding the place. To do this, research must be carried out in three major areas: historical research, oral history research and research on the fabric of the place and its physical context.

Historical research requires a thorough investigation into written records, newspapers, journals, maps, photographs and illustrations. Oral history research should involve community consultation, ie interviews with the present or past users, and any groups or persons having an interest in the place. Fabric research requires a thorough examination of the place for evidence of earlier structures; physical changes such as new wall linings, painting etc; previous uses, intactness, etc. The context and siting (the curtilage) of the place is also examined. This research is then compiled into a historical summary to give a full understanding of the place. The aim of this analysis is to establish if the place has a special significance, either historically, aesthetically, socially or scientifically.

The place is then compared to other similar places to determine whether it is significant at local, state, national or international level. From this assessment concise statements of significance are drafted. These statements of significance provide a sound basis on which to proceed in formulating policy or strategy about the most appropriate way to keep the place's significance or heritage value. For instance, significance that relates to the fabric of the building will require that the fabric is

conserved; or if it was the way in which the building was used that is deemed significant, then a continuation of that use may be required.

A 1.3 Formulation of conservation policy: how do we keep the heritage values of the place?

Once the significance of the place is determined, all the other factors that will bear on the future of the place must be assessed and put into the equation.

- What are the issues that arise out of the significance of the place?
- What does the owner or manager want to do with the place and what resources, financial and other, are available?
- What is the condition of the place: is it about to collapse; does the roof leak; are the supports rotted out; are there termite infestations; can the existing structure be altered? What shape are the existing services in (electrical, gas, fire sprinklers, air conditioning, etc) and what is their potential for upgrading?
- What are the current BCA (Building Code of Australia) requirements, local and state government regulations and planning instruments etc, that will affect the place and what will be their impact?
- What are the users/community needs: is there an identified need that this place could fulfil and still retain its significance?

It is in the second part of the Conservation Management plan, the identification of issues and opportunities that we begin to understand the conflicting nature of some of the requirements.

When all the issues and opportunities have been identified, assessed and resolved, a short list of appropriate options and uses can be proposed and tested against their impact on significance. Specific policies and strategies can then be formulated which will guide future works, management and maintenance of the place to retain its important or significant qualities and features. The final document, once adopted, can be used as a management tool and as part of a design brief for future works and development of the place. Generally a Conservation Management Plan should be reviewed against changing circumstances every 5-10 years.

Compiled by Sarah-Jane Rennie of the Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW in collaboration with Alan Croker of Design 5 and Linda Raymond with funding from the NSW Heritage Office.
Layout by Jocelyn Payne.

Appendix 2

Contact details for more information on any of the topics discussed in this publication

For information on heritage listings and heritage issues generally

NSW Heritage Office

Locked bag 5020

Parramatta NSW 2124

tel 02 9873 8500

fax 02 9873 8599

www.heritage.nsw.gov.au

Note that both the State Heritage Register and Inventory are available on this website.

Australian Heritage Council

GPO Box 787

Canberra ACT 2601

tel 02 6274 2111

fax 02 6274 2095

www.ahc.gov.au/index.html

National Estate Register

www.ahc.gov.au/register

For Information about the development of museums and galleries

Museums and Galleries Foundation of NSW

43-51 Cowper Wharf Rd

Woolloomooloo NSW 2011

Tel 02 9358 1760

Free call (in NSW) 1800 114 311

Fax 02 9538 1852

www.mgfnsw.org.au

References

For more details about environmental effects on different materials

Heritage Collections Council, *ReCollections: caring for collections across Australia*, 2000 available through Australian Museums Online (AMOL) <http://amol.org.au/reollections/>

Heritage Collections Council, *Guidelines for Environmental Control in Cultural Institutions*, 2002
available through AMOL, http://amol.org.au/craft/publications/hcc/environment_guide.asp

For references on Access

Martin, Eric J *Improving Access to Heritage Buildings - a practical guide to meeting the needs of people with disabilities*, Australian Heritage Commission, 1999, available through the Australian Heritage Commission's website
www.ahc.gov.au/infores/publications/generalpubs/access/preface.html

Heritage Council of Victoria, Heritage Technotes: providing access for people with disabilities,
available through Heritage Victoria's website,
www.heritage.vic.gov.au/technotes/tech_14.html

MGF's website has more general information on access see <http://www.mgfnsw.org.au/resources>