



# RESEARCHING HERITAGE PLACES



# CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Introduction to historical research	4
How to begin	5
Where to look	6
J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History	6
State Records Office of Western Australia	6
National Archives of Australia (WA Regional Office)	7
Landgate	7
National Trust of Australia (WA)	8
Heritage Council of WA	8
Historical societies, local history, collections and other record depositories	9
Royal Western Australian Historical Society and affiliated local societies	9
Local history collections	9
Other record depositories	9
Types of information	10
Land information	10
Rate books	11
Newspapers and serials	12
Post Office directories	13
Maps and plans	13
Photographs and illustrations	14
Oral histories	14
Other sources	15



# INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered about the history of your house? Or maybe you have always wanted to know the story behind a local park or community hall.

There may not be a published history of the place you are interested in so you will need to do the research yourself.

If you are an owner, researching the history of your home can be very rewarding and can be a vital first step before undertaking conservation work on an older property.

This brochure aims to make the new researcher's task a little bit easier. It provides an outline of the available sources of information and how to make the most of them.

**BELOW:** Brookman and Moir Street Precinct, Perth (1897-98)





# INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Historians refer to two main types of information: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources are the essential basis of good historical research. They include documents, plans, State and local government records, as well as private documents, such as letters during the historic period you are researching.

Secondary sources are interpretations of the past, and include books, articles and university theses. These are written at a later time, and are useful for giving an overview of the topic, in addition to providing clues for avenues for further investigation. However, to avoid repeating someone else's mistakes, secondary sources should be cross-checked against primary sources whenever possible.

Some resources, such as magazine and newspaper articles, lie between primary and secondary sources. Although written at the time, they are one writer's interpretation of events.

Other useful sources of information include encyclopaedias, handbooks, yearbooks, almanacs, atlases and directories, interviews, photographs and oral histories.

Remember that no source is infallible. Use as many sources as you can to confirm facts and make your own work more accurate.

Librarians and archivists are there to provide assistance and guidance. They are not there to do the work for you. So you will need to think creatively when searching for references. Word association and checking different spellings of names are important tools when finding relevant information.

When taking notes, keep a record of exactly where you found your information, because you will need to reference the information you have used in your written history. There are a number of ways to do this, including footnotes and endnotes. But whichever method you use, you should be able to easily locate exactly where the information came from.

There are several reasons for referencing your work: it saves time if you need to check details later, others may want to find out more about the place and can locate the sources you used, and it acknowledges the work of other researchers you have used.

A useful book for new researchers is: G. M. Hibbins, C. Fahey & M. R. Askew, *Local History: A Handbook for Enthusiasts* (1985). Copies may be available through your local library.

LEFT: Colwyn, Claremont (1911)



# HOW TO BEGIN

While research can be fun, it can also be time consuming. Be realistic about your expectations and the amount of time you can devote to the task.

If you are researching the history of a house, the first source is the building itself. Reading a building is a skill that takes a little practice. Walk all around and through the house, noting the different materials used, and see if there is evidence of change over the years. Have new windows or doors been added, or older doors bricked up?

Construction materials can help roughly date a house. For example, corrugated iron became common from the 1880s onwards, casement windows from the 1910s, and fibro walls from the 1940s.

Many houses look similar to others in shape, material and detailing. When the similarities are greater than differences, those houses are given a style names such as California Bungalow or Queen Anne. Some styles were more popular at certain times than others so a style can help to date a building.

A good standard book for identifying Australian building styles is *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture* (1989) by Apperly, Irving and Reynolds. This may be available through your local library.

You might want to ask local residents if they can recall stories about the building and its earlier residents because this may also give you helpful clues for your research.

The next step involves establishing the facts you already know about the place and identifying questions you would like answered. This will give you a starting point for further research and help establish the types and possible location of relevant records:

What is the exact address and location of the place?

Which building style best fits your place?

