

December 2022

***Re: The National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron Significance Assessment***

The National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron Significance Assessment was commissioned by the City of Greater Bendigo (The City) in conjunction with the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in 2022 to enable a shared vision and way forward for the management of the cast iron items on loan to the COGB.

The Significance Assessment provides several key pieces of information including:

- Identifying which of the cast iron objects in Bendigo belong to the Graeme Robertson Collection and which do not
- what is significant and why
- ascertains the collections relationship to Central Victoria

As this Significance Assessment focuses on best practise outcomes without taking into account the financial limitation of both organisations, the City and the Trust have agreed that the key recommendations in this report will be used to provide an overall framework from which decisions and management tasks will be based.

The City and The Trust will continue to work together collaboratively towards long term outcomes which benefit the collection. Our priority task is to sort and separate and Graeme Robertson Collection from the other items and enhance the existing database records to ensure we have up to date information from which to work.



Simone Ewenson  
Heritage Collections Officer  
City of Greater Bendigo



Dr Annette Shiell  
Executive Manager  
Collections and Cultural Projects  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)



Graeme Robertson in New Orleans with his Nikon F camera being photographed by the Times-Picayune newspaper in 1961. Source: Denis Robertson

# The National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron

## Significance Assessment

### Final Report

History At Work  
October 4 2022

### Project Team

Emma Russell, Director | Historian  
Susan Faine, Curator | Historian

### Schedule

Project	Significance Assessment of the National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron
Status & Date	Final Report
Prepared for	City of Greater Bendigo (COGB) in conjunction with the National Trust Australia Victoria (NTAV)

### Contact & business information

Emma Russell, Director  
E | [erussell@historyatwork.com.au](mailto:erussell@historyatwork.com.au)  
M | 0414 530 880

History At Work Pty Ltd  
A | 13 Urquhart Street, Northcote, VIC 3070  
W | [historyatwork.com.au](http://historyatwork.com.au)  
ABN | 96 986 965 179    ACN | 628 206 726

### Table of contents

Executive Summary .....	2
Methodology .....	5
Investigation of Cultural Heritage Significance – the history of cast iron and of the collection .....	7
Thematic and interpretive framework.....	20
Focus and Scope of the Cast Iron Collection .....	22
Contents of the Collection .....	23
Role in the Community .....	26
Comparative Analysis .....	26
Application of Significance 2.0 criteria.....	27
Statement of Significance .....	30
Recommendations .....	31
Recommendations in detail .....	32
References.....	36
Appendix 1: .....	37
Summary Timeline of the Genesis and Development of the CIC Collection.....	37
Appendix 2:     Comparative Analysis .....	38

## Executive Summary

The genesis of the Cast Iron Collection owned by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (NTAV) and on loan to the City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) was as a personal collection of 'ornamental cast iron in architecture'<sup>1</sup> acquired by Dr Graeme Robertson from 19th and early 20th century buildings demolished in a wave of urban development during the 1950s. The cast iron objects were mostly from buildings in Melbourne. After donating his collection to the NTAV in 1970 it was added to by a newly established Cast Iron Committee chaired by Dr Robertson with the hope of establishing a cast iron museum. This did not eventuate and before long a home was needed for a collection that had grown to over 500 objects, many of which fell under the category of domestic, commercial, or public realm objects, rather than ornamental architectural.

The CoGB, a significant 19<sup>th</sup> century city itself, considered the collection would support Council's vision 'to create a City of which its citizens are proud', and a key objective to 'continually work towards recognizing the historical significance of Bendigo'.<sup>2</sup> In February 2001 they entered into a 50-year loan agreement with the NTAV. The entire collection was relocated from Melbourne by the end of 2001 and today it remains in the Kennington Shed in Bendigo.

### The collection today

This collection is over 50 years old and been permanently stored in sheds, basements, and other out-of-the-way places, with sustained damage to many objects. There are few people who have seen it or even know of its existence. Many objects are large, heavy, and cumbersome, so handling is difficult. Provenance of many is unknown. The 50-year loan to CoGB expires in 2051 but after just fourteen years CoGB Council resolved in 2015 to return the entire collection. However, this has not yet taken place. Today, both institutions are working together to make strategic collection management decisions and develop a new vision for the collection. This significance assessment was commissioned to provide a fuller understanding of the history, development, and significance of the CIC, and to guide the decision making and new vision.

The brief included the following tasks:

Tasks	Outcomes or summary responses
1 Provide a Statement of Significance	P.35
2 Identify which objects form the nucleus of the collection and which are additions	The cast iron ornamental architectural objects.
3 A comparative assessment of the collection and any sub collections	No cohesive sub-collection identified.
4 Individual comparative assessments for items of high significance	Many individual objects could not be assessed or compared due to access difficulties.
5 Comparative assessment to cast iron collections within Victoria and to Australian collections outside Victoria	P.30 Includes international collections.
7 Provide key recommendations for future use and interpretation potential	The thematic framework (p.37) is a starting point, but the collection is in no state to yield interpretation suggestions. Recommendations have been made to enable this.
8 Identify direct relationships to Central Victoria and CoGB for interpretive purposes	P.11 The provenance suggests none have a direct relationship with either place.

