



A Guide to Conducting a Thematic Study

A word of warning:

For the most part this Guide is based on Brisbane's Living Heritage Network and participant organisation experiences, feedback, recommendations and suggestions.

*With this in mind, this is **A Guide** not **THE** Guide.*

We felt that the best way to provide guidance was through a discussion of the aims, process, methodology, and outcomes we found were possible and/or achievable – including a candid discussion of the pros and cons of this study.

You might find you have stronger community networks, duplication of collections, complementary collections, more money (through grants or otherwise), more time, better resources (staff/volunteers), and so on – and therefore have very different results to ours.

For other examples of Thematic Studies please refer to the References at the end of this document.

Brisbane's Living Heritage Network Ltd

Brisbane's Living Heritage Network Ltd began a pilot thematic study in 2006, which involved six (6) cultural heritage organisations from the Network membership. Through the thematic study the Network aimed:

- To demonstrate the significance of the collections, and to highlight their cultural, social and economic values to their communities and the Greater Brisbane area through a survey of historical collections involving mapping and documenting a selection of community collections.
- To document the context and history of significant objects in chosen distributed collections across the Greater Brisbane area through the recording of stories and associations of significant objects and collections.
- To promote awareness of the significance and value of the collections and to substantiate the case for improved funding for conservation, interpretation and re-housing.
- To improve knowledge and research into the theme and its related collections.
- To develop a clear understanding of the issues affecting the conservation and interpretation of objects.
- To establish the conservation needs of significant objects, and help to develop or rework existing museum policies such as strategic planning, collection policy, exhibition policy.
- To strengthen and develop collaborative relationships between museums and heritage places within the Network.

What is a Thematic Study?

A Thematic Study is a survey, or mapping, of heritage items that relate to a particular theme or subject. It is designed to document items contained in a collecting institution, and to help develop an understanding of the significant objects, collections and heritage items associated with a particular theme.

A thematic study acts to:

- identify the most significant items and collections related to a particular theme
- understand the historical context of a subject or theme
- fully record the stories and associations of the significant objects and collections
- identify conservation needs and priorities
- improve interpretation of the objects and their wider context
- co-ordinate promotion of museums and collections around themes and linked displays
- identify omissions in the collections and improve future collecting
- argue for improved funding and grants for significant objects and collections
- and build networks between museums and heritage places

Why use themes?

To provide a framework for analysing the objects and assessing their significance and to make connection between disparate collections and institutions.

Why survey or map collections?

By mapping the important objects, collections and heritage items associated with a theme, the thematic study highlights omissions and gaps in the historical record and identifies new collecting priorities.

What outcomes are possible from a Thematic Study?

There can be a number of outcomes from a Thematic Study which are only limited by the scope of the study and the capability of the institutions involved. Outcomes such as: a themed database of collections; an educational resource, an exhibition, a collections-based or historical publication, a marketing project or themed tours are all possible.

Know your objective

Know your objective/s e.g. to raise the profile of heritage collections and community museums within the greater Brisbane area. A survey of historical collections within the greater Brisbane area will involve mapping and documenting a selection of community collections, the aim being to demonstrate the significance of the collections, and to highlight their cultural, social and economic values to their communities and the city of Brisbane.

Initial resources required

You will need to apply for funding to be able to contact a consultant to write a contextual history along the lines of your selected theme or develop a theme for you, your area, and/or the institutions involved, and write the subsequent contextual history.

Depending on your objective and expected outcomes you might need to apply for more funding to accomplish these things.

Planning process

1. Form a group to decide on a relevant theme and desired outcomes
2. Produce an initial project timeline
3. Seek and generate funding for the project
4. Seek expressions of interest from those institutions that would like to be involved
5. Create a panel of participants to be involved in the study
6. Draft a project outline and reassess timeline
7. Contract a Consultant to write a contextual history which will link collections together.
8. If the collection institutions are unfamiliar with significance assessments and/or preventative conservation, engage a consultant to run workshops on these topics
9. Commence your major project

Methodology

STAGE 1

1. Decide on a broad theme

The theme could be based on, for example, an anniversary, an event, geographical element, historical period or type of object. The theme may change during the contextual study.

2. Put boundaries on the Thematic Study

Decide how many individual and/or institutions will be involved and the length of time that the study will take. For example:

Geographic Location:	Greater Brisbane (inc. Redcliffe, Redlands, Logan)
Number of institutions:	Min. 4 – Max. 6
Project Management:	Co-ordinator, Brisbane's Living Heritage Network
Strategic Direction:	Collections Research Group (representatives from each of the participating collecting organizations). To meet regularly over the project period.
Activities:	Significance training workshop, preventive conservation workshop, regular meetings to develop key historical themes for significance assessment and ideas for project outcomes (i.e. an exhibition).
Funding:	Arts Queensland and Brisbane City Council to be approached.
Overall Timeframe:	18 months approx.

3. Commitment Contract

It is important that institutions involved in the study understand the commitment that is required to make the Thematic Study as successful a project as possible.

Each institution should agree to a contract which outlines the level of commitment involved.

For example: To be involved an organisation must be willing to do the following:

- Identify a team of people to work on thematic study for its inception in stage 1 to its completion in stage 2. This will be approximately an 18 month commitment.
- Provide two people to form part of the Collections Research Group to guide the study process and attend regular meetings.
- Work closely with a commissioned historian and provide assistance and access to your collection and collection records for the purpose of writing a contextual history.
- Have at least 2 people attend the significance & preventive conservation workshops, work with the conservator on one on one significance training & preventive conservation as well attend the Revise & Analyse Session.

4. Commission Contextual History

- It should be strongly linked to movable items and collections, photographs, maps, paintings, places and original source material of relevant/participating collections.
- It should provide a framework for analyzing the collections. An advisory committee (Collections Research Group) should direct the research and identify key themes in the history for the assessment of movable items and collections.