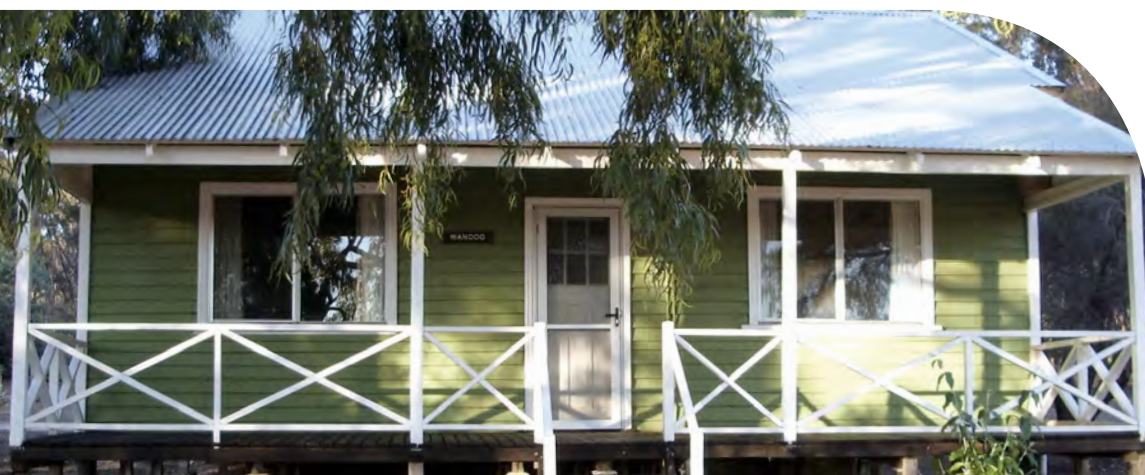
What is the history of the locality, including the street, estate and suburb?

What is the most likely era of construction?

Was the place financed, designed or built by a government or public organisation?

After this, do some background reading on the local area. This probably won't reveal too much about the specific place you are studying. However the context will give you a sense of how your building fits into the history and development of the area, and help with dating your place, as well as your final presentation of its history.

**RIGHT:** Dryandra Woodland Settlement, Cuballing (1935)



# WHERE TO LOOK

## J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History

The Battye Library, part of the State Library, holds the bulk of information sources relating to the history of Western Australia. The library's online catalogue is one of the best places to start your research.

The library contains books (some of which are very rare), serials (such as magazines and periodicals), State and local government publications, newspapers, ephemera, maps and plans, private archives, photographs and illustrations, oral histories and film, videos and DVDs.

Private archives are the records of non-government organisations, such as associations, clubs, businesses and churches, and the records of individuals, such as letters and diaries.

There are several sets of records from notable WA architects held at the Battye Library, including: Iwan Iwanoff, Krantz & Sheldon, Forbes & Fitzhardinge, Julius Elischer, Marshall Clifton and Hobbs, Smith & Forbes. These records contain plans of buildings, houses and monuments.

The Leah Jane Cohen Reading Room was opened in 2009 for those wanting access to rare and archival items. You must register as a researcher to view these collections.

All rare and archival material needs to be retrieved from storage, and this will require a library card, which can be obtained in a few minutes and requires proof of address. Retrievals are carried out every 30 minutes so remember to allow time. To handle very delicate material you may be asked to wear gloves and even a mask.

Photocopying of most material in the Battye Library is permitted, with the exception of rare books, serials and maps, bound newspapers, original photographs, private archives and ephemera, and fragile material. However, a digital camera has been set up in the Reading Room that can be used to take images of some of the above material.

### Contact details

The Battye Library, 3rd Floor  
Alexander Library Building  
Perth Cultural Centre, PERTH WA 6000  
T: (08) 9427 3291  
W: [www.slwa.wa.gov.au](http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au)

## State Records Office of Western Australia

Documents held by the State Records Office are essential when researching public buildings and places. Often records generated by government departments are the only available documents about a public place. The collection can be searched using the State Records' online catalogue.

State Records is located on the ground floor of the Alexander Library Building in the Perth Cultural Centre. It holds government archives: official records created or collected by colonial, State and local government departments and agencies, as well as the records of statutory authorities, courts of law, royal commissions, and committees of inquiry.

It also has a wide collection of maps and plans, which date from the 1830s. Sewerage plans can prove particularly useful because these can often show when a place was first sewered and connected to water.

Some records have been microfilmed or copied to microfiche, and these are located on the ground floor. For all other records, a request must be lodged. Some materials are held outside the building and will need to be ordered in advance. A small number of files are restricted and require permission before they can be accessed.

A reader's ticket is required to use the State Records Office and this is available on your initial visit.

Due to the nature of the original records, all notes are to be taken in pencil. However you may use a camera for copying and one is provided at State Records if you do not have your own.

For further information about government documents, see David Saunders, *A Manual of Architectural History Sources in Australia – Vol. Two: Victoria and Western Australia* (1981).