<sup>1</sup> The subtitle in Dr Robertson's first book *Victorian Heritage*

<sup>2</sup> CoGB Corporate Plan 1999 - 2002

- Provide key recommendations for management  
9 and preservation activities, identifying priority items p.37

## Collection summary

<b>Name:</b>	<p>The entire collection has most commonly been referred to as the National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron, or the Cast Iron Collection (CIC). In this document the entire collection of <b>672 objects will be referred to as the CIC</b>.</p> <p>Its significant component is the <b>ornamental architectural cast iron objects (catalogued)</b> that reflect Robertson's original purpose. They will be referred to as the <b>Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC)</b>.</p>			
<b>Purpose:</b>	<p>Robertson's purpose was to draw 'attention to the unique importance of cast iron architectural ornamentation still remaining in Melbourne in the hope of fostering its preservation and retarding the spate of destruction which was occurring'.<sup>3</sup></p>			
<b>Size<sup>4</sup>:</b>	<p>Some objects (catalogue numbers) have multiple pieces not included in this numbering, but all are recorded in the 2018 Audit as amounting to 1,334 pieces.</p> <p><b>526</b> catalogued objects including the unnumbered Latrobe Gate &amp; Letterbox  <b>146</b> uncatalogued objects<sup>5</sup>  <b>672</b> objects in total. <b>Less</b>  <b>130</b> catalogued objects missing from the Audit so not in Kennington Shed</p> <p><b>= 542 objects in Kennington Shed, some with multiple pieces</b></p>			
	Category of object (Defined during this assessment)	Catalogued	Uncatalogued	Total
<b>In Kennington Shed</b>	Ornamental architecture	230	41	271
	Public realm	13	105	271
	Domestic	135		
	Commercial	18		
<b>Total</b>		<b>396</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>542</b>
<b>Not in Kennington Shed</b>	<p><b>130 objects are recorded in the 2018 Audit as missing.</b> Of these:</p> <p>30 are identified in the NTAV 8.3.2022 Database as located at CoGB, 5 of these are ornamental architecture</p> <p>19 are identified in the NTAV 8.3.2022 Database as located elsewhere. 7 of these are ornamental architecture</p> <p>81 objects are missing from both the Audit and the Database</p>			

<sup>3</sup> G Robertson, memo to NTV Council Meeting 7 April 1975 outlining the history of the collection

<sup>4</sup> Figures are calculated from the 'Catalogue for SA\_August 2022\_HAW'

<sup>5</sup> They include objects with no cast iron such as marble pieces, tram parts, timber lengths and columns, wooden furniture, tiles, a cistern, pipes and plumbing parts, and a grand piano. These were not considered for this Significance Assessment.

## **Summary of Significance**

The Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection has outstanding cultural heritage significance at a national level for its historical and aesthetic values.

## **Recommendations**

**The goal is to convert the OACIC from a liability to an asset.**

This goal is underpinned by 4 priority actions responding to the request for key recommendations ‘regarding future use and interpretation potential’ and ‘for management and preservation activities’

The priority actions are to:

1. Acknowledge the original purpose of the collection and separate ornamental architectural objects from other objects
2. Develop a collection management plan for the ornamental architectural objects that also addresses the balance of the CIC
3. Connect the physical OACIC with the intellectual legacy of Dr Robertson’s research
4. Enable and encourage public engagement to attract projects, partnerships, and sponsorships

Recommendations to achieve the four priority actions and the end goal involve a three-stage program with nine actions, which can be summarised as:

### **Stage 1: Collection Management Part 1**

Physically separate the OACIC from the CIC and from the non-cast iron objects

Provide safe storage with an enabling workspace for the OACIC

### **Stage 2: Transform the OACIC from a liability to an asset**

Conservation & Preservation Needs Assessment

Forensic research and collection documentation

Professional stills photography of each OCIAC object

### **Stage 3: Collection Management Part 2**

OACIC Website

Deaccessioning

Feasibility & Interpretation Plan

Conservation work

## Methodology

This assessment was conducted using the methodology described in *Significance 2.0. A guide to assessing the significance of collections* (2009) and the *Burra Charter* (2013).

**Reference documents** Given the difficulties in accessing and viewing the collection the following documents assisted greatly in understanding its contents and evolution:

1. 'Cast Iron Collection. National Trust of Victoria', c.1994 and updated c.1998 – the 'Catalogue'
2. 'Cast Iron Collection' archive 1 – 4, NTAV – the 'CIC Archive'
3. A 2018 Audit commissioned by the CoGB and undertaken between August 2018 and January 2019 - the 'Audit'.
4. 'NTAV Cast Iron Collection\_Full database report \_ 8 March 2022' – the 'Database'

These four documents are sometimes referred to as a group in this report, where they are called the 'Reference Documents'.

