

# AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEMES

A framework for use in heritage assessment and management

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION

The Australian Heritage Commission acknowledges  
Jane Lennon and the Centre for Western Australian History  
including Professor Norman Etherington, Peggy Brock,  
John Dallwitz, Tom Stannage and Jenny Gregory  
for their contribution to the Framework.

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# CONTENTS

## AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEMES FRAMEWORK

## CENTRE FOLD-OUT

FOREWORD	1
INTRODUCTION	2
WHY A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF HISTORIC THEMES?	2
PROJECT HISTORY	2
ABOUT THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK	4
FRAMEWORK DESIGN	4
USING THEMES	6
CASE STUDY: ALBURY	8
NATIONAL, STATE, TERRITORY, REGIONAL OR LOCAL THEMES?	9
USING THEMES IN HERITAGE DATABASES	10
APPENDIX A	11
NOTES	13

## FOREWORD

I am pleased to be able to publish this guide to assist in the use of the Australian Historic Themes Framework.

The Australian Historic Themes Framework provides a valuable research tool, which can be used at the national, state or local level to assist in the identification, assessment, interpretation and management of heritage places.

The Framework was initiated and developed by the Australian Heritage Commission with the assistance of the State and Territory historic heritage agencies, consultants and heritage practitioners. It has been used by the Commission, in its assessment of places for the Register of the National Estate since 1998, and will be an essential element in using the Australian Heritage Places Inventory to better understand the comparative context of places of historical significance around Australia.

A great deal of work has gone into the development and trialing of the themes over the last five years and many people have been involved. I would like to thank all those people who have tested the Framework, provided thoughtful and constructive comment and assisted in the development of the themes. The Framework was endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies in March 2000.

The adoption and use of these historic themes throughout Australia will assist in the development of a nationally coordinated approach and encourage consistency in heritage assessment and management across the nation.

The Australian Heritage Commission is committed to research on heritage issues and to making that research freely available. To help achieve this objective, this publication will be placed on the internet linked to the Commission's home page at [www.ahc.gov.au](http://www.ahc.gov.au)

The Commission would be pleased to receive comments to feed in to a review to occur in 2003.



Peter King  
Chairman  
Australian Heritage Commission

# INTRODUCTION

*Each city, suburb, region or state has its own stories to tell, its own particular weaving of theme, people and place. The Framework of themes should encourage us to look anew at our historic environment and to make new connections.*

Australian Heritage Commission, Preamble to Project Report, 1995

Australia's Commonwealth, State and Territory heritage registers represent an important repository of information about significant places in Australia's history. Places have been listed on registers because nominating bodies want to preserve them, enjoy and study them as representing a component of Australia's heritage. Once they have been assessed as significant, these places become the focus for conservation policies and funding, public promotion and community interest. Their significance is no longer hidden and communities rediscover or care again about such places.

## WHY A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF HISTORIC THEMES?

The Framework is designed for use by heritage professionals. Historians, teachers and interpreters may also find themes useful as a national framework of historic themes provides links between the different regional stories in Australia's history, and the heritage places that help to illustrate that history. We are the only nation to occupy a whole continent and the diversity of our experience of our landscapes can be linked through a thematic framework.

A national framework also recognises that State and local historic themes are already in use by heritage professionals. It provides a very broad and general framework at the national level, so that these different regional frameworks can continue to evolve while being linked. Places that relate to a particular theme in different parts of Australia can also be identified and compared providing they are entered in a nationally-linked database.

A national approach to our Australian themes is consistent with the current move by Australia's government heritage agencies to develop common national standards for the identification and conservation of heritage places. It will enable a balanced approach across regions and reveal previously ignored themes in those regions. This comprehensive framework also provides a springboard for the identification and understanding of places that may be of outstanding historical significance to the nation as a whole.

