



GET THE FACTS - HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

02. WHAT IS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE?

James Semple Kerr, well-known heritage practitioner and author of The Conservation Plan (currently in its 5th edition), affirmed in 1984 the value of assessing cultural significance. 'Cultural significance', he wrote, 'is a simple concept. Its purpose is to help identify and assess the attributes which make a place of value to us and to our society. The UNESCO World Heritage Operational Guidelines sets out a number of conditions which cultural heritage should fulfil to be deemed to be of world heritage significance.

These are: (i) it must represent a masterpiece of human creative genius, or (ii) it must exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world or (iii) it must bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or civilization, or (iv) it must be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural ensemble, or (v) it must be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture, especially

when vulnerable, or (vi) it must be directly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, or with artistic or literary works of outstanding universal significance. Heritage places in Australia have since the early 1980s been assessed according to their significance using criteria derived from the Burra Charter of Australia ICOMOS which essentially embrace the UNESCO framework.