### The Assessment involved:

- Digitising four large CIC archive folders (item 2 above) and rendering each as a searchable PDF document, which the NTAV now have as a digital archive.
- Two visits to Bendigo to view as many objects as possible. On the second visit the CoGB engaged a fork lift operator so we could access some of the stacked crates of objects
  - 110, approximately 20%, of the catalogued objects (with a CI-### prefix) and 9 uncatalogued objects were pulled out and photographed
  - All other objects that could be seen (ie not submerged in crates or hidden beneath or behind other objects) were photographed in situ
- Research into ornamental architectural cast iron (having established through Robertson's publications and the CIC Archive that the nucleus of this collection was the ornamental architectural objects), and research into the history of the collection
- Development of 'Catalogue for SA\_August 2022\_HAW' – this has a line item for every catalogued object in the CIC and brings together content from two 'Rationalisation' documents in the NTAV archive files, the Reference Documents, and our categories developed during the study – cast iron used in architecture, the public realm, the domestic realm, and the commercial realm.
- Consideration of the collection's ability to reflect its purpose. This collection has never had a collection policy, but its founder was quite clear about why he was collecting, researching, and publishing – namely to draw 'attention to the unique importance of cast iron architectural ornamentation still remaining in Melbourne in the hope of fostering its preservation and retarding the spate of destruction which was occurring'.<sup>6</sup>
- Consideration of its condition, completeness, and integrity
- Comparison with cast iron collections in Victoria, Australia and overseas. Project limitations meant this was a desktop study only, using catalogue and website information rather than consultation and collection visits.
- Consideration of the collection against the *Australian Historic Themes Framework (2001)* and *Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes (2010)*
- Assessment against the Criteria described in *Significance 2.0*

### Limitations

Time, budget, and the difficulty of access to so many large, heavy pieces created challenges and limitations to this work, preventing:

---

<sup>6</sup> G Robertson, memo to NTV Council Meeting 7 April 1975 outlining the history of the collection

- A detailed condition survey for each piece
- An extensive comparative survey involving consultation with and/or visits to each of the collections or museums identified
- Statements of Significance for individual pieces or for sub-collections

### **Consultants**

This Assessment was conducted by Emma Russell and Susan Faine of History At Work. Both are members of the Professional Historians Association and experienced historians and collection consultants.

Emma, Principal Historian and Director of History At Work, has worked with collections since 2006 when engaged by the State Library of Victoria to manage the Memory Victoria Project and conduct significance assessments of 58 public library local history collections across Victoria. She has since conducted assessments, audits, and policy reviews of dozens of local history, civic and specialist collections and run training workshops for different audiences.

Susan was curator of collections at the Jewish Museum of Australia for fifteen years and, since joining History At Work has helped guide assessments, audits and policy work for specialist, local history and civic collections.

### **Appreciation**

Is due to Simone Ewenson of the City of Greater Bendigo and Dr Annette Shiell from the National Trust of Australia (Victoria). We would like to thank Wonona Fuzzard (CoGB) and Michelle Derrick (NTAV). Professor Miles Lewis for his generous professional guidance; and Denis Robertson for his generous discussion and for shedding some light on his father's methods of collecting.



## Investigation of Cultural Heritage Significance – the history of cast iron and of the collection

A 'Summary Timeline of the CIC Collection' can be read in Appendix One

### History of cast iron

Cast iron artefacts were first discovered in Jiangsu, China. Dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, they included ploughshares, posts, weapons, and pagodas. In Europe cast iron was first used to make cannon and shot during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. With advances in cast iron technology in England and Europe, by the 1700s cast iron was being used for structural purposes, most notably for bridges but also for building frames and columns, and later still, by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, for prefabricated buildings and for decorative facades.<sup>7</sup> As early as 1756 the architect Isaac Ware, in his *A Complete Body of Architecture*, included several plates to illustrate ironwork gates and railings and commented on its decorative qualities:

*Cast iron is very serviceable to the builder and a vast expense is saved in many cases by using it; in rails and balusters it makes a rich and massy appearance when it has cost very little and when wrought iron, much less substantial, would cost a vast sum.*<sup>8</sup>

### The difference between wrought iron and cast iron

These terms indicate different production methods, although they are often used interchangeably. Dr Robertson explains:

*... wrought iron is individually hammered by a smith, while cast iron is cast in a mould, and may thereby be mass-produced ... The artistry and craftsmanship of wrought iron undoubtedly exceeds that of cast iron, but both these qualities characterize the best castings.*<sup>9</sup>

NTAV correspondence from an 'amateur smith' explains that

*up to the mid-1850s wrought iron was the principal material for smiths and used exclusively for the decoration of buildings both inside and outside ... later of course cast iron became the preferred material ... [because it was much cheaper and] a readily available material ...*<sup>10</sup>

The inclusion of wrought iron in the collection was intended 'to demonstrate the difference between wrought and cast iron' in a hoped-for museum. The difference between wrought iron and cast iron in the context of this significance assessment becomes important when making deaccessioning decisions in the future, and to understand why ornamental architectural cast iron was so prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian and Australian architecture.