## PROJECT HISTORY

This project, originally named the Principal Australian Historic Themes Project, was initiated in 1993 by the Australian Heritage Commission with the aim of developing a practical and comprehensive framework of Australian historic themes to assist in the identification, assessment, interpretation and management of heritage places. It was seen as forming part of an ongoing process of developing and implementing a nationally coordinated approach to the assessment and management of heritage places in Australia. The thematic framework was intended to be applicable at the State and Territory, regional and local levels, as well as at the national level.

The identification of historic themes and checklists in relation to the Register of the National Estate dates back twenty five years. However, the project differed from previous thematic work as it was designed in response to concepts of history and heritage which have expanded and broadened considerably in recent decades to consider



meanings and connections as well as historic fabric. It has parallels with the 1994 revision of the US National Park Service's Thematic Framework where

*redefining of the past has expanded the boundaries of inquiry to encompass not only great men and events but also ordinary people and everyday life... reconstructing it as an integrated, diverse, complex, human experience.*

Stage 1 of the project involved research and extensive consultation by the Centre for Western Australian History (Professor Norman Etherington, Peggy Brock, John Dallwitz, Tom Stannage and Jenny Gregory) and Jane Lennon to establish a thematic framework.

Stage II involved testing the applicability of the proposed historic themes to 20 registered sites chosen by the Commission and State and Territory heritage authorities. A field test of the themes was also conducted in which the themes were applied to historic places along a selected stretch of the River Murray system encompassing three State jurisdictions. This resulted in minor modifications to the wording of the Framework.

Stage III involved a trial of the Framework by Commonwealth, State and Territory Government heritage agencies using a guide prepared by Jane Lennon. The Heritage Officials Committee agreed to finalise and formally accept the Framework in September 1997. They accepted the thematic Framework had benefits in developing national standards for heritage assessment including:

- enhancing the credibility of the processes used and the content of heritage registers
- helping make comparative assessments of places across States and Territories, especially for twentieth century places.

Minor revisions to the Framework were carried out in 1998 and 1999. The final Framework can be applied to places at all levels of significance from local through to national. It deals only with historic values although it recognises that natural, social, scientific and aesthetic values may also reside in a place.

The Framework has also been renamed as the Australian Historic Themes Framework, emphasising that it provides comprehensive coverage of historical processes, applicable at all levels of interest and significance.

It is seen as a 'how to' tool for those interested in identifying, assessing and interpreting historic values in places. As such it will complement other guides such as the Australian Heritage Commission's *Protecting Local Heritage Places*

The benefits of using themes have been demonstrated as:

- helping to think more widely about historical processes in assessing places
- emphasising historical values of places rather than a fabric based assessment
- assisting in structuring research
- assisting in the preparation of interpretive texts
  - assisting in determining development controls. There is increasing pressure for agencies to justify heritage listings and development controls, and themes can help to explain how particular elements of a place are significant because of their ability to illustrate important aspects of its history
- justifying an assessment of historical significance to responsible authorities so as to avoid criticism of 'targeting' certain places for heritage controls
- identifying the significance of a place as above threshold for establishing its statement of significance
- showing how some types of place are usually associated with each theme so that themes are not used interchangeably with types.



# ABOUT THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

*Themes are webs we weave to better understand the history and storylines of a place. They are not rigid straitjackets into which we must place our heritage assessments.*

Joan Domicelj, 1991

## FRAMEWORK DESIGN

The Thematic Framework comprises nine Theme Groups which encompass and are elaborated by a network of more specific themes. Themes are further expanded into more focussed sub-themes.

