



SIGNIFICANCE
International

Assessing Significance and *Significance 2.0*: an introduction

Community Heritage Grant Winners Workshop
Canberra 24 October 2017



Significance ...

... incorporates all the elements that contribute to an object's meaning, including its context, history, uses and its social and spiritual values. [*Significance*, 2001]

... refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. [*Significance 2.0*, 2009]

What values could be ascribed to your collection?

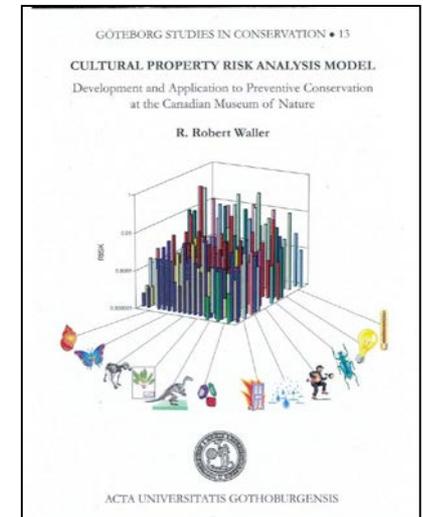
Values compilation by Waller

Economic // Informational // Cultural // Emotional // Other

Table 3.2-1 Examples of kinds of values.

Economic	Informational	Cultural	Emotional	Other
use ¹	documentary ¹	symbolic ^{1,15}	aesthetic ^{1,5}	craft ⁵
exchange ¹	scientific ^{1,2}	social ¹	personal narrative ¹	perceptual ¹²
monetary ¹	perceptual ¹	political ^{1,17}	sentimental ²	intrinsic ^{4,13}
re-collecting ²	social history ³	ethnological ³	spiritual ^{1,3,4}	existence ^{1,14}
market ⁵	period ⁵	folklore ⁵	superstition ⁵	medicinal
asset ⁶	educational ¹⁰	fashion ⁸	curiosity ⁵	
deprival ^{6,7,9}	teaching ¹⁰	continuity ¹⁶	wonder ¹⁷	
future benefits ^{6,11}	knowledge ^{12,15}	tradition ¹⁶		
historical cost ^{6,11}	serendipity ¹⁴	legend ¹⁷		
current cost ⁵	concept ¹⁵	patriotic ¹⁷		
going concern ⁹	refutation ¹⁵	nationalistic ¹⁷		
break up ⁹	interpretation ¹⁵	religious ¹⁷		
disposal ⁹	reference	iconographic		
replacement ^{9,11}	discipline specific			
socio-economic ¹¹	evidentiary			
gift and lease back ⁸	voucher			
agreed ⁶	exhibit			
private treaty ⁸	historical			
family division ⁶				
sale estimate ⁶				
reserve at auction ⁸				
inheritance tax ⁸				
capital gains tax ⁸				
rent or lease ⁸				
willing buyer & seller ⁸				
collateral against loan ⁸				

References: 1) Ashley-Smith 1999; 2) Andrew 1997; 3) Walley 1997; 4) Clavir 2002; 5) Timberlake 1997; 6) Uribe 1997; 7) McBride 1997; 8) Gowland 1997; 9) Evans 1997; 10) Pickering 1997; 11) Fitzgerald, Whiting and Shepherd 1997; 12) Michalski 1994b; 13) AHP and Winkworth 1998; 14) Blackmore, Donlon and Watson 1997; 15) Cotterill 1997; 16) Lagerqvist 1996; 17) Feilden and Jokilehto 1998



Whose significance?



European Australia 1788 -



Aboriginal Australia 65,000 -

Do values change?