### Cast iron in Victorian and Australian architecture

The gold discoveries in the 1850s brought well over 600,000 people to Victoria.<sup>11</sup> Population and prosperity continued to grow until the 1890s depression. In the intervening decades, as the demand for homes and buildings grew and towns and cities across Victoria expanded, cast iron, as well as wrought iron, was used for structural and ornamental architecture. Cast iron was also used to commercially produce domestic objects such as cookware, flat irons, and shoe lasts, and for fountains, lampposts, and public seating in parks, streets, and other public places.

The building boom of the 1870s and 1880s enabled speculative developers to build rows of houses in the inner suburbs where decorative or lacy cast iron featured so prominently that 'these buildings have come to be

---

<sup>7</sup> 'Cast Iron', Wikipedia, accessed 20 March 2022

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture*, issued in parts 1756-57, quoted in David Mitchell, 'Ornamental Cast <https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/orncastiron/orncastiron.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Robertson, *Decorative cast iron in Australia*, p.1 & p.4

<sup>10</sup> Correspondence from Roy McNaught to Simon Molesworth, 7 July 1988, 'CIC' File 2, National Trust Victoria

<sup>11</sup> Broome, *Arriving*, p.72

regarded as distinctly Australian, although there are interesting parallels to be seen in New Orleans and also in the West Indies and South Africa.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in Robertson's 1977 publication he explains 'Australia's cities were built up during the cast iron era, and their climate encouraged the lavish use of cast iron for balconies and verandas: Melbourne has more architectural cast ironwork than any other city in the world.'<sup>13</sup>

*The most important cast-iron components were those associated with the veranda-posts in the form of ultra-thin classical columns, balustrades, friezes, brackets, and fringes. Ordered from the iron founder's catalogue and quickly assembled on site, they made the veranda into a lacy screen seen against pools of dim shadow ... the filigree screen became the visually dominant element which transformed the architecture.*<sup>14</sup>

*Until the 1860s any upper decoration was confined to brackets and drops, and possibly a fringe or valance ... Finally, towards 1880, the rail began to be eliminated to unite frieze, brackets, and fringe into a continuous all-over pattern - the famous iron lace appearance.*<sup>15</sup>

Some cast iron building components were imported from England, but by the 1870s cast iron pieces for architecture were being designed, made, and widely used in Australia. Professor Miles Lewis, architectural historian, has written that

*Local production on any scale seems to date in Melbourne from about 1860. In that year the quartz mining boom burst, and it seems that the local founders, who until now had been flat out making machinery, suddenly found it worth turning to ornamental ironwork, and marketed it at prices equivalent to the English imports. In his 1862 builders' pricebook Charles Mayes lists examples of the first indisputably Melbourne manufactured 'iron lace'.*<sup>16</sup>

Mayes' examples were balconies 'of various patterns, fixed ... Balconies, large honeysuckle pattern, fitted with wrought iron top rail and standards ... Ditto, plain Gothic, ... Ditto, very richly ornamented, ... Ditto, plain diamond pattern ...'<sup>17</sup>

*... many patterns were being designed locally (in contrast to the situation in Sydney), first by William Fulton ... and then by Angus McLean, David Livingstone and William Hutchinson. In 1866 William Hutchinson showed at the Intercolonial Exhibition balcony panels ... while Russell & Co of Sydney showed balcony panels, and garden chairs cast with iron from the Fitzroy Mines. One can only begin to get a more detailed picture of local work from 1870, when the Victorian Government instituted a system of registering designs - the equivalent of copyrighting them. Between 1870 and 1890 thirty-three manufacturers registered 161 designs, of which 48 were from the one firm of Angus McLean.*<sup>18</sup>

Aesthetic designs for cast iron were registered, just as technical inventions or innovations in cast iron work were patented.<sup>19</sup> The following figures of registered designs in Australia<sup>20</sup> show Victoria with more foundries and more designs over a longer period than in other Australian colonies. Although, these figures don't include the Australian designs created since 1860 when local decorative cast iron design began to take off in Victoria

---

<sup>12</sup> Apperly et al, *A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture*, p.60

<sup>13</sup> E.G. Robertson & J Robertson, *Cast iron decoration. A world survey*, p.49

<sup>14</sup> Apperly et al, p.60

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, Miles 8.07 Metals: Ornamental Cast Iron: 2014, from *Australian Building Survey*, p.4, and available on [mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html](http://mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html) p.9

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, Miles, *Australian Building Survey*, p.4, and [mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html](http://mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html) p.9. These figures differ slightly from the Robertson figures quoted in the table above but are more reliable given their respective professional skills and the additional sources presumably available to Lewis over thirty years later.

<sup>19</sup> pers. Com. Professor Miles Lewis

<sup>20</sup> Figures taken from Robertson & Robertson, *Cast iron decoration. A world survey*, p.52

because registrations only began in 1870.<sup>21</sup> By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the decorative cast iron era came to an almost abrupt end.