### Contact details

Ground Floor  
Alexander Library Building  
Perth Cultural Centre  
PERTH WA 6000  
T: (08) 9427 3360  
W: [www.sro.wa.gov.au](http://www.sro.wa.gov.au)





ABOVE: Airlie, Swanbourne (1899)

## National Archives of Australia (WA Regional Office)

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) is responsible for the management of Commonwealth Government records. The NAA's collection documents the full range of Australian Government activities since Federation in 1901 and includes significant 19th-century records dealing with colonial activities.

The WA Regional Office holds records created by State branches of Commonwealth Government agencies. The records are held in a variety of formats, from paper files and registers to photographs, films and plans.

The National Archives also maintains a small reference library containing Western Australian Commonwealth electoral rolls, World War I era Commonwealth Gazettes and some parliamentary papers, annual reports, journals and magazines. Copies of records are available for a fee.

Researchers can identify relevant records, many of which have been digitised, by using NAA's online database or by contacting the Perth office.

The NAA reading room hours are Wednesday to Friday, 9.00am to 4.30pm.

### Contact details

National Archives of Australia,  
(WA Regional Office)  
384 Berwick Street,  
EAST VICTORIA PARK WA 6101  
T: (08) 9470 7500  
F: (08) 9470 2787  
W: [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

## Landgate

Aerial photographs and land title information are just some of the sources available from Landgate.

It is not necessary to know a great deal of information about a parcel of land in order to ask for a land ownership search, but it is helpful if you have the location or lot number marked on a map.

It is essential to have the correct title before asking for it to be printed because the cost of title searches and printing can quickly add up. Contact Landgate for current search and printing costs.

Landgate also holds an extensive range of old surveyors' field books and cadastral plans, maps and aerial photographs, and the Geographic Names division provides information regarding the background of name places in Western Australia.

Landgate files may also contain useful information on parks and other reserves.

Always check with the State Records Office first to see if they hold relevant historical records before requesting them from Landgate.

### Contact details

Landgate  
1 Midland Square  
MIDLAND WA 6056  
T: (08) 9273 7373 (General Enquiry)  
T: (08) 9273 7341 (Customer Service)  
T: (08) 9273 7053 (Geographic Names)  
W: [www.landgate.wa.gov.au](http://www.landgate.wa.gov.au)

## National Trust of Australia (WA)

Since the National Trust was established, it has promoted knowledge and awareness of Western Australia's unique heritage.

The Trust takes a holistic approach to heritage, giving consideration to natural, Aboriginal and historic heritage, as well as moveable and maritime heritage.

As well as conserving and interpreting heritage places behalf of the community, the Trust also:

- Runs curriculum based education programs
- Works with Aboriginal groups to conserve and interpret Aboriginal heritage values
- Supports private landholders to conserve their bushland

For more than fifty years the National Trust of Australia (WA) has written and collected a large range of books, reports and heritage studies on places throughout Western Australia. This material is available to be viewed by appointment and can be photocopied or scanned for a small fee. This service is available to members of the Trust for free.

### Contact details

National Trust of Australia (WA)  
Old Observatory  
4 Havelock Street, WEST PERTH WA 6005  
T: (08) 9321 6088 Fax: (08) 9324 1571  
W: [www.ntwa.com.au](http://www.ntwa.com.au)

## Heritage Council of WA

The Heritage Council of Western Australia (Heritage Council) was established under the Heritage of Western Australia Act 1990 as the State's advisory body on heritage matters. It provides for and encourages the conservation of heritage places in Western Australia. The Heritage Council has three main functions:

- To establish and maintain the State Register of Heritage Places (State Register)
- To ensure that any development of heritage places is in harmony with cultural values
- To promote awareness and knowledge of our cultural heritage

The day-to-day activities of administering the Act are undertaken by professional and administrative staff within the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

The Heritage Council's library holds a variety of books, heritage studies and reports. Although many of these are available at the Battye Library, the Heritage Council holds information that is not available elsewhere.

Photocopying of material is available, for which a fee is charged. The library is open by appointment.

In addition to the library, the Department of Planning, lands and Heritage also maintains inHerit, an online database of heritage places that might provide information on the place you are researching.

Included as part of the data in inHerit is the State Register which includes buildings, monuments, parks, gardens, landscapes, archaeological sites and maritime sites.