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- It should generate research material that may be used in future interpretation and will involve participating museums from the very beginning.

Significance assessments should be given to the consultant historian as a basis for the contextual history.

5. Survey or Map collections

- Draw up a checklist of the main categories of objects likely to be found.
- Survey collections and movable items to identify the most significant objects and collections, using the checklist.

6. Significance Assessment & Conservation

- Research and document the most significant objects. Undertake further research on the history and provenance of the items. Develop object files for most significant objects.
- Assess the significance of items and collections using the Significance criteria and methodology.
- Attend a workshop in significance assessment and present initial research and case studies on significant objects.
- Assess the objects against the identified themes to consider the representativeness of the items and collections, in order to identify omissions and duplications in the collecting record.
- Attend a preventive conservation workshop to identify ways of limiting, reducing or preventing deterioration and damage of collections.

7. Revise & Analyse

Revise the history to incorporate the collection research and significant objects into the contextual history

- Revise the history to incorporate the collection research and significant objects into the contextual history.
- Analyse the results of the survey. Attend a workshop to discuss the thematic analysis, the information gathered in the study and strategies to improve collecting in the subject area. Look at revising collection policies, and making improvements to displays and interpretation.

STAGE 2

1. Publish & Promote

- Publish and promote the work via a database, exhibition, catalogue or tours, etc.

2. Further Actions

- Summarise the work and develop recommendations and strategies to aid the conservation and interpretation of movable heritage items and raise awareness of their significance.
- Strategies might include joint projects to address neglected collecting areas, conservation plans and support for significant movable heritage items, improved interpretation and upgrades to displays, further training of museum workers, preparing grant applications to fund work identified by the study, developing further public programs including exhibitions, tours, etc.

APPENDIX A – Feedback

Historian Feedback

As the historical consultant, I enjoyed the thematic river study including exploring some unfamiliar territory and working with representatives of the 6 participant organizations.

As only 1 organization was directly connected with the history of the river and 3 barely connected at all, the ultimate challenge was link to each of them meaningfully to any thematic history of the river. Consequently the professional historian who undertook the project initially pulled out altogether.

Another challenge from my point of view was that insufficient spadework had been done by the organizations involved. Most items had not been identified or researched at all, let alone written-up as useful statements of significance. Perhaps more lead-up time and training would have helped -- and hopefully the exercise has prompted more awareness of what's significant and what should be done as custodians of heritage collections.

For that reason I had to start from scratch in most cases. This meant the project took 13 weeks (for a fifth of what a professional historian would ordinarily charge) -- and many items could not be researched as well as one might like.

While the process was useful in identifying and executing the main stages of the project, the above reason (among others) necessitated a more pragmatic approach. I first identified potential objects for display while surveying the collections, then composed the framework and finally completed the history, instead of the other way round (as explained at the start of my historical report, if you need more detail).

Though some connections remained wishy-washy, my contextual report (of 60-pages plus timeline by June 2007) identified and historicized more than enough significant objects in the 6 participating collections. At the same time it related these to the over-arching title of 'Linking Heritage', particularly ways in which those objects revealed the river as a conduit for moving people, products and concepts 'up, down and around' the river. Identified themes, mostly historical acts or aspects, were selected and the selected objects arranged accordingly (as elaborated in the introduction to my report if you need more info).

While the BLHN may be congratulated on its timely and appealing exhibition for River Week in September, I was disappointed that the folksy and over-worked concept of 'stories' took the limelight in its title (which bore little relation to either the thrust of the report or the exhibition itself). I have not, however, seen the Website presentation (or been able to correct any errors), having only learnt of its existence at the successful launch of the exhibition and being overseas for much of the time since then.

I also think that viewers would have appreciated more succinct exhibition panels, which by and large were lifted straight from my report. While flattering to me, my intention was not to write actual text for the exhibition, but to provide sufficient documentation from which that might be selected and edited for panels and captions.

Despite these drawbacks, the process was eminently successful in its outcomes, so that if doing it again, I would only modify it accordingly.

Thematic Study Participant's Feedback:

Strengths of Thematic Study Project:

- Increased profile and exposure of our organisation as a result of the thematic study e.g. RiverFestival partnership, segment on Great South East, exhibition at the Queensland Maritime Museum, strong web presence of the study on the BLHN website;
- Improved staff knowledge and skills in relation to our own collection, related collections, the significance assessment process and practical techniques in preventative conservation;
- Building partnerships between diverse cultural organisations;
- The experience of working with an historian to develop the contextual history was a first for us and we found the experience productive and enjoyable;
- We have now incorporated significance assessments and preventative conservation into our collection management policy and processes – this is already showing positive results i.e. knowledge of the collection, value of the collection, object files, storage layout and so on;
- We now have a better understanding of our collection which has helped in the development of new exhibitions;
- Improved knowledge of the collection has also resulted in an increased capacity to apply for funding grants and our ability to justify the value of the collection, identify the needs of the collection, and provide more detailed/accurate interpretation for individual objects and the collection as a whole.
- It provided an opportunity for an amateur and a volunteer to learn more.
- It helped to cultivate a broader appreciation of Brisbane's Heritage.
- It created an opportunity to liaise with other interested and interesting collections.
- It helped to engender a greater awareness and understanding of items in the collection and in the archives.
- It fostered an appreciation of the need for care and preservation of important objects.
- It encouraged learning by interaction with the professionals, the Historian, the Curator and the Photographer
- The early workshops on Thematic studies, significance assessment and conservation were excellent. Working with our project partners helped broaden our knowledge of other collecting institutions in the region and opportunities for greater collaboration.
- The discipline of the thematic study was a very useful process to help develop new methods of interpretation and the use of objects within a collection to tell stories.
- Presenting an exhibition at the end of the study provided an excellent focus for the project.
- It was a very positive experience being involved with the Thematic Study.
- The initial workshops were very informative and certainly helped me to get our Significant Object Files, documentation and records organised. Sadly I missed the second Significant Assessment Workshop due to a prior engagement but hope there will be repeat workshops one day soon so I can catch up. Even so just through our involvement in the Thematic Study our knowledge about significant assessments, conservation and preservation has increased. Our involvement has also been instrumental in increasing our knowledge about many items in our display, and has also given us the inclination to learn more about other items in our collection.
- Holding the meetings at the different museums involved in the study was a good idea as it enabled us to get a better picture of the probable outcome of the Thematic Study. These partnerships were also great learning curves as we not only learnt from each other but often found we were having similar problems, and therefore were able to support each other throughout the journey.
- I found Rod Fisher very patient and helpful, learnt a lot from him and really enjoyed working with him, also Shelley Pisani was very pleasant to work with – good choices.
- The end result was just so justified. The display at the Maritime Museum was very well put together and just seemed to flow smoothly.
- We enjoyed being pushed to gather the right information about the objects and it actually helped us to solve a few mysteries. While we understood significance assessments we had not been able to undertake many. The training was excellent in that we could offer it to some volunteers and staff who hadn't had the chance to that sort of thing before.
- The exposure in terms of the exhibition was also very satisfactory and there was a great deal of satisfaction in having worked successfully with other museums to create a strong finished product.
- I knew nothing about significance assessments, the preservation of objects or preservation methods. Much

