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NOT-FOR-PROFIT OF THE MONTH

NTV
Geelong & Region
Branch

PROTECTING HERITAGE: WHY IT MATTERS MORE THAN EVER



Why does protection of heritage, and in particular physical heritage sites, matter? Why should we care?

In an era when humanity is struggling to understand our future in an AI world, the importance of seeing and feeling heritage objects (the very foundations of our society) is critical. The legal fraternity is pondering the future admissibility of video and photographic evidence in court; so too must the heritage field ponder the cost of losing bricks and mortar sites to digital images and online stories. "History is written by the victors" was a past meme; it might soon be replaced with a new one - "written by the virtual assistant".

The mission statement for National Trust Victoria (NTV) is:

As a community-based member organisation, we work with partners to deliver our mission to champion Victoria's diverse heritage, embrace the complexity of the past, and inspire connections to place for the benefit of current and future generations.

In line with this mission, the Geelong Branch sees its key role to be one of raising public awareness around threats to our region's heritage (officially protected or not) and to inform recent arrivals about our rich past, so they can understand and identify with their new community. We do this through large public events; talks and site tours for members; and supporting staff who manage NTV properties. NTV membership automatically extends to membership of the Geelong Branch. In addition, it provides free/discounted entry to other countries' National Trust properties,

especially the UK, Italy, Scotland, NZ and Canada. We hope such international visits will extend the love of heritage to what we are seeking to protect here in Australia.

Celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, the NTV pursues its mission in an apolitical manner with a limited paid staff and no government funding. The Geelong Branch is run by a small, volunteer committee with a membership base nudging 1,000. Our following on Facebook continues to grow daily. These figures demonstrate how deeply the residents of Greater Geelong and the whole South-West region care about our heritage. Our region's history is very rich, commencing with First Peoples, early settlers, through to post WW2 and to future heritage.

The Branch's region is quite large, extending north-west to Camperdown, west to Port Campbell, north to Bacchus Marsh and east to Queenscliff. NTV owns six properties within this area:



Barwon Grange

25 Fernleigh Street, Newtown - The only survivor of fashionable and picturesque mid-nineteenth-century villas built along the Barwon River in Geelong.



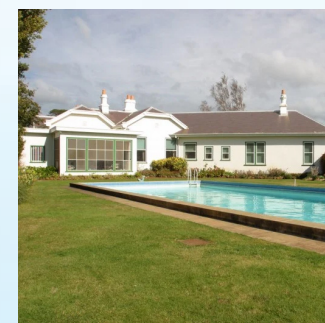
The Heights

140 Aphasia St, Newtown - site of the popular French Festival in October. One of the largest surviving prefabricated houses (1854) in Victoria, situated in a flourishing garden setting, maintained by a dedicated, volunteer team of gardeners.



Barwon Park

Winchelsea - a magnificent 42-room building constructed for Prince Albert's visit by the Austin family in 1869-71.



Mooramong

Skipton - home of the fairy tale couple, silent movie star Claire Adams and horse racing family son, Scobie MacKinnon (MacKinnon stakes at the Melbourne Cup Carnival). The 1880s homestead was given a Hollywood glitz and glamour makeover in the 1930s.

Mills Cottage and Motts Cottage

Further afield in Port Fairy - Mott's Cottage was originally built in 1842 by blacksmith William Bird, with the stone building completed in 1851. It was later occupied by Sarah Mott in 1918, giving the cottage its name.

Mills' Cottage, built in 1841, is Victoria's oldest surviving dwelling. It was acquired by whaling captain Charles Mills in 1843, and his brother Captain John Mills later added the front section in 1856.



These properties are open to the public at different times, but mostly on weekends when conservation/restoration activities permit. Group bookings, particularly of students, are highly welcome. Entrance fees contribute to maintenance of the properties. The venues may be hired for private functions, and many have been locations for locally made feature films.

Engagement with regional stakeholders is integral to our activities; we collaborate with other like-minded organisations, such as Geelong Historical Society, Geelong Library & Heritage Centre, National Wool Museum, Heritage Advisory Committee (CoGG), Showgrounds Museum, Hamilton Group, National Museum of Crime and Justice, Osborne House. At times we lodge objections to local planning applications and other activities that threaten the heritage sites in our region. Recently our Branch President spoke at the Senate Enquiry into the sale of Fort Queenscliff, part of the Dept. of Defence's divestment strategy.

First Peoples' heritage is managed primarily by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, which is made up of a maximum of 11 Traditional Owners, appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. All Council members live in Victoria and are knowledgeable in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

For the layperson, it is easiest to remember that there are eight general categories of heritage significance:

- Aesthetic (creative)
- Cultural
- Social
- Historical
- Scientific/technological
- Archaeological
- Architectural

A lack of understanding of these categories by the general public sometimes leads to confusion about why the National Trust may be objecting to neglect, demolition or alteration of sites. Heritage significance extends well beyond attractive 1800s architecture.

So, back to the opening question. Why should we care? Preservation and/or adaptive reuse of heritage sites have impacts on sustainability, environmental management, tourism, social harmony, community identity, and education. That's a whole topic on its own.

The Geelong Branch of the National Trust actively seeks new members, and anyone wishing to be on Committee or assist on an ad hoc basis would be most welcome; expertise or experience in heritage is certainly not required, as we are supported by professional personnel in our Head Office in Melbourne.

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