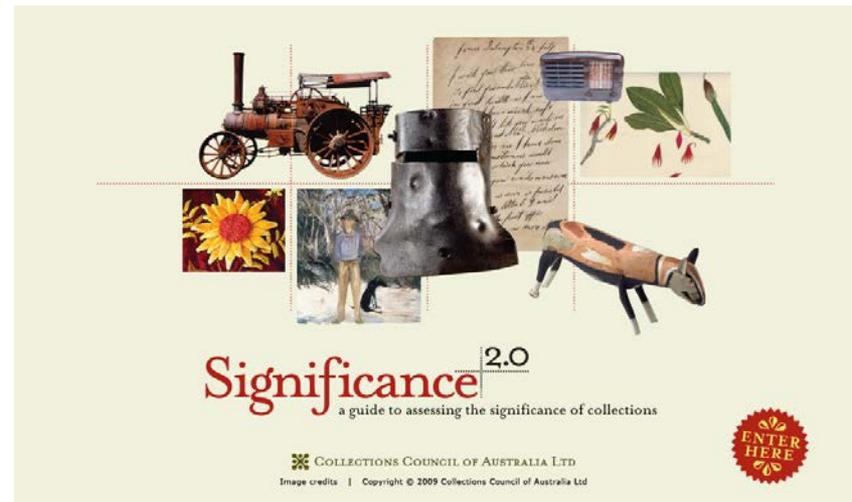
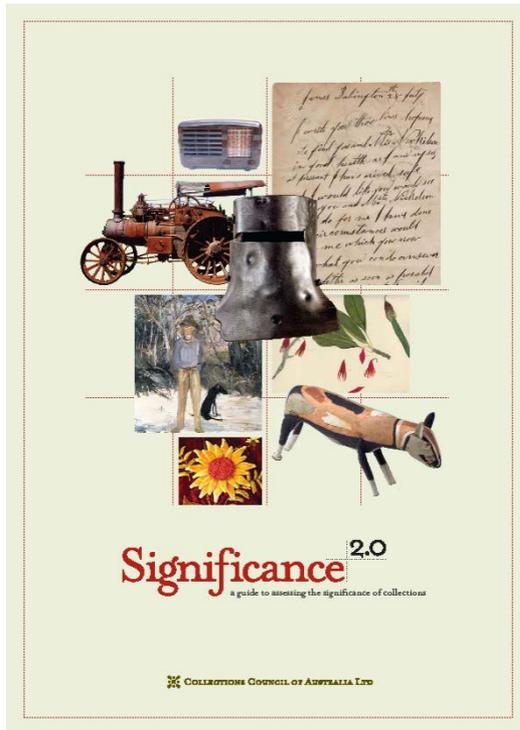


Yes, with
time
(diachronic),

and with
perspective
(synchronic)

Significance 2.0

Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collections (2009)



‘significance is the sum of all values’

PDF <http://arts.gov.au/resources-publications/industry-reports/significance-20>

ARCHIVED WEBSITE <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/112443/20101122-1236/significance.collectionscouncil.com.au/index.html>



Other resources

The Significance International webpage, 'What is Significance?' –

<http://www.significanceinternational.com/AboutUs/WhatIsSignificance.aspx>

– provides links to:

- Heritage Collections Council, *Significance* (2001)
- the summary 10-step process for assessing significance
- plus Ros Russell & Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0* (2009) [archived website & PDF]



The museological method

- ensures objects are assessed using consistent / uniform methods of analysis
- *Significance* (2001) aim:
‘to eventually have all museums [now collecting organisations] in Australia use a common system and language to describe and assess the significance of the country’s collections’

Heritage Collections Council, *Significance* (2001)