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was learnt by attending the courses and meetings over the last couple of years and will now be applied to the preservation of objects and documents in the possession of the museum. It was also a chance to visit other museums and learn how they operate. Something that can't be done if you simply turn up as a paying customer.

Weaknesses of the Thematic Study Project:

- Liaison was not always easy, but the major problem was identifying the scope and detail of what was required. The approach of the first Historian sent us out in areas that proved unnecessary and ultimately irrelevant and which without financial support were hard to sustain. Simply too demanding.
- In this instance a theme ('the river') was selected that was aimed at appealing to a number of museums. Whilst the final outcome was very good I was aware that the theme presented a number of very worthwhile challenges. Selecting a suitable theme, appropriate to the circumstances, is most important.
- The project was unique to us all, and proved to be a great learning curve for most people involved.
- Any difficulties that were encountered seemed to be quickly overcome and I cannot think of anything that was particularly negative about the thematic study.
- It was difficult to make all the meetings and not enough people beyond the main contact people were able to attend meetings. There was no real opportunity to have further input into the final thematic study put together by the historian – all this was done by email but it would have been better to have another on-site meeting with each museum to ensure that all the information was correct and to make sure that there was nothing extra that might have been relevant.
- While the preservation component was interesting, there was no follow up money for any intervention conservation so it had little impact on our part of the project. It would have been better to actually have been able to conserve some of the items in preparation for the exhibition and then those items could have gone back to their homes in better condition – and if the preservation component was acted on by each partner the storage or display conditions would have also been improved in the meantime.
- The thematic study was a difficult concept to understand – the exhibition was so much simpler and was an outcome we could all comprehend. However the resulting exhibition tried to hard to put all the information from the study in didactic panels. It was far too wordy and should have been more punchy – copies of the study for those interested could have been made available. It was hard to see the links between the objects and the museums with all the historical text – the focus should have been on the objects, not on a desire to tell the visitors everything. Perhaps this was a problem in the brief. It was also a concern that the text was not shown to the partners prior to printing to prevent any errors and to give feedback on the information presented and they way it was presented.
- Handing the exhibition over to a consultant curator was the right thing to do but the curator needed to be more consultative – asking the groups for information and objects is not consultation. In future projects this aspect must be addressed and curators must build in the time to ensure that all the partners are appropriately consulted and have a real role to play in the construction of the exhibition.
- On a practical note invitations to the exhibition opening came far too late for us to arrange for our mayor or our senior management to attend. This was not good – we need those people to understand the work we are doing and a written report doesn't do it – they need to see the end product. Funds need to be provided for a proper printed invitation – email is not good enough – and there should be enough so that each venue can send out invites to all its volunteers and board members or senior management. Projects are great but if the people who hold the purse strings or the people who support the venue do not see what we are doing then there is no real point.
- We were committed to the Thematic Study group before we were told what the theme was to finally be and with little or no knowledge of the standard of documentation required. The River as a theme really left us with very little room to move as we really never had an association with the river. We felt that most of the time we were wasting our time by being involved. The other proposal to select a couple of periods in time, e.g. 1909, 1959, would have suited us better.
- The meetings weren't always particularly productive;
- The discussions at meetings weren't always on topic!
- We didn't always have enough time to get things together for the historian prior to his visit – his patience was appreciated and should be noted;
- There seemed to be a lot of duplication between the historian's contextual history and the curatorial content development – particularly with regards to information and images supplied;

Challenges of the Thematic Study Project:

- The essential challenge was identifying what was expected and how we could respond. Ultimately all turned out to be reasonable and manageable, but the early stages without always clear direction or without apparently clear understanding of what a volunteer organisation can offer were at times awkward. Changes in central personnel at BLHN staff did not help.
- As per the previous question, the greatest challenge was the selection of the theme and its relevance to a museum's collection.
- As previously stated the Thematic Study was a unique experience for all of us and proved to be a great learning curve. Any challenges that did arise were quickly dealt with and overcome. They just enhanced our knowledge in preparation for "the next time".
- Actually it was like a breath of fresh air when Kate joined the BLHN as I found her to be honest and always pleasant, patient and helpful. Quick to respond to my queries.
- It was very difficult in the first instance to understand what we were doing however as the consultant historian came on board things became more defined. Having to dismiss the first historian was probably a good thing – it showed us what we didn't want. However because of the uncertainty our group nearly pulled out – had Rod Fisher not come on line and helped to define the project we would probably have not stuck with it.
- Much of the work ended up falling to one person despite the training etc given to others and that one person struggled to get it all done plus their own job as well.
- There was a massive increase in Public Liability Insurance for all rail based heritage groups, us included, which left us very short of funds for several years. The museum is run entirely by volunteers and we receive no ongoing funding from any source. As a result we found we were unable to give the Thematic Study the time or financial commitment that was expected of us
- Obtaining funding!
- It was difficult to explain to funding bodies what the project was about, what it could result in, what outcomes, who would be involved, etc when this was a pilot study;
- Many organisations struggled to find the time for significance assessments and preventative conservation;
- Many organisations found financial and resource restrictions difficult to overcome – perhaps there were more organisational outlays than participants had thought?
- The changes in BLHN Co-ordinators (4 in total) and, to a lesser extent Board Chairs, meant a loss of "institutional memory", project direction, and made consistency and continuity difficult.

Achievements of the Thematic Study Project:

- We have been encouraged to open up and to share items special to us but now identified as significant not simply in the growth of our organisation but also in the establishment of the city of Brisbane.
- The great outcome of the thematic study was the renewed emphasis on the use of collections to aid the process of telling stories and bringing history to life. An object may have its own significance but that story can be enhanced by looking at it in the wider context of a thematic study.
- Fundamental to the thematic study process is a thorough knowledge of the provenance and significance of objects in a collection. The workshops on significance helped reinforce the importance of this discipline in the museum context.
- We were very proud to be part of the Thematic Study Project, and were particularly thrilled that our part of the display was so well put together.
- We learnt the value of having significant object files and were able to assemble a file for each of the most valuable objects already in our collection. We also learnt the value of doing significant assessments, and having collection management policies. We had tended to be a "dumping ground" for objects not wanted by some departments in the hospital and are now more selective in what we accept.
- I was unable to attend the launch, but had been told by the museum committee members who did attend that "You had done us proud".
- When I visited the display I was very impressed at the way Shelley Pisani had arranged each participant's collections. The objects were well set out and the signage and panels were very informative, telling some great stories without being overloaded. Overall the display gave an excellent picture of Our River Our Stories.
- The project was an achievement – I believe we have learned many lessons and those lessons will ensure that future projects (and there should be more) will have better outcomes. The objects that were used are now brilliantly documented and this has set a standard within our museum.
- We have learnt a lot from this project. We now have one of our members appointed as our archivist and he

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is currently going through and documenting all of our documents that we inherited from the Brisbane City Council. We are also starting to list all of our objects, check their condition and work out a solution for their future security and preservation.

- Although I feel we were not able to be an effective partner in this project, it has been a more than worthwhile activity for the Museum. We have learnt a vast amount. We have realised that there are museums out there doing things far better than we were.
- We are proud of our involvement in this significant heritage project;
- We have learnt about significance assessments, preventative conservation, connections within and between collections, working with consultants (historian, curator, photographer, conservator, etc), and importantly about our own collection;
- We are implementing object files for significant objects;
- We are identifying objects for significance assessment, and working on these;
- We are identifying preventative conservation measures we can implement, and also finding objects that need more treatment i.e. professional conservation work;
- We have identified the need for a full collection preservation survey, collection storage monitors (thermohydrographs), improved artwork storage, and better housing for many items within the collection.

Suggestions if a Thematic Study is held in the future:

- Clearer understanding of just what is expected in advance. The change to the second historian rendered the experience manageable and ultimately comprehensible. The approach chosen by the first was on such a broad scale that volunteer establishments without prior training and experience could only find difficult to handle, especially without financial support. But even money may not have created time, commitment and understanding.
- Developing a process/template for the selection of the theme. Ideally, the thematic study should lead to an exhibition.
- It would be great to get more grants in the future to enable the BLHN to hold more Thematic Studies, or events of a similar nature.
- Now that we have the experience of being involved in a Thematic Study, and know what is involved, I feel sure that the museum Management Committee would approve our involvement in any future Thematic Studies or similar projects.
- Grant applications need to address the whole project from study to exhibition or publication or seminar series or whatever. The final outcome helps define the project and will assist in getting groups on board.
- In defining themes I think it would be interesting to look at the issue from a different direction – perhaps a workshop with all the members of the BLHN attending and an attempt to come up with a number of themes that have the potential to become studies. This way the whole membership has a chance to explore themes and may engender more natural groupings for future projects. Our group was so diverse that picking a theme was very difficult and so we went for something very obvious. I think if these kinds of studies are something that BLHN want to do more often there needs to be a more strategic approach to defining themes, approaching funding organisations and ensuring that the studies have a real outcome for the membership
- It is my impression from being involved in this project that the members of the BLHN are a very diverse group who in many cases don't have much common ground to enable a Thematic Study to be effectively carried out. I feel that if a future study is to be undertaken then a theme needs to be chosen first and then specific member museums be invited to join based on their ability to "fit in" to the theme to enable them to participate at the high standard required.
- Definitely funding is an issue – this was a major project, with several parts, and our success in a few funding areas helped the project, but more funding would have ensured better outcomes and shorter timeframes.
- A funding/grant contribution back to the participant organisations for their work and efforts would have guaranteed ownership as all would have shared responsibility for complying with the terms of the funding contract, provided an impetus for meeting agreed upon timeframes, given an incentive for significance assessments to be prepared for the historian, and pushed this project to the top of priorities.
- The theme was an artificial construct to try and link disparate collections – we think it worked well, and the exhibition was a great outcome. The theme of the Brisbane River could be used again for other collections and organisations as it is such a "fluid" theme...
- Ensure your theme suits what your organisations are about, what you're trying to achieve, provides connections, is supported by strong objects, and is adaptable

APPENDIX B – Contextual History

Historian Contract; Framework; Project Plan

Historian Contract

Monday 5 March 2007

CONDITIONS OF CONTRACT

Dear Consultant Historian

I am pleased to confirm your appointment as an independent Consultant to Brisbane's Living Heritage Network for the Thematic Study – Stage 1. The Terms and Conditions of the contract are as follows:

1 Engaged by: Brisbane's Living Heritage Network.

2 Location: Level 3, 381 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley and with consultation to participant organisations including Mercy Heritage Centre, Brisbane Tramway Museum, Queensland Maritime Museum, St. John's Cathedral, Diamantina Healthcare Museum, Redcliffe Museum, as required.