If the place you are interested in has been entered in the State Register, you can get a copy of the assessment documentation, which usually includes a brief history of the place and a physical description, by visiting inHerit at [inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au](http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au)

### Contact details

Heritage Council of WA  
140 William Street, PERTH  
T: (08) 6551 8002  
FREECALL (regional): 1800 524 000  
W: [dplh.wa.gov.au](http://dplh.wa.gov.au)



# HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

## AND OTHER RECORD DEPOSITORIES

### Royal Western Australian Historical Society and affiliated local societies

The Royal Western Australian Historical Society was founded in 1926. A non-profit, voluntary organisation, the Society encourages the study of Western Australian history, preserves records relating to the history of Western Australia and publishes journals and newsletters.

The Society maintains a library, reading room and an historical museum. The library is particularly useful to researchers as it houses a large collection of secondary sources, a photographic collection and an extensive newspaper collection, much of which has been donated. Due to the nature of the collection, many of the items cannot be found elsewhere.

Metropolitan and regional Western Australia is serviced by a network of affiliated historical societies. Contact the Perth headquarters or the website to find details of an historical society that can assist with your research.

#### Contact details

Royal Western Australian Historical Society (Inc)  
Stirling House  
49 Broadway, NEDLANDS WA 6009  
T: (08) 9386 3841  
E: [histwest@git.com.au](mailto:histwest@git.com.au)  
W: [www.histwest.org.au](http://www.histwest.org.au)

### Local history collections

Local history collections are usually attached to local libraries. The extent of information they hold depends on how well established the collection is.

Although some of the information may be available from the Battye Library, local history collections often have records of individuals and places that relate specifically to the local district.

In addition, many local history collections have

excellent photographic collections.

#### Contact details

Contact the local library in the area you are researching to see if they have a local history collection.

### Other record depositories

Museums, particularly regional and local museums, can also be useful sources of information. They often hold documents and photographs that are not available elsewhere.

The local government authority of the place you are researching may hold records relevant to your research. For example, the City of Perth holds Building Licence Records and files for applications made before 1994 for places in the City of Perth, Town of Cambridge and Town of Victoria Park. The City of Perth also holds similar records relating to buildings in the City of Vincent where approvals were made before 1985.

In addition, the State Records Office holds records relating to places in the City of Stirling from 1917 to 1947.

State Government departments also have libraries that may hold reports and records relating to a particular place. For example, if you are researching a bridge, it may be worthwhile to contact the Main Roads Library to see what information they hold. Note that some authorities charge for access to files and for search time.

There are State Government libraries that have collections based on the following topics:

- geology, mining, petroleum and related environmental subjects
- the natural environment and nature conservation
- planning and infrastructure
- transport

# TYPES OF INFORMATION

## Land information

Ownership of land in Western Australia comes under two broad categories: Crown land, which is land owned by the State (also often referred to as the Crown), and freehold land.

All land ownership details are held by Landgate, although the State Records Office has details of land taken up before the early 1900s.

Most land has a Certificate of Title. This is a legal document showing ownership of land. It contains important data including the name and address of the owner, the nature of the estate and issues such as mortgages, leases, caveats and other statutory 'interests'. Certificates of Title are important sources of information, particularly when used in conjunction with rate books and directory searches.

New digital titles only show the current information about ownership but have references that allow the history of the land to be searched back to the original Certificate of Title or Crown Grant.

Titles also have references that allow you to search to find out about changes in purchase price, which may indicate 'improvements' were carried out on the property. The term 'improvements' refers to any works being done

that increased the value of the land. Most often, improvements involved construction, usually of a building. So, for example, if a property was bought in 1884 for £30 and mortgaged in 1887 for £300, it is reasonable to assume that improvements were carried out in the intervening time.

Titles also provide information about subdivision, re-subdivision, and amalgamation of land.

The Batty Library holds two indexes that provide useful land details. The Lands and Surveyors Nomenclature Index details the naming of sites in Western Australia and their meanings and may provide some historical information for built sites. The Landgate Crown Reserves Register provides details of reserves (when they were gazetted, amended, vested and so forth) and can be useful in tracing the development of sites.

**BELOW:** Bridgedale, Bridgetown (1862)



## Rate books

Municipal (or local government) rate books are an invaluable source of information. In Western Australia, a number of rate books are held in the State Records Office.

Copies may also be available at local libraries, or you can check with your local government authority about their availability.

To use the rate books, you need to know what ward a place is in, the lot number and the subdivision number. This information can be obtained from the relevant local government.