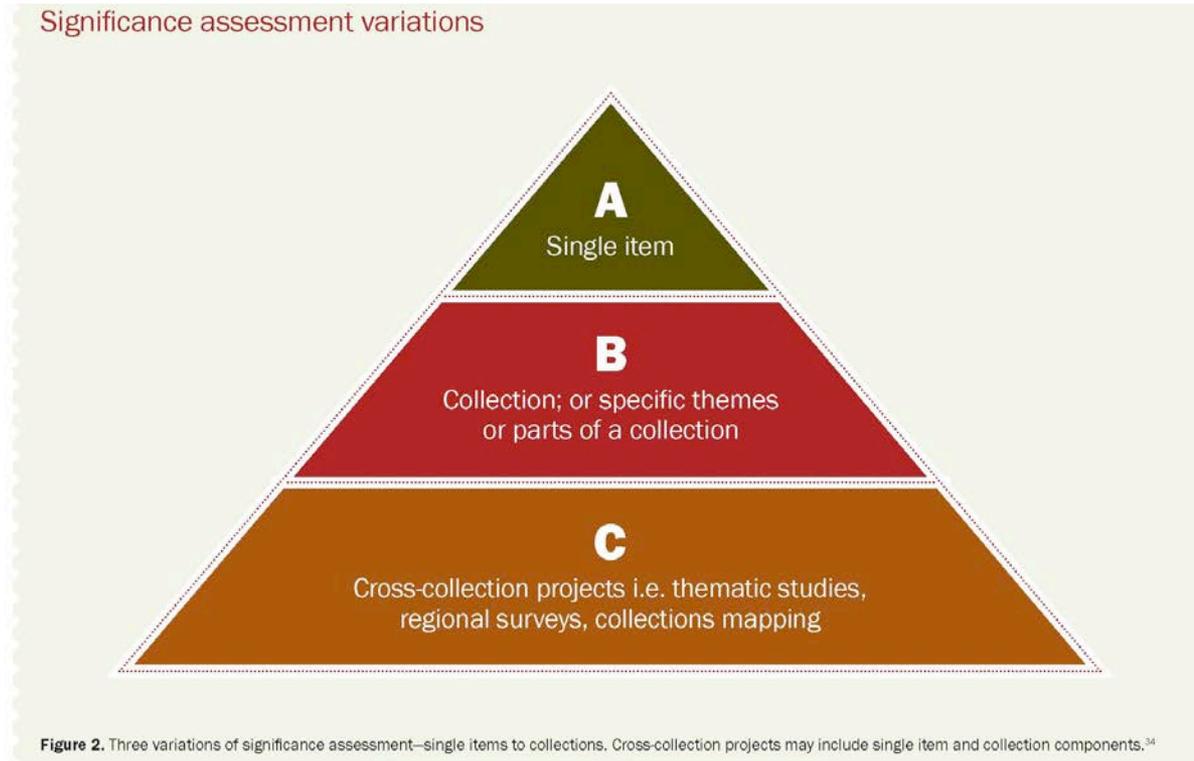
What is significance assessment?

‘Significance assessment is the process of researching and understanding the meanings and values of items and collections’

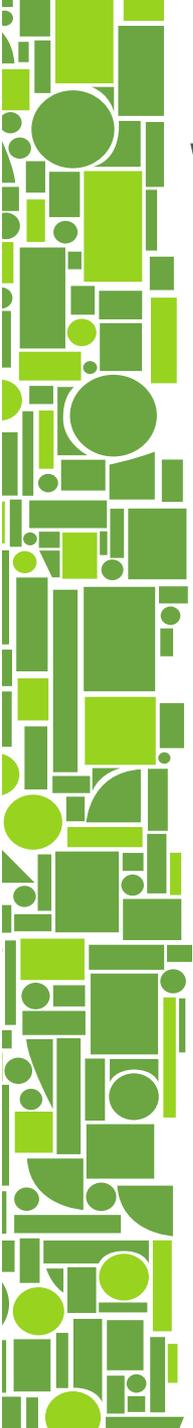
‘The purpose of significance assessment is to understand and describe how and why an item is significant’

...using a stepped process and criteria

What can be assessed?



Single items // Collections (or sub-sets) // Cross-collection projects



What is a ‘statement of significance’?

‘a statement of significance is a reasoned, readable summary of the values, meanings and importance of an item or collection’

‘it is an argument about how and why an item or collection is of value’

- A ‘statement of significance’ (SOS) arises from the process of significance assessment.
- The SOS is written by a named author, and dated.
- It answers questions about the object / collection: what? how? why? and what can the object / collection contribute to society or culture?