3 Consultant reports to: Brisbane's Living Heritage Network Board, through Collections Research Group and in person where required.

4 The period of engagement:

The period of engagement will commence in March 2007 and continue until June 2007. During this period the Consultant will work whatever hours and days are required in order to fulfil the obligations of this contract in reasonable proportion to the fees paid.

March- April 2007

Work with participant member organisations (Collections Research Group), and the BLHN Co-ordinator, to:

- Develop the contextual history of the chosen theme 'River Heritage' which is strongly linked to movable items and collections, photographs, maps, paintings, places and original source material
- Draft thematic framework and list of significant items for possible incorporation into the contextual history and further analysis of the collections
- Survey collections and movable items to identify the most significant objects and collections, using the framework.

May – June 2007

Work with participant member organisations, and the BLHN Co-ordinator, to:

- Revise the history to incorporate their collection research and statements of significance into the contextual history, producing a written record
- Assist in the production of an outcomes report (prepared by BLHN for Arts Queensland, for funding acquittal)

5 Fees and Reimbursable Expenses:

BLHN will pay total fees and expenses to 'Brisbane History Group Incorporated' a total of \$6,000.00 (plus GST). Fees will be paid subject to satisfactory progress in the performance of the Consultant's Services in three stages;

50% of the fee is to be payable on signing of the contract (7.3.07) and on submission of invoice;

25% to be paid on completion of first draft of contextual history (10.5.07) and on submission of invoice;

25% to be paid on project completion (13.6.07) and on submission of invoice;

Please note all costs incurred such as administration, travel, accommodation and communications costs including telephone costs, compatible computing system and all applicable insurances must be covered by this fee, except for photocopying related material at participant organisations of the BLHN office.

6 Role of Consultant Historian

The consultant will be required to:

- Attend monthly meetings at the premises of BLHN/and or members sites to discuss project development with the Collections Research Group

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- Travel to member sites throughout Greater Brisbane to undertake collection research activities
- Write a contextual history of the chosen theme 'River Heritage'
- Attend BLHN Board meetings as required

7 Schedule of Deliverables

- Project plan submitted to the BLHN Board, by Wednesday 7 March 2007
- Thematic framework due Wednesday 4 April 2007
- First draft of contextual history due Wednesday 9 May 2007
- Final draft of contextual history due Wednesday 13 June 2007

8 Role of BLHN

BLHN will provide the following assistance and support to the Consultant, to meet the agreed timelines:

- Arranging meetings with the Collections Research Group as required;
- Providing project management assistance as required;
- Communicating consultancy outcomes on conclusion of the contract to the BLHN Board.

9 Conflict of Interest

The Consultant warrants that, to the best of his knowledge, he does not, and is not likely to have any conflict of interest in the performance of this agreement. If a conflict or risk of conflict of interest arises (without limitation, because of work undertaken for any person other than BLHN) the Consultant will immediately give notice of the conflict of interest, or the risk of it, to BLHN.

10 Contract Material

Title to and intellectual rights in all new contract material, including every stage of production of it, will rest jointly with BLHN, Rod Fisher, and the participating member organisations so that they can use, reproduce and adapt material from this project for their own use. This agreement does not affect intellectual property rights in existing contract material.

12 Compliance

The Consultant must comply with all relevant laws and the requirements of BLHN in performing the services contained within this agreement.

13 Indemnities

The Consultant releases and indemnifies BLHN and all its officers, servants and agents from and against all actions, proceedings, claims and demands which may be brought or made against any of them by any person arising from -

- (a) any wilful or negligent act or omission of the Consultant;
- (b) any unlawful or negligent act or omission of the visitors, invitees or licensees of the Consultant;
- (c) death, injury, loss or damage suffered by the Consultant or any of its visitors, invitees or licensees except where the death, injury, loss or damage is caused by the wrongful act or omission of BLHN.

If you are satisfied with the terms and conditions of the contract as outlined above, and the requirements of the Project Background material attached, please sign both copies of this letter and return one to the BLHN at your earliest convenience. The other is for your personal records. If you have any questions about the contract or the requirements of the consultancy, please contact me.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Connell

BLHN Chair

Date: 7/3/07

Signature:

I accept and agree to the terms and conditions of the contract as outlined above.

Rod Fisher

Consultant Historian

Date: 7/3/07

Signature:

Study Framework

BLHN THEMATIC RIVER STUDY FRAMEWORK

Rod Fisher 020407

Linking History: Up, Down and Around the Brisbane River

EXTRACT

Since visiting each of the six participant BLHN organizations and surveying their collections in March, I've developed the following **thematic river study framework** which incorporates potential display items. That should then form the basis for my contextual history and further assessment of individual items by the respective organizations.

The **rationale** for doing these things backwards (from the normal procedure of history, framework and then survey) is that the usual kind of history has already been done for the river by several historians (especially ALS 1990, Gregory 1996, Longhurst & Douglas 1997 and Steele 1976). Moreover, another one would be of little direct use for a BLHN exhibition, as the six participant collections are so disparate and all of them except QMM are only tangentially connected with the history of the river. This means that the sub-themes of this thematic study need to derive from items in the collections rather than vice-versa.

