



# World Heritage Research

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## Abstract

### Introduction:

The Australian Heritage Collections Council (HCC) has urged significance assessment of museum objects using a nationwide consistent process and agreed set of criteria (HCC 2001: 7). Using the HCC suggested process of addressing four primary and five comparative criteria, a full assessment of a group of objects held by the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM) is presented here in the form of a Conservation Plan.

Significance assessment may typically take place upon acquisition, during cataloguing, prior to conservation, as part of exhibition research, or preliminary to de-accessioning (HCC 2001: 14). This case concerns thirteen archaeological artefacts donated to the ANMM in 1987 from a New South Wales Public Works Department building site at West Bennelong Point/East Sydney Cove/East Circular Quay. This area is part of the Sydney Opera House development. The material was acquired by the ANMM as "an important example of a 'port facility' of Sydney Harbour mid 19th Century", and consists mainly of massive chain links. The rapidly deteriorating condition of one of the thirteen objects excited concern in 2000, and was then suggested as a research project. In this report the focus will be on a group of ten related objects I have called 'The Sydney Cove Chain'. In the absence of an existing thorough significance assessment, such an assessment is now undertaken prior to conservation, in consideration that "Significance is the starting point for how best to conserve an object" (HCC 2001: 68)

Conservation Plans commissioned outside institutions with conservation departments do not commonly enter into condition and treatment detail. Their aim is to make a thorough analysis of significance which, when demonstrated, leads to conservation policy making that "enable[s]...significance to be retained, recovered or, at least, impaired as little as possible" (Kerr 1990: 3). While the essence of the conservation approach in such a Conservation Plan is outlined, the substance of policy decisions is often detailed in a separate document by conservation specialists (HCC 2001: 14). This institutionally based Conservation Plan is thus a hybrid report which both examines significance and presents conservation solutions - museum acquisition practices and contract archaeology management emerge as corollaries to significance investigation.

### References:

Heritage Collections Council 2001 *Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections* Heritage Collections Council/Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Kerr, JS 1990 *The Conservation Plan: a guide to the preparation of conservation plans for places of European significance* (3rd Ed'n) The National Trust of Australia Sydney.

### Some findings:

The Sydney Cove Chain is Admiralty Pattern Mooring Chain. Evidence presented shows that it may either have been used in mooring or boom defence. Currently, it appears that the Chain was fully imported from Britain for use in naval permanent moorings in Sydney Cove from 1795. Permanent moorings were laid at the head of the Cove by Matthew Flinders in 1803 for his ruined ship H.M.S. Investigator, and permanent moorings were re-laid near the find site in 1823. Chain segments were dredged up to back-fill civic seawall construction from around 1860.

On the basis of original historical research and georegistrations of the archaeological site area through time, this report finds that the Opera House site contained archaeological deposits associated with the early development of Sydney Cove, in contrast to the 1986 operating premise and 1987 findings of the contract archaeologist E. Higginbotham. The dates of deposition and original use of the Sydney Cove Chain artefacts are revised back 20-30 years here. A Statement of Heritage Significance explains why these objects are significant for Australia. This work has reduced the degree of uncertainty surrounding the significance of the Sydney Cove Chain.

Arising publication:

Bullock, VM 2011 What lies beneath the Sydney Opera House? in Staniforth, M et.al., Proceedings on the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Underwater Cultural Heritage, Asian Academy for Heritage Management, Manila, Philippines, pp. 953-967. Available at: <http://www.themua.org/collections/items/show/1248>

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