The Theme Groups are:

- 1 TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT
- 2 PEOPLING AUSTRALIA
- 3 DEVELOPING LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ECONOMIES
- 4 BUILDING SETTLEMENTS, TOWNS AND CITIES
- 5 WORKING
- 6 EDUCATING
- 7 GOVERNING
- 8 DEVELOPING AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL LIFE
- 9 MARKING THE PHASES OF LIFE

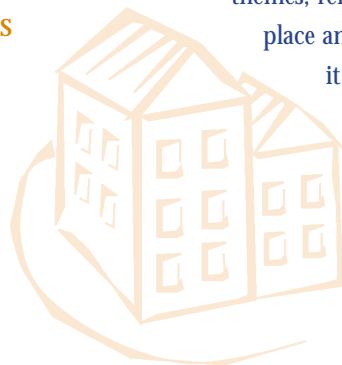
The consistent organising principle for the Thematic Framework is *activity*. By emphasising the human activities that produced the places we value, and the human response to Australia's natural environment, places are related to the processes and stories associated with them, rather than to the type or function of place. The themes do not invalidate classifications such as type and function. Themes are simply another way of investigating and interpreting the history of a place.

The themes are not intended to follow a chronological order. Rather, they are generic, and designed to be applied and interlinked, regardless of the period or place. They embrace prehistory to the modern period and a multiplicity of human activities. The wording of the themes is designed to be gender and age inclusive—covering men, women and children.

The Framework is not arranged as a hierarchy which gives priority, weighting and privilege to some themes. Nor is it a checklist which prescribes a minimal approach. It has been applied in some organisations as an aid in cataloguing museum collections so as to enrich the historical context and stories behind the objects displayed.

Figure 1 shows how the Theme Groups relate to place. They are non hierarchical and one place may have many themes, reflecting current thinking on the significance of place and the way we look at the past, reconstructing

it as an integrated, diverse, complex human experience. Each Theme Group represents a significant aspect of the human experience, and the terms used expand our notions of historical activity.




**FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUALISING THE USE OF THEMES IN RELATION TO PLACE. THE THEMES ARE NOT HIERARCHICAL AND ONE PLACE MAY HAVE A NUMBER OF THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH IT.**



The Framework is designed to be generic for Australia as a whole. Existing State or local themes may be linked to the national Framework as required, and the themes can acquire additional specific sub-themes which may arise from more detailed local surveys and historical research.

The addition of further sub-themes provides for regional variations or particular historical processes, and allows specific sub-themes to be incorporated within the Framework to explain the significance and the place. Figure 2 demonstrates how Theme Group 7, **GOVERNING** has been divided in the Framework into specific sub-themes and could be further expanded.

**FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF HOW THEMES CAN BE FURTHER EXPANDED TO SUIT INDIVIDUAL PLACES.**

<i>Theme Group</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-themes as outlined in Framework</i>	<i>Possible additional sub-themes to suit local variations</i>
<b>GOVERNING</b> 	<b>Defending Australia</b>	Providing for the common defence	Building forts
		Preparing to face invasion	Training in drill halls
		Going to war	



## USING THEMES

The Thematic Framework can be used as an alerting device to stimulate broad scale thinking about a place and its connections.

The themes can be used to focus on the historical values of a place and how these values are represented physically in the place and/or in the wider historical context.

The themes can be used as an integral part of a suite of other analytical tools, including legislative criteria (as in Heritage Acts), values (as defined in the ICOMOS Burra Charter) and typologies (place type studies often used in architecture or archaeology). For example, Table 1 describes the way in which a significant place can be identified or represented in the context of assessment for the Register of the National Estate.

Themes can be integrated with heritage assessment and management in many different ways. These include:

### Documentary research—geographic, thematic or site-specific

- to fully explore the history of an area or a particular place
- to establish historical context
- to identify significant places associated with historical processes, events, activities, or people
- to guide historical research for heritage surveys (prepared by State and Territory heritage agency or local council)

### Field research

- to focus the area for site recording, given the thematic analysis in documentary and archival research
- to identify chronological layering of themes and links between the layers as physically represented in the field
- to alert the researcher to historical associations not physically apparent or previously identified in the field
- to assist in oral history interviews