Victoria	38 foundries	Registered 161 designs	April 1870 to August 1900 (in above quote Lewis suggests 33 foundries / 161 designs / 1870-1890)
NSW	23 foundries	Registered 103 designs	December 1879 to early 20th century
SA	Unknown	Registered 29 designs	March 1880 to February 1885
Qld	8 foundries	Registered 74 designs	November 1885 and November 1902

Foundries produced catalogues of their designs for prospective purchasers. They show the plethora of motifs available to architects, builders, and owners, whether classical British and European, or contemporary designs of indigenous Australian flora and fauna. Only a handful of Foundry catalogues have survived, including the 'outstanding' catalogues from William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry at Melbourne and the Sun Foundry of A.C. Harley & Co at Adelaide.<sup>22</sup>

### Decorative cast iron production in Bendigo

Beyond Melbourne, or Sydney, regional foundries in gold mining towns and elsewhere produced some noteworthy works. If there was a local foundry in or near a town there was likely to be locally designed, made and used decorative iron work, often enabling experts to identify the origins of a balustrade or frieze.

In Victoria Bendigo had the Bendigo Ironworks from the mid 1850s established by Joel Horwood, whose business grew to over thirty tradesmen and expanded into Inglewood, before buying the Albion Foundry in Castlemaine with his brother. Other Bendigo foundries included the Phoenix Foundry owned by William Challinder and later bought by Carter, Brown & Redpath. This foundry produced 'an enormous range of builder's ornamental ironwork'. The City Foundry and Dunn & Redpath were two other important Bendigo decorative iron businesses of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup>

The Database shows eleven pieces of cast iron in the collection have foundry provenance, but none are from Bendigo. They include:

CI 001 – Hall Stand	J. McEwan & Co, Melbourne
CI 050 – Mantelpiece	Watson, Gow & Co, Glasgow, also known as Etna Foundry
CI 068 – Ventilator, ceiling	William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry, Melbourne
CI 069 – Ventilator, ceiling	William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry, Melbourne
CI 071 – Ventilator, wall	William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry, Melbourne
CI 125 – Balustrade panel	Swinerton & Frew, Annandale Foundry, NSW
CI 505 – Frieze, one of four pieces	William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry, Melbourne
CI 269 – Fire grate	Waites Foundry Ltd, New Zealand
CI 523 – Column, open-work	Swinerton & Frew, Annandale Foundry

<sup>21</sup> Pers. Com. Professor Miles Lewis

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, in Cast iron decoration. A world survey, p.52.

<sup>23</sup> Miles Lewis, 8.07 Metals: Ornamental Cast Iron: 2014, Australian Building survey, p.4, mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html p.11

## The decline of ornamental architectural cast iron

Architecturally speaking at least, ornamental architectural cast iron became synonymous with the 'Marvellous Melbourne' of the 1880s. But when the 1890s depression brought an end to this marvellousness, Melbournians emerged from the economic disaster with little interest in the ornateness of this filigree. As the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century went by, war and depression around the world put foundries and manufacturers into bankruptcy, people's tastes changed, and 'iron lace' was no longer in vogue. As popular as it had been, there were of course differences of opinion on its decorative merits even during its height of popularity. Some architects of the day thought it 'excellent as designs for lace and crochet work but adapted for no other use that we can see'. John Barlow [1860-1925], a Sydney architect, abhorred terraces decorated 'with their hideous iron balconies and preposterous parapets ... pitiful in their vulgarity, dispirited, dyspeptic'.<sup>24</sup> By 1918 the Brisbane architect Alexander Wilson (1857-1938) declared 'friezes and brackets of cast iron have not been a success. The roof masses have always appeared too heavy from the slight appearance of support given by the posts.'<sup>25</sup>

Those that loved ornamental cast iron did so often for its extravagance, or because they 'celebrated the machine and its reproductive powers as a revelatory wonder ... as art's democratizing agent that could be no more condemned than the printing press, which did the same for literature centuries earlier.'<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the opinions of ornamental architectural cast iron, it had an intense but short life in this country, particularly in Victoria, bookended by the fortunes of the gold rush on the one hand and a severe economic decline, followed by Federation and a new outlook on the other.

## Urban change and the demolition of cast iron ornamental architecture

In the twentieth century

*as new architectural styles gained vogue, many once-fashionable inner suburbs became slums. Terrace houses were now regarded as dark, ugly, and undesirable and fell into disrepair and squalor. Often, ornamental cast iron was either left to rust or was ripped off to be replaced by "modern improvements". Numerous inner city terrace houses were condemned as substandard and demolished to make way for high-rise developments.*<sup>27</sup>

Certainly, in the 1930s the work of social reform campaigner Frederick Oswald Barnett decidedly changed the landscape of the inner suburbs of Melbourne. His research and advocacy to raise the housing standards of impoverished Melbournians led to the appointment of a Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board. This in turn led to the establishment of the Housing Commission of Victoria in 1938 and, over the next twenty to thirty years, streets of inner-city terrace homes were demolished and replaced by 21 housing estates with 45 high rise blocks from Williamstown and around the CBD to Footscray, Flemington, Fitzroy, Carlton, Richmond, South Yarra, Prahran, St Kilda, and South Melbourne. But it was not just 'slum' housing that was demolished. In Robyn Annear's history of Whelan the Wrecker she writes