Preparing a significance assessment using the *Significance 2.0* Summary Card

1. Collate a file

2. Research/Review

3. Consult

4. Explore the context

5. Analyse and describe

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT CHECK LIST ✓



6. Compare

7. Identify places

8. Assess significance

9. Write statement

10. Action

The significance assessment process

Significance assessment in action

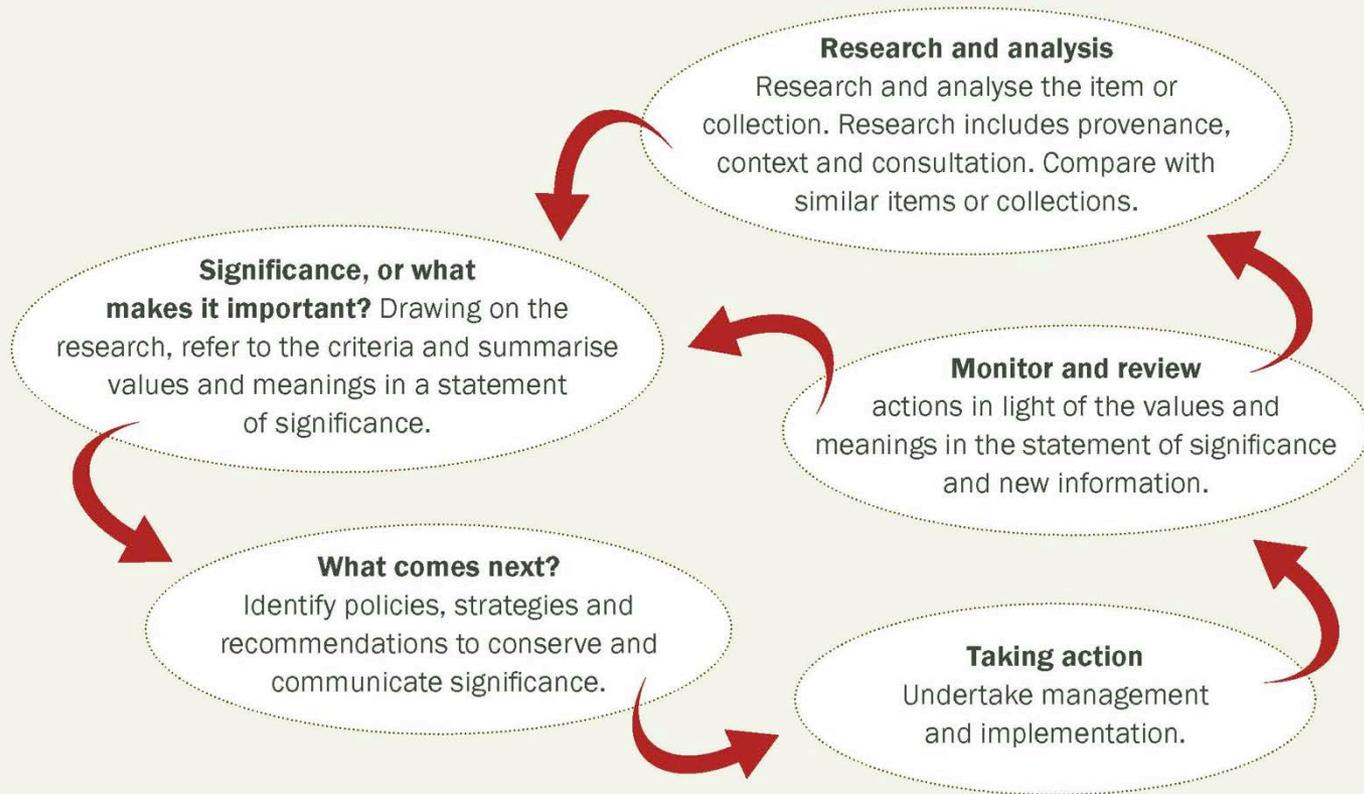


Figure 1. Use the statement of significance as a reference point for associated work, then revise the statement and related work as necessary.



Significance criteria - primary

historic

artistic or aesthetic

research or scientific

social or spiritual

These criteria are defined in *Significance* (2001)
- see pages 25, 28, 30 and 32

Significance criteria - comparative

provenance

condition or
completeness



interpretive
capacity

rarity or representativeness

These criteria are defined in *Significance* (2001)
- see pages 37, 39, 41, 43 and 45

John Marsden's dress - primary

Primary criterion: **historic** significance

- associations with a prominent colonial family
- poignant keepsake of a domestic tragedy
- example of an everyday child's dress, worn in Australia
- early date - just 16 years after European settlement in Australia





John Marsden's dress - comparative

provenance:

- chain of ownership to John Marsden's family by a note verified by other sources
- from family executors to the Royal Australian Historical Society
- gifted to the Powerhouse Museum in 1981

condition:

- darned, stained and faded in places; shows wear and tear of daily life

rarity:

- a very rare example of an everyday child's dress

John Marsden's dress

Statement of significance

- see *Significance 2.0*
page 41



Catalogue description ≠ SOS

Contrasting a catalogue description with a statement of significance

Catalogue description

Cast iron mangle, K1372, Powerhouse Museum

Mangle, laundry, upright, ornate, cast-iron, red and green frame, supported on 4 casters, arched roof, 2 wooden rollers, operated by wheel with rounded wooden handle, patent no. 120847, 'The York Machine', retailed by Anthony Hordern, England, from the laundry of 18 Watkin St Newtown (OF). c. 1900 (AF).