The amount of information found in rate books varies and depends on how much information was recorded at the time. A detailed rate book may provide the following information:

- when the property (land and/or building) was first rated
- who owned it and for how long, as well as subsequent owners and occupiers
- its exact location in a particular street
- construction materials and whether the building was a single or double-storey structure
- when additions were carried out

details of other structures such as stables, coach houses, fences, and when the garden was planted

Details often appear in a type of shorthand. For example, 'WH 6' is a wooden house of six rooms. Other rate books will simply record 'house' or 'cottage' with no details about the number of rooms or building materials. In these cases, it is more difficult to trace changes to the building, or if one house has been demolished and another built in its place.

Searching rate books requires patience and it helps to have an organised system for recording the information you find. It is best to start by choosing an entry from recent times and working backwards. By searching backwards you will eventually locate the lot number and can see when the description changes from 'cottage' or 'house' to 'vacant land'. This will give you the year the place was constructed and name of the first owner and/or occupier.

**BELOW:** John Curtin's House, also known as Curtin Family Home, Cottesloe (1923)





## Newspapers and serials

Newspapers and serials can be useful sources of information.

The Battye Library holds more than 900 newspaper titles issued in Western Australia since 1830. These can be located either by title or by looking for the suburb, town or district the newspaper covered. Start by checking the library's online catalogue.

Copies of The West Australian, Sunday Times and Western Mail up to 1954 have been digitised by the National Library of Australia, as well as several other less well known or long lived papers. All of these titles can be searched and read on the National Library's Trove database (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>). The Inquirer, the Albany Advertiser and the Geraldton Guardian are going to be digitised in the future.

The West Australian has a subject index compiled by Battye Library staff, although it can be somewhat difficult to use. From 1987, indexing of The West Australian, Kalgoorlie Miner and The Countryman has been undertaken by West Australian Newspapers Ltd. The Battye Library has on-line access to this database and no longer indexes The West Australian itself.

Local newspapers are a valuable source for information on towns, shires and localities, as well as details of buildings, families, businesses, ceremonies and tenders. The Battye Library has many country and

suburban newspapers in its collection. Older newspapers can be particularly detailed in their descriptions of buildings and are often an excellent resource.

The Battye Library's 'general index' on microfiche contains many references to newspaper and serial articles and to relevant extracts in books, which can save many hours of research. Since 1984, most of the index has been incorporated into the online catalogue.

The Battye Library also holds a number of serials that may be useful. Building and Construction (formerly the Mining Journal and Investors Review and the West Australian Mining, Building and Engineering Journal) includes tender notices and details of architects, builders and contractors. Also of interest is The Architect, a quarterly publication, which ran from 1939 to 1981. This often contains details of significant buildings and designs.

The Western Australian Government Gazette contains details of land subdivision, land reservations and cancellations, and government tenders for public buildings, which usually provide the name of the successful tenderer. The annual reports of the various government departments may also be useful sources of information when researching public places.

**BELOW:** King Street, East Fremantle (1902-1920)



## Post Office directories

The Battye Library holds The Western Australian Post Office Directory from 1893 to 1949. The directories are available on microfilm or online through the State Library website. They contain useful information for the researcher.

Directories list information in a variety of different ways. Individuals and businesses can be recorded by town, metropolitan area, in alphabetical order or grouped together under a trade or occupation.

The directories are useful for finding out when a building first appears and who has occupied it over time. If you have a name of an owner or occupier but no address, search the alphabetical section (check the Western Australian electoral rolls as well). If you have an address but no name, search the street directory.

As you search back in time, streets may disappear or change names and house numbers and names change. In early issues, there are often no house numbers at all, or odd numbers change to even numbers, and vice versa. To help deal with this, make a note of the neighbouring households as a cross reference.

When researching a building, it is easier to trace its history if it is located on a street corner or near a landmark, such as a school, church or police station. Public buildings are usually always mentioned in directories and can also be used as reference points.

## Maps and plans

The Battye Library and the State Records Office hold extensive collections of maps and plans dating from 1829, and even pre-settlement exploration maps. The library's online catalogue enables you to search maps by author, subject and key word searches.

Several significant collections of plans created by private architectural firms are also held by the Battye Library.

Old road maps of an area may be useful in tracing the changing layout of a street over time. The townsites series of maps is particularly useful for country towns. This series has been marked for digitisation, so eventually will be available online.

