

Heritage Council Determination

Determination date	6 February 2025
Object name	Ballarat Processional Dragon
Location	Sovereign Hill, Bradshaw Street, Golden Point, Ballarat City, Wadawurrung Country
VHR number	H2457
Category	Registered Object
Relevant legislative provision/s	Inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register, pursuant to section 49(1)(a) of the <i>Heritage Act 2017</i>

Determination of the Heritage Council

The Heritage Council of Victoria determined on 6 February 2025 in accordance with section 49(1)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017* ('the Act'), that the Ballarat Processional Dragon is to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register ('VHR') in the category of Registered Object.

The Heritage Council also determined that:

- the categories of works or activities proposed by the Executive Director, which may be carried out in relation to the Object for which a permit is not required (specific permit exemptions), would not harm the cultural heritage significance of the Object, pursuant to section 49(3)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017*.
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Information about the Object

Description

Extract from the Executive Director's Recommendation, for information only:

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is a late Qing dynasty (1644–1911) Chinese processional dragon imported from Southern China to Victoria in 1897. The Ballarat Processional Dragon is comprised of the head, tail, horns and remnant original scales of the dragon itself, the associated pearl and teaser, and the head of a processional lion. In cultural terms, the dragon cannot perform in a procession without being accompanied by the lion, the pearl and the teaser.

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is owned by the Ballarat Historical Society and all components are stored and cared for in the Australian Centre for Gold Rush Collections at Sovereign Hill, which is located on the traditional land of the Wadawurrung People.

The dragon (head, tail, horns and remnant original scales)

The dragon itself, commonly known as Loong, is no longer complete and much of the original body has been lost. It comprises several surviving parts: the head and its horns (which are now detached), the tail, and remnants of scales that were once attached to the body. The head consists of a bamboo frame, overlaid with silk and paper mache. The surface of the head is richly detailed and has several areas of kingfisher feather inlay, as well as fringing, pom poms and mirrors. Much of the head has been overpainted in vivid yellow, red and blue. The tail consists of a bamboo frame overlaid with paper mache and painted green. The scales are made of fabric, much of it silk, encircled by a row of small mirrors. A reflective metal plate is at the centre of each scale.

The flaming pearl and teaser

There are also several objects that accompany the dragon. Two are decorated orbs attached to poles. One is known as the 'flaming pearl' and the other is known as the 'teaser'. In a processional dance, the dragon is always led by a person carrying the flaming pearl who is accompanied by a person carrying the teaser.

The 1890s lion head

The head of a processional lion is also closely associated with the dragon. It is constructed of paper mache over a cane frame. The surface is richly painted. It dates from the same period and was likely purchased at the same time as the dragon.

History

Extract from the Executive Director's Recommendation, for information only.

Ballarat's processional dragon

In January 1897, Ballarat's Chinese community purchased a processional dragon and additional items of regalia from a factory in southern China. Similarities with Loong, the processional dragon in Bendigo of a similar age, suggest this may have been the Sing Cheung workshop in Foshan, although no maker's mark has been found on the Ballarat dragon. The Ballarat dragon was commissioned for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in June 1897, an important civic event in Victoria, which was celebrated in Ballarat with a grand procession. The dragon and associated regalia were put on display at the Chinese temple (also known as the Joss House) in Ballarat prior to being paraded. A column in the Ballarat Star noted that amongst the 'gorgeous display' of banners, flags and costumes, 'the dragon is the centrepiece, exquisitely worked in gold and jewels'. Chinese communities also participated in events to recognise the Duke and Duchess of York's visit to Victoria in 1901 to open the Federal Parliament. The Bendigo, Melbourne and Ballarat dragons – the brother dragons – were central to this and are linked by this history. Ballarat's dragon adorned a welcome arch in Ballarat constructed to celebrate the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to the city.

As well as these important civic events, the Ballarat Processional Dragon was a feature of fundraising events and loaned to raise funds for charitable causes in Melbourne in both 1900 and 1903. During the early years of its use in Ballarat it appears to have been closely associated with the Ballarat Soy Woy, a benevolent Chinese association. He was also regularly used in other community events, such as Lunar New Year, and in Easter parades.

The Ballarat dragon was paraded in community celebrations such as Ballarat's Begonia Festival from the 1930s until the 1960s, after which he passed to the ownership of the Ballarat Historical Society. Changes made to the dragon in the mid-twentieth century are indicative of the community's efforts to keep him in good repair and maintain cultural traditions. He is now housed and cared for at Sovereign Hill as part of the Australian Centre for Gold Rush Collections.