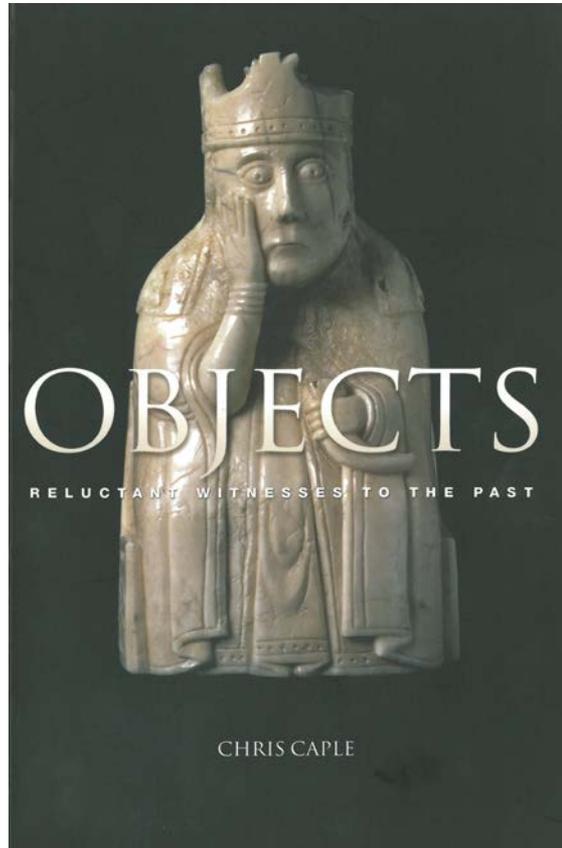
Statement of significance

An upright cast iron laundry mangle with original paintwork, complete with draining and mangling boards, retailed by Anthony Hordern's Sydney, about 1900. The upright mangle was invented in the mid-nineteenth century and was a common item in domestic laundries, hotels and boarding houses by the turn of the century. The design of the mangle, with its main spring, tooth gears and wheel, shows the application of industrial design to household technology, while the decorative cast iron panels are typical of Victorian taste. The mangle was used to wring out washed linen and clothes, and to press, smooth and add gloss to dampened household linen. The mass production and affordability of the upright mangle allowed middle-class homes to enjoy glossy, pressed linen, even with limited domestic help. Mangled linen did not need to be ironed, and the glossy surface meant it did not soil as readily. Although not rare in museum collections, this mangle is significant for its good condition, completeness, and provenance, being recorded in its original laundry context in a terrace house in inner Sydney, with associated information about the family's domestic life.



Cast iron upright mangle c. 1900
Photo: Jaime Plaza
Collection: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

A helpful materials resource



Chris Caple

*Objects: reluctant witnesses
to the past*

Routledge, 2006, Oxford



Evidence - Caple

how to investigate archaeological and
historical objects

‘object biographies’

=+=+=+=+=+=

All information on the object is important
- from the origin of the raw materials to
the final marks placed upon the object
to document its place in a collection



Evidence - Caple

- importance of physical / visual examination
 - develop your observational skills
 - your magnifying glass is your ally
 - responsibility



Evidence - Caple

bias of objects

material survivals

recent past

bespoke objects

use wear

bias of collectors

bias of interpreters

access

existing knowledge and experience



Owning up to bias

Statements of significance may reflect inherent and/or deliberate bias. The assessor may wish to acknowledge this within the SOS.

The Museum of London's 1994 prehistory exhibition included an introductory panel that demonstrated the personal responsibility taken by the two curators.

See the next slide for a photo of the panel. A transcript of the panel text is in the slide after that.

Museum of London, 1994

Can **you** believe what we say?

The Prehistoric London gallery deals with the time 'before history'. By definition, there are no written records...

Filling the gap

Archaeology supplies our evidence, although the difficulties of recording the fragile traces of London's earliest past are enormous. Usually it is only possible to salvage shreds of information.



The present in the past

These shreds can be interpreted in many ways, however objectively they are recorded. As each succeeding generation projects its own present onto the past, many prehistories are possible.



Politically present... and correct?

This gallery is a reflection of our present. We have chosen to humanise the past by focusing on specific sites and the needs of individual people, and by giving greater prominence to green and gender issues.

