



Vision planning and management of Sydney Harbour sites.

## Information Sheet No.6 Protecting Archaeological Relics

A key objective of the Trust is to protect, conserve and interpret the heritage values of Trust land. Archaeological relics make an important contribution to helping us better understand our heritage.

This info sheet outlines the matters the Trust considers when assessing actions on archaeologically sensitive sites and sets out the procedures to follow if an archaeological relic is found on Trust land.

### What is an Archaeological Relic?

Archaeological relics are the physical remains of former landscapes, vegetation, buildings, contents and site features. They are objects of physical evidence used by people in the past that represent the way they worked and lived their daily lives. Archaeological relics may be derived from indigenous or non-indigenous occupation of a site.



Fort A84 Gun, Middle Head

Archaeological sites are found in areas that have been vacated, or sites that are still being used. Archaeological sites may be spread over large areas and might only contain remains or debris.

Archaeological sites may be located almost anywhere, such as natural bushland, on disused industrial sites, under roads, along foreshores or on the seabed.

Archaeological relics may take the form of, but are not limited to:

- Buildings (both ruined and standing);
- Structures (examples from Trust lands include gun emplacements and former road alignments);
- Household objects;
- Machinery and tools;
- Pollen as evidence of past environments;
- Parasites as evidence of human diet and disease; and
- Subsurface remains of former landscape and vegetation.

### Why are archaeological relics important?

Archaeological relics are irreplaceable resources that have huge potential to contribute to our understanding of our history and the development of society.

The relics frequently contain physical remains that complement existing documentary information by providing tangible and realistic evidence about the past and important elements of human nature.



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**Heavy penalties** apply for actions without approval that result or will result in a significant impact on the environment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*.

### Assessment of Proposed Actions

The Trust's Comprehensive Plan guides the way in which the Trust will assess all activities on Trust lands, and includes policies for the protection of archaeological remains. (**Information Sheet No. 1** outlines the assessment and approval process)

As an outcome, the Trust has prepared, or is in the process of preparing, Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for all of its sites of heritage significance (**Information Sheet No. 4** details heritage conservation). The CMP provides detailed guidance for managing activities on archaeologically sensitive sites.

Dependent upon the degree of archaeological sensitivity and the scale of proposed excavation or disturbance, certain measures may be required to ensure the protection of archaeological relics. These may include:

- Undertaking an archaeological assessment and recording before proceeding with any work with the potential to impact on subsurface archaeology.
- Retaining a professional archaeologist to carry out a watching brief (i.e. attended monitoring when sensitive unearthings are anticipated) during excavations.
- All contract staff instructed as to the sensitivity of the area and what likely artifacts or objects of interest may be encountered.
- Taking extra care on sites with known Aboriginal significance, such as extra

sensitivity where rock faces are being exposed, as engravings may be revealed.

- Modifying works to avoid impacting on historic or indigenous sites.

### What applicants should do before starting works?

If required, preliminary investigations will be arranged prior to works commencing. Before the commencement of work a site operations meeting will need to be conducted, where contractors will be made aware of the existence of sensitive areas and the potential archaeological implications of any works. The contractor is also required to ensure staff and sub-contractors working on the site are made aware of the issues.



Contractors should note that all building fabric is considered to be significant by the Trust. Unless otherwise specifically approved, no removal of fabric should occur. This includes, but is not limited to signage, former fixings, services, equipment and machinery and all movable items.

### What do I do if I find an archaeological relic?

If an archaeological relic is discovered on Trust Land, work should cease immediately and the Trust should be contacted.



It is important that the relic is not removed or disturbed in any way. Not only are the relics themselves important, but their position and layout in relation to other objects is also important in establishing relationships or methods of operation.

Depending on the nature of the find, it may be necessary to undertake some archaeological investigations of the site.

This may involve a watching brief or manual archaeological investigation in order to conserve the resource.

If the nature of a relic is uncertain, it will be further investigated by documentary and physical research, prior to further disturbance.

### Further Information:

- The Trust's Plans, policies and the **Proposed Action Application Form** are available from the Trust's website at [www.harbourtrust.gov.au](http://www.harbourtrust.gov.au).
- The EPBC Act and Commonwealth heritage is available from the Department of Environment and Heritage website at [www.deh.gov.au/heritage](http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage)
- Commonwealth Heritage Places and policies is available from the Australian Heritage Commission at [www.ahc.gov.au](http://www.ahc.gov.au)

If you have any questions in relation to archaeological heritage assessment, you may call the Trust's planners on 8969 2100