*Almost daily the newspapers ran stories of their exploits – WRECKER IN FULL CRY, BRICKS FLY AT THE MINT, DOWN WITH HISTORY, BEGINNING OF THE END – with pictures of beaming Whelans amid the bones and rubble of gutted city landmarks ... What was happening, of course, was that Melbourne was being remade. It was always being remade, but from the mid-1950s the city was falling over itself in pursuit of progress. To make way for new buildings, old ones had to go. Whelan the Wrecker's job was to dispose of the bodies ... It's no stretch to say that they changed the face of Melbourne in that time ...*<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, Miles, *Australian Building Survey*, p.4, and [mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html](http://mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html) p.11

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, Miles, *Australian Building Survey*, p.4, and [mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html](http://mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html) p.10-11

<sup>26</sup> Paul Dobraszczyk, 'Rage against the machine: Victorian cast iron and its critics', [gdcinteriors.com](http://gdcinteriors.com), accessed 22 May 2022

<sup>27</sup> Robertson, *Decorative cast iron in Australia*, p.25

<sup>28</sup> Robyn Annear, *A city lost & found. Whelan The Wrecker's Melbourne*, pp.xi-xii

## The NTAV and Dr Graeme Robertson – advocate and collector

The NTAV was established in 1956 as a non-profit, community organisation and ever since has been ‘actively conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy’.<sup>29</sup>

Dr Graeme Robertson [1903-1975] was one of its founders and soon joined the Trust’s Governing Council. First and foremost, Robertson was a neurologist and physician working in all Melbourne’s major hospitals, maintaining a private practice with consulting roles to national and international institutions, and publishing dozens of scientific articles from the 1930s to the 1960s. But he was also a lover of architecture ‘and allied things of beauty’.

A keen photographer and ‘saddened’ by such rapid destruction of what he saw as Melbourne’s architectural beauty, he photographically documented as much of it as he could. Robertson published *Victorian Heritage* in 1960, the year he joined the Trust’s Council. Illustrated with many of his own images, the book sold out quickly. The public were captivated by his photographs, his advocacy for the beauty of decorative cast iron, his insistence on its importance to Victorian-era architecture particularly in Victoria but also around Australia, and his claim that Melbourne ‘has more architectural ironwork than any other city in the world’.<sup>30</sup> Robertson inspired a sense of commitment and urgency to the preservation of cast iron ornamental architecture. Miles Lewis describes Robertson as ‘almost singlehandedly responsible for the revival of its popularity’.<sup>31</sup>

Joan Robertson writes that her father gave a talk to the National Gallery Society of Victoria in 1957 and that the Chairman later remarked ‘It is curious. Overnight they have been hanging that ironwork you were talking about all over Melbourne’.<sup>32</sup>

In 2000 Rodney Davidson, then Chair of the Collections Review Project Subcommittee, remembered the involvement of Robertson as follows:

*In the late 1960s the National Trust was fighting to save Victoria’s cast iron. Many councils had a policy to remove verandahs as they were considered a danger if and when cars parking hit the support poles. During the campaign the help of Dr Graeme Robertson was sought. He became the leader of the Trust’s cast iron campaign. Education was seen as critical – he wrote and published books and organised and wrote the Trust’s Inner Suburban book series – Carlton, Parkville etc. All profits went to building the Trust’s proposed Cast Iron Museum, in collaboration with the National Gallery of Victoria (where Dr Robertson held the position of honorary curator of ironwork).<sup>33</sup>*

Robertson’s advocacy led to the establishment in 1969 of the NTAV’s Cast Iron Museum Committee with himself as chair, and in 1970 he donated his own collection of cast iron balusters, brackets, and friezes to seed what is now the CIC. The number of objects donated in 1970 is unknown but in 1973 he donated an additional 80 objects.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, nowhere in the CIC Archive is there a donation form, a date, or a list of the objects donated, and the catalogue does not identify Robertson as the donor for any objects. Consultation with Dr Robertson’s son confirms that his father’s collecting habits were more in the vein of a passionate amateur, not a professional collector, and he doubted his father would have kept or passed on to the NTAV more than the most basic of records.<sup>35</sup>

In relation to his cast iron interests Robertson is probably best described as a pragmatic but determined advocate and an avid ‘amateur’ collector. While he was indeed the ‘leader of the Trust’s cast iron campaign’ as Rodney Davidson claimed – researching, photographing, publishing, giving talks, and inspiring – he nonetheless understood the need for urban change. His caption to the Whelan the Wrecker image above (p.13) was ‘A sad

---

<sup>29</sup> ‘About us’, NTAV website, accessed 26 April 2022

<sup>30</sup> E.G. Robertson & J Robertson, *Cast iron decoration. A world survey*, p.49

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, Miles, *Australian Building Survey*, p.4, and mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html p.1

<sup>32</sup> Robertson, *Decorative cast iron in Australia*, p.vii

<sup>33</sup> Memo to Conservation Standing Committee from Chair, Collections Review Project Subcommittee, ‘Proposed deaccessions: Cast iron collection’, 21 July 2000

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Pers com. Denis Robertson

sight – yet such buildings as the Western market, and this, the Eastern market, are anachronistic in the midst of a big city. Its destruction was probably inevitable and its replacement by a modern hotel has been of benefit to the city ...’