How will this standpoint be judged in the future? What do you think?

Jonathan Cotton and Barbara Wood, Curators, November 1994



CHILTERNS

GREATER LONDON BOUNDARY



Prehistoric sites
Restored in the
gallery

Modern local
landmarks



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Insignificance

- It is perfectly acceptable to find low or no significance based on currently available information and write your signed, dated and evidenced SOS accordingly
- [Click here](#) to read an example of a low significance SOS



Distributed National Collection



B&W, 1991. Aerial Photograph of Anne Jones Inn, Glenrowan, Victoria, June 2008
Reproduced courtesy of Ken A. Mackenzie.com

The Jerilderie letter, State Library of Victoria and National Museum of Australia

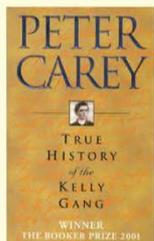
The Jerilderie letter has been described as Ned Kelly's 'manifesto'. Around 8000 words long, it was dictated by Ned Kelly to Joe Byrne in February 1879, and conveys his pleas of innocence, and his passionate desire for justice both for his family and for the poor Irish selectors of Victoria's north-east. It is one of only two documents by Ned Kelly to have survived, and the only one with a direct link to the Kelly gang and the events with which they were associated. The Jerilderie letter brings Ned Kelly's distinctive voice to life, and offers a unique insight into the man behind the legend.²¹ The National Museum of Australia holds a digital copy of the Jerilderie letter.

Archaeology at Glenrowan, privately owned site

In June 1880 Ned Kelly and his gang held local people hostage at the Ann Jones Inn, Glenrowan, Victoria, while they attempted to fend off an attack by Victorian Police that ended in a shoot-out. Kelly was captured, and the other gang members were killed. The incident left behind a wealth of material culture—seven and a half thousand items—that was recovered in archaeological digs on the Inn site from 2006. The physical evidence of the battle tells us much about the course and direction of the Police attack, and where the gang members reloaded their rifles before resuming the defence. The online Victorian Heritage Database has a statement of significance for the site.²²

Kelly in fiction, State Library of Victoria

Australian novelist Peter Carey won the Booker prize in 2001 with his best-selling novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, written in similar language to that used by Ned Kelly. Peter Carey's papers in the State Library of Victoria (MS 13475) contain a draft of what was later published as *True History of the Kelly Gang*. The papers also include notes Carey kept when he was compiling the work, as well as photographs and twig, plant and leaf samples.



Peter Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001)
Reproduced courtesy of University of Queensland Press.

McIntyre manuscript, Victoria Police Museum

The Victoria Police Museum holds two copies of a manuscript written by Thomas McIntyre, the only policeman to survive the murders of police by the Kelly gang at Stringbark Creek on 26 October 1878. He became the only living witness to give evidence at Kelly's trial, apart from Ned Kelly himself. The manuscript gives his account of the massacre at Stringbark Creek.



The McIntyre manuscript and illustration of Ned Kelly's trial
Reproduced courtesy of the Victoria Police Museum and Historical Unit



community historians and indicates that that Ned Kelly also valued life. Reproduced courtesy of the Benalla Costume and Pioneer Museum, Benalla and District Historical Society Inc.



Ned Kelly's sash, Benalla Costume and Pioneer Museum

A young neighbour of the Kellys at Avenel, Richard Shelton, nearly drowned when he fell from a footbridge while crossing a creek on his way to school in 1865, but was saved by Ned Kelly, then ten years old. The grateful Shelton family gave Kelly a silk cummerbund or sash as a thank you gift. The 2.21 metre x 21 centimetre sash was found on Kelly's injured body after the siege of Glenrowan in 1880.

Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly, National Gallery of Australia

Sidney Nolan's creation of an abstracted helmet with an oblong eyeslit has become a visual icon for the Ned Kelly story, and has been featured widely as an instantly recognisable Australian image, including its use in the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Paintings in Nolan's Ned Kelly series are in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, in the Canberra Museum and Gallery and in private collections.



