

Photographic Recording for Heritage Places and Objects

Photography is an important documentary tool in cultural heritage management. It is often a requirement that heritage places - including archaeological sites, buildings and structures, gardens and objects - be photographically recorded prior to alteration or destruction. This Technical Note provides guidance for those commissioning or undertaking photographic recording of heritage places and objects.

1. Photographic Equipment

Single lens reflex (SLR) 35mm cameras with high quality lenses are suitable for most photographic recording of heritage places and objects. Fixed lenses produce sharp, high quality images. The standard lens kit should include a wide-angle 20mm – 35mm lens, a standard 50mm lens and a telephoto or zoom lens ranging from 100mm – 300mm.

Digital SLR cameras may also be used for photographic recording. However, please note that a film record may also be required by Heritage Victoria due the changing nature of digital technologies. Digital cameras should have 8 or more megapixels.

Compact 35mm and digital cameras are not suitable for photographic recording as they produce poorer quality images than SLR cameras.

Medium format and large format cameras may be required for high quality fine detail images. Different backs can be applied to some medium format cameras to allow for different film types.

Other equipment may be necessary, for instance a tripod for use in low light situations, or a circular polarizing filter to help cut down reflections on glass. Depending on the nature of the project, scale indicators and record boards may also be required.



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Tripods are necessary for interior shots to allow for long-exposures without movement of the camera. As well as contextual shots such as this, detail images of key features should be recorded.

2. Recording media

Digital

Images should be recorded at the highest resolution, 300dpi or higher, for the production of high quality images.

Digital images will need to be recorded in RAW format, which is a digital version of photographic negatives. JPEG is not an acceptable archival format as it produces compressed images with less detail. Both a RAW and TIFF copy of all images should be submitted to Heritage Victoria.

Film

Slow film speeds of 50, 100 or 125 ISO are preferable as they produce smoother images compared to grainier high-speed films. A faster film such as 200 or 400 ISO can be used in low light situations, for interiors or extremely overcast conditions.

Black and White

Black and white film is the most stable photographic medium, has excellent detail control and is preferential for heritage place or object recording. Ilford and Kodak produce a range of black and white film including, Kodak TRI-X 100 or 400 ISO or PLUS-X 125 ISO. Professional black and white film should be used and processed by a commercial laboratory. C41 processing of black and white film is not suitable. Black and white images should be printed on fibre-based paper (not resin coated).



Exterior shots should be taken face-on, centrally positioned and with no distraction in the frame.

Colour Transparency

Colour transparency film or slide film is a great medium for photographic recording due to its accurate colour and detail representation and is more stable than colour negative film. Fujichrome and Kodachrome are two widely available films and come in a range of speeds. Colour transparency film should be E6 processed and mounted at a professional commercial laboratory.

Colour Negative

Colour negative film is not an appropriate medium for heritage photographic recording. The longevity of both the negatives and prints is poor and they fade easily.

Black and white negatives and colour transparencies can be digitised at high resolution with specialist scanners or at a professional commercial laboratory or imaging store often at the time of processing.

3. Method

In order to inform photographic technique, the photographer should understand the heritage significance and physical characteristics/layout of a place or object before they commence recording. Several different shots should be taken, including contextual images from different view points, to orient the heritage place or object to its natural and cultural surrounds. All elevations of a building and all faces of an object should be captured. The image should be recorded face-on and centrally, at a 90° angle to the building elevation or façade. Detail images of significant features should also be obtained.



This object is photographed with a scale bar, object catalogue number and date. Objects should be photographed against a plain, neutral background, and all faces of the object captured.

Photo Log

Images should be catalogued using a set sequence and naming convention specific to the project. The photo log should be typed and include the following: name and address of place, building or object; Victorian Heritage Register, Victorian Heritage Inventory or Heritage Overlay number; date, photographer, camera, lens and film details; file/image name; and in what direction the image was taken. This should be provided as an electronic file in MS Word or Excel. The metadata for all digital images should be retained.

Photographic Plan

Photos must be mapped on to a plan of the place showing north and indicating in what direction the images were taken. The naming convention used in the plan should be consistent with the photo log and the labelled images.

4. Report

The report should comprise the following:

- title page including the project name, heritage place or object name and address, VHR, VHI or HO number, date, photographer's details;
- an introduction explaining the project and its purpose including any limitations and recommendations for future recording;
- identification of the equipment, method and technical matters including processing and printing;
- photo log sheets;
- photographic plans and other relevant site plans;
- contact sheets of images including file/image name printed on archival paper;
- enlargements of images. The minimum size of prints is 10cm x 15cm up to a maximum of A4 printed on archival paper;
- colour transparency slides;
- black and white negatives; and
- 2x high quality CD-R (such as TDK, JVC or Sony) copies of any digital images.

Reports should be submitted in archive quality photographic ring-binder folders with archival quality (polypropylene and not PVC) plastic inserts for prints, negatives, transparencies and digital media. Enclosed binder folders help to protect the record from dust and other damage. A silica gel sachet should be placed in the folder to absorb moisture.

Where required by Heritage Victoria two sets of reports are to be submitted. One copy is retained by Heritage Victoria and the second is lodged with the State Library of Victoria Picture Collection once the report has final approval.

For advice on professional commercial laboratories contact Heritage Victoria.

Resources

NSW Heritage Office, 2006, *Heritage information series: Photographic recording of heritage items using film or digital capture*, NSW Heritage Office.

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