Robertson continued to photograph decorative cast iron both in Melbourne and during his travels around Australia or overseas. He published several books on the subject and the Trust continued to add to the collection well beyond his death in 1975. An obituary in the *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*, already full of praise and admiration for Robertson’s medical and scientific achievements, concluded:

*And so grew his hobby and fame as a photographer and writer on Australian historical architecture and furniture, brought together in 10 superb books, already collector's pieces and one still to come prepared together with his daughter Joan who shared his gifts and skill as no-one else could. Most of these books together create a unique and beautiful record of ornamental cast iron which was so characteristic of Melbourne architecture in the second half of last century and had remained unrecorded and unappreciated. Apart from their own innate beauty these books, by a neurologist, have filled a blind spot in architectural literature.*<sup>36</sup>

### Developing a cast iron museum

Robertson’s keen interest in ornamental architectural cast iron made waves beyond the NTAV: he was the Honorary Curator of Ironwork at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and maintained a wide circle of friends, and acquaintances across the arts and architectural sectors. It was this ‘circle’ and the various relationships, interest and expertise that emanated from it that supported the CIC’s development and the NTAV’s many attempts to establish a museum of cast iron.

In the CIC Archive the minutes of meetings or correspondence include well-known names from the Gallery, the Trust, the University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, antique dealers, and others. In April 1975 Robertson wrote a memo to the NTAV Council about the early development of the collection:

*Dr Robertson presented his previously collected balusters, brackets, and friezes to the National Trust which then generously provided funds for the further purchase of cast iron architectural and related objects. The National Gallery also purchased some expensive items at his suggestion. The Trust’s collection of ironwork, selected by Dr Robertson, with Trust funds, has reached large proportions.*<sup>37</sup>

While there are no records of his donation, it formed the genesis of both the CIC and this ‘circle’s’ aspirations for a museum. It was thought that the State government could be expected to contribute financially. In his memo Robertson continued ‘Such a museum would be unique in the world, and it appeared fitting that Melbourne, with its great heritage of cast iron ornamentation, should initiate such a project, and bring it into being.’<sup>38</sup> Several attempts were made over the following twenty years to establish a museum of cast iron for Melbourne. However, in 1986 the CIC was still

*unduly dispersed. Whilst the bulk of items are stored in the basement of Illawarra, others too large to get down in the basement, are in sheds at the back of Illawarra, at the P.W.D. (Public Works Department) Store in Port Melbourne, and in a yard at the Polly Woodside site. Furthermore, there are gasometer frames at Ballarat, a bird aviary at Werribee Park and some gates at Kingswood Collect, Box Hill.*<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Game, John A., ‘Obituary – Edward Graeme Robertson (1903-1975)’, *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*, 1976, 29:423-424, Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, Amsterdam

<sup>37</sup> Robertson, E. Graeme, Chairman, Cast Iron Museum Committee, ‘The Cast Iron Museum Committee of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria)’, issued with Agenda for Council Meeting 7 April 1975

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Chair of the CIC to the Chair of the NTAV, 24 November 1986

The museum project aimed to 'illustrate the multifarious uses of cast iron ... use of cast iron in architectural ornamentation, especially in Melbourne ... the difference between wrought iron and cast iron ... placing Australian cast iron in an international context and providing comparisons of style, technique, function, etc'.<sup>40</sup> However, it never progressed beyond concept due to the massive costs involved, a lack of government or private support, and, in the end, a lack of interest from those beyond the 'cast iron circle' that revolved around Robertson.

When the NTAV sought Robertson's assistance to save Melbourne's cast iron verandahs it did not intend to establish a museum. But Robertson's work became so far-reaching through his publications and advocacy that it drew in support, and with that support came donations from well-meaning people. It was inevitable a collection would form, and therefore a place would have to be found to put it. A museum was 1) the only way such a significant collection could be accessible for the public; and 2) ensured it could remain together.



*Joan Robertson with members of the photographic committee of the National Trust documenting items in the Cast Iron Collection, 1980*

*Source: Denis Robertson*

---

<sup>40</sup> Memo from Chair CRPS to CSC, 'Proposed deaccessions: Cast iron collection', 21 July 2000

## Developing an ornamental architectural cast iron collection

The first donation of an unknown quantity came from Dr Robertson in 1970, consisting of ornamental architectural cast iron objects only. He then donated an additional 80 architectural objects in 1973. The rest of the collection is donations or purchases from private and public places around Melbourne, but some objects were made and acquired overseas, mainly in France.

Four objects have come from the W.R. Johnston bequest. Although they have no other provenance or documentation the 1999 Rationalisation document suggests these were acquired in 1995 at the latest. William Robert Johnston gifted his collection of fine and decorative arts and objects d'art to the people of Victoria to be displayed in his former home *Fairhall*, in East Melbourne. He was a prominent Melbourne-born antique dealer, real estate investor and collector who was born in 1911 and died in 1986<sup>41</sup> and it is highly likely that Johnston and Robertson were collecting colleagues and maybe even friends.