Sidney Nolan
Ned Kelly 1946
Enamel on composition board
90.8 x 121.5 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of Sandley Reed 1977

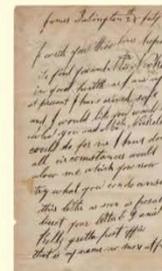
Kelly papers, Public Record Office Victoria

The Kelly papers held by the Public Record Office Victoria are the primary documentary evidence of Ned Kelly's story and provide detailed factual information on Kelly, his gang members, family and supporters. The hundreds of official Kelly papers at PROV are the largest and most intact collection of historic documents on the subject, and range from the earliest police reports in the Kelly saga to the court records of Kelly's trial. The papers, dating from the 1850s to 1882, also document the reform of the Victorian Police Force as a result of the 1881 Royal Commission on the Police Force of Victoria, which was reviewed at the time of the Kelly breakout. The records provide substantial material evidence of the life and career of Australia's most notorious outlaw.²¹

The Story of the Kelly Gang, National Film and Sound Archive

Made in Australia in 1906 by Charles Tait, and believed to be the first full-length feature film (60 minutes) to be produced in the world, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was a success in Australia, New Zealand and Britain. It is a testament to the birth of the Australian film industry, and exerted an influence on modern cinema production.

The surviving seventeen minutes of fragments of the *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, along with its promotional booklet that gives a context for the tale, have historical significance as the first Australian narrative film, and as signifying the foundation of a vigorous Australian film-making industry. The film has creative significance as the surviving original filmic representation of the Kelly bushranger legend.²²



Letter written by Edward (Died) Kelly to Sergeant James Balgownie of the Kyneton Police 28 July 1870. From the Kelly papers collection PROV, VPRS 937/P0, Indexed Registered Correspondence (Victoria Police), Unit 212, 1870/01256
Reproduced with the permission of the

See pages 5 – 9 of *Significance 2.0*



What does a finished Statement of Significance look like?

Some examples are tabled for viewing
during this session

Step 10 – Actions

[Click here](#) to explore a number of projects that have resulted from significance assessments

Significance in action—applications

Significance assessment applications

Significance assessment is only the first part of the significance process.

Once an item or collection has been assessed as significant, a range of actions, called 'applications' here, flow from the assessment.

These two pages contain a snapshot of how collecting organisations have used significance assessment to better manage their collections, to make them accessible, and to advocate for their importance to the community.

Note: captions and acknowledgements for these images appear on page 46.

Please visit *Significance 2.0* online to see the full case studies for the applications of interest to you.

Significance^{2.0}
<http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au>



ACQUISITION...
of the Charlotte medal
1



DEACCESSIONING...
of 6 000 items from the National Trust of Australia (WA) collection
2



CONSERVATION TREATMENT...
of Prime Minister Menzies' Bentley
3



COLLECTION RISK ASSESSMENT...
of Australian flag fragments for priority salvage
4



COLLECTION CARE...
of South Sea Islands artefacts
5



COPYING AND DIGITISATION...
of the James Gleeson Oral History Collection
6



COLLECTION ANALYSIS AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT...
at the University of Melbourne
7



IN SITU COLLECTIONS...
documenting the Springfield sheep station collection before transfer
8



SHARED COLLECTIONS...
managing the Manning Clark portrait between a private historic house and a government gallery
9



EXHIBITIONS AND INTERPRETATION...
of an art installation in a travelling exhibition
10



ONLINE EXHIBITIONS...
Bungaree lithograph in the Objects Through Time online exhibition
11



ONLINE ACCESS AND EDUCATION...
at the Sydney 2000 Olympics website
12



ASSESSING CULTURAL HERITAGE WEBSITE QUALITY...
for the Australian Government's Culture Portal
13



NOMINATING TO A REGISTER...
Riawe to the Australian Register of Historic Vessels
14



APPLYING FOR A GRANT...
Jilamara Arts and Crafts collection to the Community Heritage Grants Program
15



ADVOCACY AND RESOURCING...
of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre
16



FUNDRAISING AND PROMOTION...
for the Great Melbourne Telescope
17



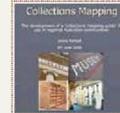
FUNDRAISING AND PROMOTION...
for the Neicebee
18



THEMATIC STUDIES AND REGIONAL SURVEYS...
Her Story at Port Macquarie
19



THEMATIC STUDIES AND REGIONAL SURVEYS...
Timber Stories in the Hastings region
20



COLLECTIONS MAPPING...
see <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/collections+mapping.aspx>
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SIGNIFICANCE TRAINING...
across Australia
22

Values do change!





Questions?

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