

What is Heritage Conservation?

The aim of heritage conservation is to ensure that the cultural significance of heritage places is retained for future generations to enjoy, but how do we achieve this? In 1979, Australia adopted a charter outlining the general principles and philosophy behind heritage conservation - The Burra Charter. This now forms the backbone of the management of historic places across Australia and indeed many other countries worldwide. (Copies of the Burra Charter can be obtained from the Heritage Council of WA.)

The Language of Heritage Conservation

Like many industries, heritage has some terms which are unique, or which have a different meaning from the one we use every day.

Under the Charter, "conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance and may, according to circumstances, include preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation and will commonly be a combination of more than one of these." (extract from Article 1 Burra Charter)

Therefore conservation doesn't necessarily mean keeping a place as it is without allowing change. Over time, buildings and places need to adapt and change to different circumstances and the needs of the user or occupier. Heritage conservation is an informed process that manages and allows for this change, but at the same time perpetuating the cultural significance of the place.

The Glossary of Heritage Terms includes some more commonly referred to words and phrases.

The principles in the Burra Charter have been adopted by the Town and are used to formulate the policies relating to the conservation of our heritage places within the Town of Vincent.



Looking after Your Heritage Property

Regular Maintenance - "stave off decay by daily care" - William Morris, 1877

Regular maintenance of your property makes good sense and in the long run often saves you money. However, to many of us maintenance can seem a real chore and we often put off what needs to be done in favour of a trip to the beach, the footy or just relaxing at home!

A small regular investment into maintenance can limit the need for expensive and extensive repairs later down the track. For example, regular cleaning of gutters and downpipes will help to prevent water damage, and damp penetrating brickwork and timber.

The first step of maintenance should be a regular inspection of the property. Early detection of problems makes it easier to take timely remedial action. For smaller properties it is not difficult to carry out the inspection yourself. Approach it safely and methodically starting at the roof and working down, and then it is less likely you will miss something. This will help you identify slipped tiles, blocked gutters, loose pointing, rotten weatherboards, build up of soil and vegetation above the damp proof course etc. If you find problems and do not know what to do next, then you may need to seek advice from a suitably qualified professional, such as an architect building surveyor, structural engineer or builder. It is important to try and find one who is familiar with work to older buildings and specialises in their repair and improvement. If you're not sure ask to see examples of their work.

KEEP SAFE

It is important that you carry out any building maintenance in a safe way. Working on ladders, in lofts and on roofs can be hazardous. It is best not to work alone and make sure you consider the safety of others when doing your inspection. You may need safety equipment, such as gloves and protective goggles when clearing gutters and drains. If you have any concerns about your safety, particularly on roofs or in loft spaces, ask a reputable and professional builder to undertake the inspection for you.

Common Causes of Building Failure and Decay

The most common causes of building failure or decay are poor construction, inappropriate repair or neglect. The main culprit is neglect! This can be demonstrated by vegetation growing out of gutters, and trees anchored into the brickwork at the base of a building, but also less obvious things like blocked ventilation grills and dripping outdoor taps or poorly placed reticulation.

Tremendous damage can also be caused by wood boring insects and fungi in warm, damp and unventilated conditions. Correction by eliminating moisture and increasing natural ventilation will help to alleviate these problems.

Tree roots can damage the foundations of a building but equally climbing plants such as ivy can create and conceal serious problems. The plants can trap moisture behind them and not allow the walls to "breathe" and dry out, resulting in damage to mortar and timber and damp problems within the building. The roots of ivy can penetrate into the building fabric so be very careful when removing. It is better to cut the ivy at its base and allow the growth to wither before removing. Not all plants cause problems but if possible check behind them (in winter if they lose their leaves) to make sure nothing sinister is happening!

Rising Damp

Rising damp can be reduced if the base of the building is kept dry and not wetted by leaky gutters, downpipes, poorly placed reticulation and rain splashing back from hard ground surfaces. It is also important to keep the soil level in the garden below the damp proof course (if there is one) and certainly below internal floor level.

If done regularly, maintenance should not be an onerous task. Here are some helpful "Do's and Don'ts" to guide you with your maintenance. Remember "stave off decay by daily care".

Do	Don't
carry out regular inspection and maintenance	allow serious defects to remain
gain advice from appropriate professionals	expect independent advice from someone who has something to sell you
repair rather than replace	use unsympathetic materials
respect the building's character and history	"improve" by altering the original appearance
avoid unnecessary work	clad walls using artificial or modern materials
find the cause of defects	repair without finding out the main cause of the problem
use only traditional materials and techniques	use inappropriate modern materials
remedy inappropriate repairs	bodge repairs
remove disfiguring alteration or additions	replace windows and doors in non-original patterns and materials
obtain necessary planning and legal consents	do any work without required consent

Making Changes to Your Heritage Property

Heritage conservation is not about preserving our culturally significant places without allowing change, but is more about understanding why a place is important and then managing change in an informed way so that the historical significance of the place is retained and possibly enhanced. For example a building is better to have a change of use than fall into dereliction because its original purpose is now redundant. Equally a house built in the early 20th century will need modifications to bring it up to the living standards expected from today's dwellings. Both of these can be done successfully through a process of informed conservation. Again the Burra Charter provides us with guidance on how to make changes to a heritage property. The charter does not lay down rigid rules for the improvement of heritage places but instead provides guiding principles to allow logical decision making when planning their future management.



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Remember these Basic Steps to Conservation:

- Investigate the physical and documentary evidence of the place (by looking at the building and doing historical research).
- Assess and understand the heritage significance of the place (why is the place special?).
- Develop a conservation and management policy based on the heritage significance of the place (what is it you are trying to do and how are you going to do it?).
- Keep a record of what changes you have done (so that others will know in the future).
- Do things in a logical order (know what, how and when you will do it).
- Do as much work as is necessary, and as little as possible! (this will help maintain the place as well as keep original materials etc).
- Repair rather than replace.
- Where possible make alterations that can be reversed in the future.
- Avoid precise imitation of architectural detail in new work (so we know what is old and what is new).
- Ensure additions are sympathetic.
- Stabilise problem areas (using qualified trades people who have a proven reputation for quality work).
- Respect the interior as well as the exterior.
- Seek design excellence (a respectful approach to heritage places does not prevent innovative, interpretive and contemporary design solutions).
- Contact Town of Vincent to ascertain whether the works require approval.

If you are planning work to your heritage place, it is recommended that a conservation specialist be employed to plan and undertake the work (unless it is maintenance or minor repair) Contact your heritage adviser at the Town for further information on who can assist you with your project.

Acknowledgment

The information in this brochure is based on the information contained in the document "A Stitch in Time" produced by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation in association with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and the Australian Burra Charter, and the Town of Vincent freely acknowledges the use of these documents.



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TOWN OF VINCENT