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is the oldest surviving processional dragon in Australia and one of the oldest surviving examples in the world. The pearl and teaser are one of only two known surviving sets in Australia dating from the era, the other being associated with Bendigo's Loong and included in the VHR as part of that registration. The lion head, likely imported along with the dragon, is thought to be the oldest surviving lion head in Australia. It is particularly valuable in that it includes a maker's mark which sheds light on the design and creation of these items in the late nineteenth century.

Background

Executive Director's Recommendation

On 19 November 2024 the Executive Director made a recommendation ('the Recommendation') to the Heritage Council that the Object is of State-level cultural heritage significance and should be included in the VHR. The Recommendation was advertised publicly for a period of 60 days, beginning on 22 November 2024.

Section 44 submissions

No submissions were received during the public advertisement period.

Heritage Council's findings

State-level cultural heritage significance

The Heritage Council's findings are in accordance with the Executive Director's Recommendation. The Heritage Council find that the Object is an important addition to the Heritage Register as the oldest surviving processional dragon in Australia, and one of the oldest surviving examples in the world. The Heritage Council determines that the Object meets the following of the Heritage Council's Criteria for Assessment (**Attachment 1**) at a State-level:

- **Criterion A** – Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
- **Criterion B** – Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

Extent of Registration

The Heritage Council determined that the Extent of Registration recommended by the Executive Director is appropriate.

The Extent of Registration is provided as **Attachment 2** and includes all the components of the 1897 Ballarat processional dragon which include original elements (whether in part or in full) being the head, tail, horns and remnant original scales; the associated pearl and teaser; and the 1890s lion head.

Permit exemptions

The Heritage Council determined that the permit exemptions recommended by the Executive Director would not harm the cultural heritage significance of the Object.

The permit exemptions are provided as **Attachment 3**.

Conclusion

The Heritage Council of Victoria determined on 6 February 2025 in accordance with section 49(1)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017*, that the Ballarat Processional Dragon is to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register in the category of Registered Object.



Professor Philip Goad
Chair, Heritage Council of Victoria

Attachment 1

Heritage Council criteria for assessment of places and objects of cultural heritage significance

Criterion A	Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.
Criterion B	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
Criterion C	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
Criterion D	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects.
Criterion E	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
Criterion F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
Criterion G	Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.
Criterion H	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

These were adopted by the Heritage Council at its meeting on 1 December 2022, and replace the previous criteria adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 December 2012.

Attachment 2

Extent of Registration

All the components of the 1897 Ballarat processional dragon which include original elements (whether in part or in full) being the head, tail, horns and remnant original scales; the associated pearl and teaser; and the 1890s lion head.

Attachment 3

Categories of Works or Activities which may be undertaken without a Permit (Permit exemptions)

Introduction

A heritage permit is required for all works and activities undertaken in relation to VHR places and objects. Certain works and activities are exempt from a heritage permit, if the proposed works will not harm the cultural heritage significance of the heritage place or object.

Permit Policy

N/A

Permit exemptions

General exemptions

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the *Heritage Act 2017*.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must notify the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions. Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific exemptions

The works and activities below are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of the Ballarat Processional Dragon subject to the following guidelines and conditions:

Guidelines

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Act and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.

5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.
6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Act must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

Conditions

1. All works or activities permitted under specific exemptions must be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents harm to the registered place or object. Harm includes moving, removing or damaging any part of the registered place or object that contributes to its cultural heritage significance.
2. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the registered place are revealed relating to its cultural heritage significance, including but not limited to historical archaeological remains, such as features, deposits or artefacts, then works must cease and Heritage Victoria notified as soon as possible.
3. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time, all works must cease and the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*) must be contacted immediately to ascertain requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.
4. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any munitions or other potentially explosive artefacts are discovered, Victoria Police is to be immediately alerted and the site is to be immediately cleared of all personnel.
5. If during the carrying out of works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions any suspected human remains are found the works or activities must cease. The remains must be left in place and protected from harm or damage. Victoria Police and the State Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that the remains are Aboriginal, the State Emergency Control Centre must be immediately notified on 1300 888 544, and, as required under s.17(3)(b) of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, all details about the location and nature of the human remains must be provided to the Secretary (as defined in the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*).

Exempt works and activities

The following exemptions must be in accordance with the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries and/or in accordance with the accepted collection management standards, policies and procedures of the Sovereign Hill Museums Association.

1. Usual use, management, conservation, display and care of items, including relocation within Sovereign Hill's facilities.
2. The conservation or analysis of items where the custodian employs conservators qualified to accepted industry standards.
3. Temporary relocation to a site other than Sovereign Hill for the purposes of carrying out professional conservation.