The Battye Library has a large collection of real estate plans. These may include pictures and plans of houses, as well as street plans.

The State Records Office holds a large collection of architectural plans and drawings. These plans are mainly of government-owned buildings and works but plans of some commercial and residential properties are also included in the collection. All of these plans have been transferred from government agencies, rather than from private architects.

The State Records Office has already digitised many townsites, exploration and survey plans. A full listing of these can be found on their website.

BELOW: Leschenault Homestead, Bunbury (1846)





## Photographs and illustrations

Old photographs can illustrate how the external features of a building have changed over time. In some instances, interior photographs exist which help document internal changes to a place.

It may be worthwhile asking past owners or others associated with a place whether they have photographs that could be of interest. It may also pay to look at photographs of the street where a building is located, as these may show the property you are researching.

The Battye Library's pictorial collection includes photographs, postcards, illustrations, sketches, cartoons and a few watercolours. Some of these have been digitised and can be found by searching the online catalogue.

Digital copies of photographs held at the library can be obtained upon request, for which a fee is charged. If the photograph is not intended for your own personal use, copyright clearance must be obtained.

Aerial photographs can also be useful in tracing the physical development of buildings and sites. Some are held by the Battye Library, others may be found at Landgate or the relevant local government authority.

## Oral histories

Oral history can be overlooked as a source of historical information. Interviewees may provide information on how a building was furnished, what particular rooms were used for and how the structure, surroundings or locality have changed over time.

The Battye Library holds the country's largest oral history collection outside the National Library. The collection consists of interviews with people associated with Western Australia, either by birth, occupation or interest. While some of the interviews are with well-known Western Australians, many are with ordinary people.

Many of the tapes have transcripts while some only have a synopsis. Some longer transcripts are indexed.

All oral history interviews can be found via the online catalogue. There are plans to digitise the oral history collection.

BELOW: Belvedere House, Cottesloe (1897)







ABOVE: Marsala House, Dianella (1976)

## Other sources

The sources mentioned in this brochure are only a starting point. As you become more familiar with research, you will come across many more useful sources of information.

Biographical and autobiographical material may also provide useful information regarding owners and occupiers, as well as architects and builders. Possible sources of biographical information include:

- indexes at the Batty Library
- the birth, death and marriage indexes which are searchable online at the Attorney General's website [www.dotag.wa.gov.au](http://www.dotag.wa.gov.au)
- the divorce index
- the convict index
- passenger indexes

For a detailed guide on how to find information on Western Australians see *Dead Reckoning: how to find your way through the genealogical jungle of Western Australia*, a copy of which is available online at [www.slwa.wa.gov.au/dead\\_reckoning](http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/dead_reckoning).

In recent years, local governments have carried out heritage assessment surveys (commonly called Municipal (Heritage) Inventories) and these often contain useful information on buildings in the local area. This information is available through the inHerit online heritage places database at [inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au](http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au).

It can also be a good idea to read the relevant conservation plans for various buildings around the State. Many of these can be found in the Batty Library, while others will be in the State Heritage Office Library.

Film, video and DVDs can also be informative sources. The Batty Library holds an extensive collection of audio-visual material dating from 1907. Many of these films will show public buildings, business premises, churches and houses. Kaylene Heard's *Bibliography of 16mm film produced in Western Australia to 1950* from the State Film Archives of Western Australia provides a detailed shot list of each film, with a subject index where you can search names, locations and building names for relevant images.

The Batty Library's ephemera collection includes pamphlets, brochures, flyers, articles, and programmes. This is often a source of useful information for public places.

There are also a number of bibliographies detailing sources relating to a particular district, such as the Kimberley, Shark Bay and the South West.



RIGHT: Maisonettes, Nedlands (1934)

Disclaimer: The Heritage Council of WA acknowledges that the base text for this document was originally compiled for the National Trust of Australia (WA), funded by a grant from the Western Australian Historical Foundation, 1992. Further research and editing was undertaken by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

COVER, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: King Street, East Fremantle (1902-1920); Maisonettes, Nedlands (1934); and Belvedere House, Cottesloe (1897)

## Contact us

Heritage Council of WA  
Locked Bag 2506  
Perth WA 6001

T: (08) 6551 8002  
FREECALL (regional): 1800 524 000  
E: [info@dplh.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@dplh.wa.gov.au)  
W: [www.dplh.wa.gov.au](http://www.dplh.wa.gov.au)