### Assessing significance

- to consider historical values
- to identify significant themes demonstrated by or associated with the place
- to enable comparative assessment, gaps analysis and identification of places with particular historic associations in heritage register databases. For example places valued by immigrants could be studied under many of the themes. Also, places identified as specific site types such as mining places would have a range of sub-themes associated with them
- in writing the Statement of Significance – the Thematic Framework enables the elucidation of significant historical aspects of the place in the Statement of Significance. It provides multiple storylines for a place and assists in understanding all its cultural values

TABLE 1: EXAMPLE OF HOW THEMES AND SUB-THEMES MAY BE INTEGRATED WITH AN ASSESSMENT FOR HERITAGE LISTING.

Place	Value	Register of the National Estate Criterion	Typology	Themes	Specific Sub-Themes
Wheal Gawler mine site, South Australia	Historic (Place from which metal ore was first exported in Australia – 1841)	A4 (Importance for association with events, developments or cultural phases)	Mine site	3.4 Utilising natural resources 2.4 Migrating	Mining Migrating to seek opportunity

### Analysing database records

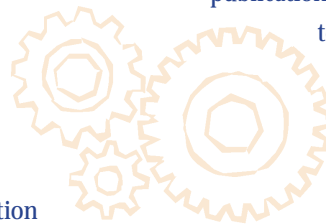
- to establish comparisons with places demonstrating similar historical themes
- to assist in determining priorities for research, funding, conservation work, promotion and publicity
- to identify gaps in research
- to assist searching on the internet

### Managing places

- to identify how significant themes are expressed in a place
- to provide guidance to place managers for conserving, managing or interpreting the particular historic values of a place
- to plot places associated with particular themes on Geographic Information Systems to aid appropriate conservation management of a region or site
- to assist in the development of management priorities
- to illustrate significant elements in conservation management plans. Themes provide context and layers of meanings and show that places are more than physical fabric

### Education and interpretation

- to broaden understanding about the diversity of heritage places discussed at community workshops or liaison meetings. For example, the use of the themes will show the community that heritage is not just about old buildings
- in promotional material relating to heritage. For example, a popular outback resort could be interpreted as being sited at a place significant for centuries to Aboriginal people and significant to explorers, drovers, surveyors, picnicking local residents and modern tourists
- as a policy or educational tool to explain historic values. Themes show that a place has more than one value
- in public interpretation material such as guided walks, publications and signs. Using the themes will help to reveal the layers of history over different periods in one place and the multiple stories associated with it.





Walter Abikhair in the former Abikhair Haberdashery, Albury.  
Photograph courtesy The Border Mail

## CASE STUDY: ALBURY

In 1996 Jacqueline Durrant and Bruce Pennay of Charles Sturt University applied the Australian Historic Themes Framework to the Albury local government area. Two separate heritage studies had been conducted in this area in 1991 and 1993 resulting in an inventory of 398 items.

Specifically, **for site identification** they found it useful in:

- identifying under-representation in indigenous heritage
- identifying under-representation in multi-cultural heritage, especially those associated with post-World War II sites
- identifying under-representation in women's heritage, places associated with children, young people, families and older people
- identifying under-representation of places associated with the experience of failure and conflict
- identifying over-representation of heritage places associated with wealth, privilege and social elitism.

The Framework was found to be far more useful in site identification when used in combination with local themes than when either system was used alone. This occurred because firstly, the Framework is both more specific and more numerous in available themes and sub-themes than the local themes, thereby prompting recognition of a wider range of site types than local themes. Secondly, local themes remain important to the identification of sites associated with local historic issues.

**For recording and assessing sites** they found that the Framework helped in:

- ensuring that site histories were recorded more thoroughly

- contributing to the overall direction of site management
- comparative assessment of similar site types when applied to groups of sites (in order to determine whether the site is actually unique or if it has certain unique aspects in comparison with other apparently similar sites).