Suggested **sub-themes** (historical acts or aspects) are grouped below according to the **subjective concept** of 'Up, Down and Around the Brisbane River'. This arrangement is adopted partly to get away from the usual classification of river subjects (eg flooding, industry, recreation) but mainly to connect the random items of participant member organizations with particular acts or aspects (having an exhibition rather than a book in mind). 'Linking History', is the **overall concept**, particularly ways in which the river was the conduit for moving people, products and concepts up, down and around the place.

No attempt is made to represent the whole history of the river which has been published already. Instead, the ultimate aim is to use **grouped items** to arouse the interest viewers in the history of the river, especially its historical role as above, and the collections of the six participant organizations. In particular, a single evocative item for each grouping is placed first and asterisked, hopefully to illustrate the **objective concept** of 'Treasures as Insights'. Other items might be deemed to be more important in the long run.

A much larger than necessary number of **individual items** has been included to indicate the potential range, to elicit further ideas and to give the participant member organizations and prospective curator a wide choice for display purposes. **Occasional items** are added from bolded non-members of BLHN to strengthen a particular aspect (eg *BHH, JOL, QM, RHSQ*).

Font variations are used for objects (bold), records (italics) and photos (standard). **Abbreviations** include @ (ssessed), arr(ived), b(uilt), c(irca), d(emolished), l(aid up), o(pened), s(old).

If this basic framework is approved, the **contextual study** will not tell the history of the river from 'go to whoa'. It should concentrate instead on expanding these sub-themes as illustrated by the identified items, thereby providing context for their display and a basis for prospective exhibition panels etc. If more convenient, some sub-themes may be combined with others.

The contextual study should also include an **appendix** of source material on individual items (including significance assessments where available), a timeline of events and a reference list.

Comment, correction and infill would be appreciated from participant organizations as soon as possible. Details about objects are only as good as the information supplied to date.

UP THE RIVER incl shipment, migration, culture, health

Penal settlement from Sydney, SS Amity 1824-25

Tortoiseshell serviette ring by some convict for river explorer, Surveyor-General Lieut. John Oxley c.1830 [RM]*; **Convict manacles** [RM]; **Clay brick** [RM], **half bricks** from Commandant's Cottage [RHSQ, BHH]; Oxley's journal/report re discovery/exploration of the river [AONSW]; Portrait of Oxley [JOL]

Sisters of Mercy from Dublin via Melbourne & Sydney, Yarra Yarra arr.1861

Harmonium c1860 by Alexandre et Fils, Paris[MHC]*; **Books from Dublin** with inscriptions and/or All Hallows bookplates, 1800s [MHC]; **Mother Vincent Whitty's reliquary** 1844 [MHC@]; Portrait of Whitty [MHC]; *Letters of Mother Vincent Whitty, enroute & Brisbane 1860-61* [Dublin/MHC]; *Reminiscences of Mother Bridget Conlan* [MHC]; **Commemorative urn** 1941, green-glazed Art Nouveau style, by ME Smith, student of Lewis J Harvey [MHC]

DOWN THE RIVER incl disaster, shipping, tourism

River shipping

Life-ring of steam tug Forceful 1925? [QMM]*; **Steam engine of dredge Groper** date? [QMM]; Photo of same, date? [QMM]; **Model of ST Coringa** arr.1914 from Scotland, disapp.1940 (liner Arafura rescue 1929) [QMM]; **Model of ST Forceful** b.Scotland 1924, arr.1926, l.1970 (ditto) [QMM]; Blueprint plan of ferry MV Ena [QMM]; Photos of ferries [QMM] Photo of Bulimba car ferry date? [BTM copy?]

Seaside sojourning 1910s-50s

Postcard cartoon of female bather enjoying Redcliffe 16Feb1917 [RM]*; **Lace blouse** with high neck of type worn by visitors to Redcliffe c1900s? [RM]; **Male & female bathers** 1910s-30s; **Penny machine from Redcliffe jetty** c.1940s? [QM]; **Wooden chocolate box from penny machine** on same, date? [RM]; **Misc. picnic cutlery & utensils** c1930s? [RM]; **Souvenir cup & saucer with seascape** from Suttons Beach to Scotts Point, England c.1930 [RM]; **Souvenir cream jug with seascape** incl Redcliffe jetty, Czechoslovakia c.1930? [RM]; **Souvenir eggcup with seascape**, same? [RM]; **Souvenir silver spoon with badge of seascape** with view of Hornibrook Highway, Peninsula post-1935 [RM]; **Souvenir china and glass ashtrays with seascapes** c1930s? [RM]; **Souvenir seascape on metal** with rear prop c1930s [RM]; **Souvenir seascape in glass capsule** date? [RM]; Misc. photos/postcards of views, employee picnics etc 1920s-30s (historical pics on www.redcliffe.qle.gov.au) [RM]; Misc photos of accommodation incl boarding houses, camping date? (see same) [RM] *Ephemera incl flyers* [RM]

AROUND THE RIVER incl wharfage, transportation, boating

Wharfage

Framed photo of Circular Quay/Petrie Bight 1920s, incl Cooma, Lucinda, tug, Koopa?, All Hallows, St Johns [QMM]*; Photo of city wharves c1911?, *Gleanings* 1911 [MHC]; Panoramic photos (2) of Town Reach wharves in single frame, early 1920s [QMM]; Misc. photos of Petrie Bight from All Hallows 1930s? [MHC]; Framed photos at opening of Newstead wharves 1938 [QMM]; **Tow motor** b.Ohio 1922-23c, reportedly 1st industrial tractor imported for Hamilton wharves [QMM]; **John Burke Ltd coastal shipping company flag, brass plate, photos** etc 1910-68/89 [QMM]; **Model of SS Canonbar** b.Ardrossan SA/Scotland? 1910, operated by Burke [QMM]; **Model of MV Wyrallah** b. Denmark 1934, & operated along coast by Burke 1954-61; Framed photos of 3 patriarchs of the Burke Co. serving from Moreton Bay to Gulf of Carpentaria 1972 [QMM]; **Wharves' equipment** including hand trolley, bag hooks etc [QMM]; Photos of wharves, cargo etc 1900s-50s [QMM]; Photo of unloading trolleybus chassis at Brisbane wharves from Wolverhampton 1950 [BTM?]

