

GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Developing a significant collection

Provenance

It is important to record the provenance of items (particularly artefacts), when acquiring and cataloguing collection items. Provenance information can prove that an item is authentic. Information collected for provenance includes who created and or owned the item and when and where it was made and (for artefacts) used. This information helps when determining the significance of the item and the importance of the item for your collection. Fields are incorporated in cataloguing data structures for recording this information. A section for recording the information should be included in acquisition forms for new items.

Significance

Increasingly references are made to significance, significance statements and significance assessment in articles about collection management and in grant application guidelines.

Some funding bodies expect societies to have had a significance assessment of their collection before providing funding for collection management and other projects. Such assessments can be undertaken by an historian, a museum curator, a librarian or an archivist depending on the type of collection. The Community Heritage Grants – <http://www.nla.gov.au/chg/> – from the National Library provide funding for significance assessments.

Even if societies decide not to have an outside significance assessment made of the collection, societies are still encouraged to internally evaluate the significance of their collection. What makes the collection different from other collections? Do items collected fit in with the collection policy of the group? As well as looking at the significance of the collection as a whole, societies also investigate individual items, selecting the most significant items and providing a statement as to why they are significant. Considerations for significance may include rarity of the item, age of the item and association with the local area. Some items and collections may be of state or national significance. Information about the item's provenance can assist when determining significance.

In 2001 the Heritage Collections Council published *Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage and collections*. This publication was revised and republished in 2009 as *Significance 2.0* and can be downloaded from Collections Australia Network website – <http://significance.collectionscouncil.com.au/home> .

Preservation Surveys

Preservation surveys examine the current condition of a collection and determine how items may be preserved by preparing a prioritised list of recommendations for improving the condition of the collection and the housing of collection items.

Some funding bodies expect societies to have had a preservation survey of their collection before providing funding for collection management and other projects. Such assessments can be undertaken by a conservator. The Community Heritage Grants – <http://www.nla.gov.au/chg/> – from the National Library provide funding for preservation surveys.