**For site interpretation** they found the Framework helpful in:

- interpreting sites in terms of multi-layered historical processes and complex developmental histories associated with adaptive re-use of sites
- interpreting sites interconnected by historical themes
- interpreting contested site histories
- interpreting the social value of sites
- combining with local historic themes for broader interpretation.

In applying the Framework to places in Albury, several **new issues** were raised.

- Neglected historic themes at the local level.
- Management of Aboriginal heritage at the local level.
- Total absence of items of natural heritage from the inventory.
- Difficulties connected with Federation themes and their representation in material heritage.
- Non-representation of sites lacking substantial visible fabric.

## NATIONAL, STATE, TERRITORY, REGIONAL OR LOCAL THEMES?

Although most States and Territories have developed their own thematic frameworks, a comprehensive Australian Historic Themes Framework provides the opportunity to see how they link, overlap and/or integrate places across Australia. It will also have increased value by enabling comparative assessment between places across State and Territory boundaries.

Using the Framework can expand the interpretation of a place. Table 2 shows how themes can help to illustrate a significant building's history as it evolves over time.

**TABLE 2: APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK TO THE OLD COMMISSARIAT STORE, BRISBANE**

Chronology	Thematic Framework	Criteria	
		National Estate	Queensland
Brisbane's second oldest building and only one of two surviving from the convict era (1824-1840)	<b>2</b> Peopling Australia (Theme Group)	A.4 Association with events, developments or cultural phases	(a) Demonstrates evolution or pattern of Queensland's history (b) Demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects
Used as detention centre for convicts	<b>2.3</b> Coming to Australia as a punishment		
Later used as immigration depot	<b>2.4</b> Migrating		
Recruitment of immigrant labour	<b>3.6</b> Recruiting labour		
Later housed the Queensland Archives	<b>3.20</b> Informing Australians		
Later housed the Law Reform Commission	<b>7.6</b> Administrating Australia: 7.6.4 Dispensing justice		(g) Strong or special association for social, cultural or spiritual reasons
Currently, headquarters of Royal Historical Society of Queensland and a museum	<b>7.6</b> Administrating Australia: 7.6.12 Conserving Australia's heritage		(g), (h) Special association with particular person, group or organisation important in Queensland's history

Using the Thematic Framework to better understand the Old Commissariat Store (Table 2) illustrates the role of the Framework as an analytical tool rather than a prescriptive one. It also provides more strands and layers of information for use in developing Statements of Significance. The Old Commissariat Store example also shows how a local story (oldest building) can intersect with an Australia-wide theme **PEOPLING AUSTRALIA** and the linked theme **COMING TO AUSTRALIA AS A PUNISHMENT**.

The Framework is also designed to interconnect with regional themes, eg **PROVIDING SAFE HARBOUR** formed a specific regional sub-theme within the theme **3.8 MOVING GOODS AND PEOPLE** for the Land Conservation Council's Historic Places Special Investigation of South-Western Victoria.



## USING THEMES IN HERITAGE DATABASES

Appendix A includes two examples of how the Framework has been applied to existing listings. The first example is from the Register of the National Estate and the second is from the Queensland Heritage Register.

The Australian Heritage Commission is working on a project to incorporate the historic themes in Register of the National Estate historic places listed over the last decade. The incorporation of themes within all place records, in a searchable form, creates a valuable research tool. The Commission would encourage all state agencies and other organisations responsible for compiling and maintaining lists of heritage places to apply this Framework to their listings. The ability to search by historic theme can unlock hidden layers of history and enable the exploration and comparison of places across Australia.

# APPENDIX A

## REGISTER OF THE NATIONAL ESTATE DATABASE

### PLACE REPORT – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

<b>Name of Place:</b>	Commencement Column Monument		
<b>Former/Other Names:</b>	Commemoration Stone, Foundation Stone of the Federal Capital		
<b>Reference Nos:</b>	018028	8/01/000/0389	
<b>Status:</b>	Registered		
<b>Interim List Date:</b>	30/6/1992		
<b>Registration Date:</b>	22/6/1993		
<b>Nearest Town:</b>	Capital Hill	<b>State:</b>	ACT
<b>Location/Boundaries:</b>	Federation Mall, near Parliament Drive, Capital Hill, Canberra.		