Transportation

Sign for one tram only per span of Victoria bridge due to saltwatering corrosion, date? [BTM]*; Photos of Spring Hill & Valley baths 188? & 18??, supplied first by river water first from Petrie Bight pump [BTM/JOL?]; Photos of Countess St tram powerhouse o.1897, pumped river water for boilers, standpipes etc 1910s- [BTM]; Photos of street sprinkler cars, ?horse-electric drawn 1885-1910s supplied with river water [BTM]; *Mayor's report re this river water system* 1911 [BTM copy; BCA original?]; Photo of tramcar 421 along signposted Victoria Bridge in lane prohibited to heavy traffic 1966 [BTM]; Framed photo of New Farm powerhouse on riverside date? [BTM]; Maps of tram & trolleybus routes incl ferry termini, shelters and cross-river links [BTM]; Photos of trams & trolleybuses plying same [BTM]; Photo of tramcar 319 at West end river terminus 1961 [BTM]; Photo of tramcar 456 at Bulimba ferry terminus & woolstores, Newstead before last trip on the line 1963 [BTM]; **Tramway destination roll display** incl river stops, date? [BTM]; **Tram directory from stop nr North Quay** 1960s? [BTM]; **Yellow and black safety zone signpost** date? [BTM]; **Tram at Term(inus?) box sign** date? [BTM]; **Dead slow sign for New Farm & Bulimba ferry route** date? [BTM]; **Misc. signs** incl DANGER Do not touch cables, date? [BTM]; **Master clock of Synchronome time system**, Woolloongabba 1927 & 12?inch clock [BTM]; **Daily run cards for motormen & conductors** 1967-68 [BTM]; **Misc. tram tickets, punches, pouches, coin dispensers** dates? [BTM]; **Tramway uniforms, caps, pith helmet, badges** esp 1947- [BTM]; **Employee's leather Gladstone bag with 2 Vincent's powders** date? [BTM]

Project Plan

BLHN THEMATIC STUDY PROJECT PLAN: Rod Fisher, historian 7 March 2007

Theme: *River Heritage (including related sub-themes to be identified)*

Purpose: *To produce a contextual history of this theme linked to movable items in 6 participant organizations in accordance with the Project Brief and Contract*

Stage 1: Tue 27 February - Wed 7 March: Orientation

Clarify parameters with BLHN chair and coordinator
Set up survey visits per coordinator
Submit project plan
Commence tasks for the duration (see below)
Revisit historical river writing (eg Douglas, Fisher, Gregory, Steele)
Finalize and sign contract (Wed 7 March)
Submit BHG invoice for 50% of fee

Stage 2: Wed 7 March - Fri 16 March: Survey

Visit each organization to establish contact, identify finding aids, scope collections, ascertain potential items, obtain significance assessments etc per item and seek ideas re theme and possible sub-themes (2 hours each)
Arrange follow-up visits as necessary and confirm same with coordinator

Stage 3: Mon 19 March - Wednesday 4 April: Framework

Draft thematic framework for the contextual study
Draft list of significant items for possible incorporation in same
Identify possible gaps in same and possible remedies
Submit same to BLHN (Wed 4 April)

Stage 4: Thurs 5 April - Wed 9 May: Draft

Discuss above framework at thematic study meeting (Wed 11 April?)
Write draft of contextual history accordingly
Submit same to BLHN (Wed 9 May)
Submit BHG invoice for 25% of fee

Stage 5: Thurs 10 May - Wed 13 June: Submission

Discuss above framework at thematic study meeting (Wed 16 May?)
Revise draft contextual history accordingly
Submit same to BLHN (Wed 13 June)
Submit final BHG invoice for 25% of fee

Stage 6: Thurs 14 June - Wed 27 June: Aftermath

Obtain feedback from BLHN
Assist in production of BLHN outcomes report as necessary
Liaise with same re prospective outcomes (eg tour, publication, exhibition)

Duration: Compile bibliography of historical sources (primary, secondary, visual etc)
Compile chronology of relevant events (starting with BHG Timeline)
Consolidate file of relevant historical resources per theme
Consolidate file of significant assessments etc of items per collection
Continue communication with organizations as necessary
Liaise with photographer and conservator of listed items as necessary
Attend BLHN meetings as necessary
Contact and communicate with BLHN personnel as necessary

APPENDIX C - Exhibition Panels

Our River, Our Stories - Tales of the Brisbane River



Photo reproduced courtesy of Brisbane City Council.

The Brisbane River had long been central to the identity and heritage of the Indigenous clans of South East Queensland and remained uncharted until 1823, when Lieutenant John Oxley took the northern passage into Moreton Bay in HM cutter Mermaid and sailed into history as the first European explorer of the Brisbane River.

The ensuing convict establishment was sited temporarily at Redcliffe in 1824, until being relocated to Brisbane on the river. Free settlement followed in 1842, and then separation from New South Wales in 1859. Each subsequent boom until now was interrupted by a period of bust, war, drought or flood.

Yet these historic eras brought waves of people and products, as well as concepts, from over the seas and up the river to Brisbane, which has developed into the populous Queensland capital city we see today.