### AHC OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The foundation stones of the never-completed Commencement Column are significant for their historical association with the selection of a site for the federal capital of Australia, in accordance with Section 125 of the Constitution which stipulated that the federal seat of government would be located within the state of New South Wales, but not within a 100-mile radius of Sydney. The foundation stones are also significant for their association with the official foundation and naming of Canberra in March 1913 as the national capital (Criterion A.4)

(Australian Historic Themes: 4.1 Planning urban-settlements: 4.1.4 Creating capital cities; 4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities; 7.4 Federating Australia; 8.9 Commemorating significant events).

Though moved from their original location, the foundation stones of the never-completed Commencement Column are of symbolic significance to the Australian community for their commemoration of the official selection, foundation and naming of Canberra as the national capital (Criterion G.1).

The foundation stones are significant for their association with important figures in the foundation of Canberra, including John Smith Murdoch, designer of the intended Commencement Column and of Old Parliament House. It is also associated with Lord Thomas Denman, Governor General at the time of laying the stones, his wife, Lady Denman who performed the official naming of the capital, Andrew Fisher, the Prime Minister of the day, and King O'Malley who, as Minister for Home Affairs, was intimately involved in the selection of Canberra as the federal seat of government (Criterion H.1).

## QUEENSLAND HERITAGE REGISTER

### TOWNSVILLE AND DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTRE AND MEMORIAL GATES

<b>Other Name:</b>	Townsville West State School
<b>Place ID:</b>	602049
<b>Status:</b>	Permanent Entry
<b>Address:</b>	29 Ingham Road
<b>Town/Suburb:</b>	TOWNSVILLE WEST
<b>LGA:</b>	TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL
<b>Theme:</b>	Establishing schools
<b>Theme:</b>	Organising workers and work places
<b>Theme:</b>	Remembering the fallen

#### SIGNIFICANCE

The former Townsville West State School is demonstrative of a government scheme, the Unemployment Relief Scheme, implemented to assist the unemployed throughout Queensland, by means of generating work projects, during the Depression of the 1930s. The former Townsville West State School Memorial Gates, constructed in 1921, are an example of a relatively small number of this type of memorial. They provide evidence of an era of widespread Australian patriotism and nationalism, particularly during and following the First World War.

The building is a fine example of a two-storeyed Inter-war brick school. Due to its massing and scale, the building is a landmark in the suburban streetscape. The building has a strong association with the local community. The building has also been the centre of a variety of community activity in the past.

#### HISTORY

The former Townsville West State School, designed by the Queensland Government Architects Office was opened on the 10 June 1939. Costing £28,200, the school was built during the Depression by local workers employed under the Unemployment Relief Scheme. The school building of 1937-9 is the second of three Townsville West State Schools constructed within the same school grounds. The first, constructed in 1886-7, was one of the earliest public schools of Townsville. The school has also honoured students and teachers who served, and in some cases died, during WWI, by erecting both honour boards in the entrance foyer, and memorial gates. When the Townsville Teachers College opened in 1969, West End State School was utilised as a Demonstration School for student teachers. The building is still utilised by the Townsville and District Education Centre, a library, conference rooms, a creche and kindergarten, manual arts and home science facilities and is a venue for a community playgroup.

#### DESCRIPTION

The former Townsville West State School is a rectangular brick building of three stories, located at the intersection of Ingham Road and Sturt Street, Townsville, about two kilometres from the city centre. Set into a recess in the Ingham Road fence are the Memorial Gates. The gateway is a free-standing rendered masonry archway with a pair of wrought iron gates below.

# NOTES





# NOTES