This exhibition will take you on a journey through the eyes of the people that explored and settled on the Brisbane River and the subsequent growth of the City, its infrastructure, governance and culture. It highlights the river's role in the past, focusing on 'treasures' from six heritage collections- Diamantina Healthcare Museum, Mercy Heritage Centre, Queensland Maritime Museum, Redcliffe Museum, St John's Cathedral and the Brisbane Tramway Museum. All are members of the Brisbane's Living Heritage Network.

Moving Up the River - the First Wave of Free Settlers

The first real wave of settlers up the river followed the proclamation of the free settlement of Moreton Bay District in February 1842. That was preceded by rapid pastoral expansion into the Darling Downs and upper Brisbane Valley. Development was facilitated thereafter by frenetic sales of town, suburban and country allotments along both banks of the Brisbane River.

To boatloads of settlers wending their way upstream, the former convict windmill on Wickham Terrace served as their landmark - until sighting the cluster of other recycled and infilled buildings on the peninsula itself.

Around Gardens Point and heading for Queens Wharf, the full range of ex-convict buildings from William Street to North Quay included the Commandant's House, Commissariat Stores, boat crew/builders quarters, Parsonage, military barracks, lumberyard before Queen Street Barracks and Brisbane Hospital (1846-2000).

Only a irregular roadboat ferry service connected North Brisbane to the more industrial settlement of Kangaroo Point, and another to South Brisbane, which became known particularly for its wayfaring inns (1846-1863, 67-111).

Among the newcomers was Captain John Clements Wickham (1798-1864), a retired naval officer who left his mark on the Moreton Bay District. After arriving at Queens Wharf from Sydney with his newly-wed Anna (1816-52) on the paddlewheeler Shamrock in January 1843, he served as Police Magistrate until 1853 and then Government Resident to 1859 (1859 2027, 214-215, 219-221; CE 1906, 21; Wickham 1916-1918, 2005, 147).

Anna Wickham's Memorial, from the collection of St John's Cathedral.

A superior though damaged tablet of symbolic white marble on black slate reveals only the name and rank of her husband plus date of death and age. More is known about her husband, the ex-naval surveyor and top NSW official at Moreton Bay from 1843-59. Before departing from Sydney on SS Shamrock he married Anna (1816-52), the second daughter of Hamibal Macarthur and grandniece to John Macarthur of NSW marine, merino and mutiny fame. After roughing it in the old Commandant's Cottage in William Street, they bought Newstead House further downstream in 1847. With her husband, who was a dedicated lay reader and patron of clergy such as Gregor, Anna attended service at St. John's in the former lumberyard and taught Sunday school there. After her untimely death in 1852, during a visit to Sydney with their three children, the memorial tablet by mason William Patten was later shipped from there to Brisbane and affixed to the wall of the new church, of which her husband was chairman of the building committee at the time. He, however, has no Brisbane memorial other than the thoroughfares which bear his name.



Portrait of Reverend John Gregor, from the collection of St John's Cathedral.

The oval portrait shows John Gregor (1806-46) in appropriately sombre dress of the late Regency era. This belongs to the long British tradition of miniature painting in watercolour on ivory. The frame is a plain rectangular black with the exception of a leafy metal acorn at the top, a traditional symbol of faith and endurance. It was apparently done for the family in Scotland not long before the 25-year-old clergyman left for Sydney in 1837, and gifted to the Diocese of Brisbane in the 1990s.



Moving Up the River - The Arrival of Christianity

The mural of Bishop Quinn's reception 1861 at St Stephen's Chapel, from the collection of the Mercy Heritage Centre.



The photo shows one of three colourful murals which Virgil Lo Schiavo, a British citizen trained in Australia and Italy, painted for St Stephen's Cathedral in 1942. It dramatises the arrival of Bishop James Quinn, his priests and sisters of Mercy, which Mother Vincent (Ellen) Whitty described in a letter to her superior in Dublin: 'Here we are at long last landed in poor Brisbane, after our long but not unpleasant voyage [of 110 days], and delays in quarantine, Melbourne, Sydney, etc. We landed on the 10th [May] about 10 o'clock at night. The dean [John Rigney] ... met us on the vessel, as well as the 2 French priests and Fathers Casu and Renaghan, who had come down before us. We were first brought to the Church which was beautifully lighted up and a number of poor people came in also - had they known the Bishop would have arrived that evening they would have had grand doings to welcome him but ... we did not stop at Newcastle ... and in consequence, we arrived in Brisbane a day before we were expected - from the Church (which is a very good little stone building) we went to the priests' home and had cake and wine and then proceeded to our Convent, or rather house'. Exquisite St Stephen's Chapel in Elizabeth Street, where Quinn took possession of his diocese two days later, had been reputedly designed by Augustus W.N. Pugin, the British exponent of Gothic style.

Quinn's bust, 1873, from the collection of the Mercy Heritage Centre

The white marble portrait bust on its grey column and pedestal base was sculpted in 1873 by Achille Simonetti (1838-1900) as inscribed. Bishop James Quinn (1819-81), wearing his vestments, skull cap and crucifix, looks zealously to his upper left as the founder of All Hallows' Convent School. This was evidently Simonetti's first sculpture in Brisbane from life, a year before leaving for Sydney where he became a fashionable portraitist. Born the son of a sculptor in Rome, he studied in Italy and Greece before bringing his craft to Brisbane in 1871. Quinn, who had trained in Rome as well as Dublin where he was consecrated in 1859, recruited various Italian artists and particularly priests, as well as boatloads of Irish through his Queensland Immigration Society, so that some called the colony 'Quinn's land'.

APPENDIX D – Images of the Our River, Our Stories Exhibition at the Queensland Maritime Museum



APPENDIX E - References

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