CI-279 Chair back  
'Decorative casting with central figure of boy carrying sheaves of wheat set in oval frame.'



CI-281 Chairs (matching pair) 'Perforated metal seat on simple open tubular frame'



CI-284 Table pedestal (no top)  
'Three leg tripod base supporting central shaft featuring pair of intertwined sea-serpents'



CI-285 Table 'Simulated cast iron. Circular top, period decoration, sitting on tripod legs'

By 1986 the NTAV had compiled a catalogue with 216 objects.<sup>42</sup>

*The accompanying catalogue together with numbered photographic records of panels and friezes stored in basement of Illawarra represents the bulk of the collection. Other items not recorded as above include miscellaneous items – tables etc acquired since catalogue was last worked on (ie hallstand and two stoves); balcony balustrades from the Y.W.C.A., Tivoli Theatre; gates & posts, fencing, post box, fireplaces at P.W.D. store; Gasometer frames at Ballarat; Dove aviary now at Werribee Park. Note: National Gallery Cast Iron items will also by agreement, form part of the collection when displayed.*<sup>43</sup>

The 2001 Catalogue that came with the CIC to Bendigo was updated and illustrated with 524 catalogued numbers and the unnumbered Letterbox, although 130 objects were missing from it.

Category (established during this assessment) <sup>44</sup>	1986 (#s of objects)	2001 (#s of objects)
Architectural	80 + unknown quantity from Dr Robertson	230 objects
Public realm		13
Domestic		135
Commercial		18
Total objects	216	396

<sup>41</sup> The Johnston Collection website, <https://johnstoncollection.org/About~11>, accessed 1 June 2022

<sup>42</sup> Memo from Administrator to Interpretations Committee, 12 June, 1986 'I seek advice ... as to how Council might move towards decision concerning the Cast Iron Collection ... The collection is catalogued.' And CIC Archive File 1

<sup>43</sup> Handwritten note from Chair, CIC, 18.6.1986 with accompanying typed catalogue

<sup>44</sup> See 'Catalogue for SA\_August 2022\_HAW' for catalogue entries under each of these categories



## Rationalisation'

Throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s the questions of whether to plan for a museum, how to go about securing one, and how best to manage the objects they had in the meantime plagued the NTAV. Most of the collection had been in the basement of Illawarra, then the Royal Exhibition Building basement and, when that was given to the Museum in 1994, in a storage site rented by the Museum at Rosamund Street, Maribyrnong.

The Museum began charging an annual storage fee of \$10,500 in January 1999 and in June 1999 the NTAV Council authorised management to 'investigate rationalising' and relocating the whole 'to a regional council, museum or other cultural institutions.' They also adopted a Collections Development Policy for all the Trust collections, which included provision '2.6 Cast iron collection: **The cast iron collection is a closed collection**, pending a review of the collection and its future'.<sup>45</sup>

The rationalisation process added a defining feature to this collection – to include objects of Australian provenance only.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, no decisions were made for at least another year.

## 'Wanted: new home for cast-off cast iron'

On October 10, 2000, *The Age* newspaper published an article titled 'Wanted: new home for cast-off cast iron'. It outlined the problems, suggested options for solving some of them, and invited responses from interested parties.<sup>47</sup> There is no formal request for expressions of interest in the CIC Archive, but correspondence indicates the NTAV were only interested in loaning the CIC to entities prepared to take on the whole collection. The Cities of Ballarat and of Greater Bendigo were shortlisted but Ballarat withdrew as 'the financial implications ... made the Council rather nervous'. The CoGB's proposal was thought to show 'more creativity and dynamism in its approach and the proposed administrative structure is strong'.<sup>48</sup>

Based on a visit to the collection and on the CIC Catalogue, the CoGB claimed 'the possible relocation of the entire collection ... provides this community, indeed the nation, with an opportunity to appreciate the collection in an architectural setting that is uniquely Victorian'.<sup>49</sup>



David Adams, 'Wanted, new home for cast-off cast iron', *The Age*, October 10, 2000, page unknown

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum to Conservation Standing Committee from Chairman, Collections Review Project Subcommittee, 21 July 2000 re 'Proposed deaccessions: Cast iron collection'.

<sup>46</sup> The 1999 Rationalisation recommendations are included in the 'Catalogue for SA\_August 2022\_HAW' spreadsheet with this report.

<sup>47</sup> David Adams, 'Wanted: new home for cast-off cast iron', *The Age*, 10 October 2000

<sup>48</sup> Internal memo outlining the considerations of different committee levels within the Trust, 12 April 2001

<sup>49</sup> 'Introduction', EOI to the National Trust of Australia for the Victorian Cast Iron Collection', February 2001

## Outward loan agreement

A 50-year loan agreement to 30 September 2051 was drawn up between NTAV and CoGB in which clause 2 'Objects for loan' outlined that:

*The Trust agrees to lend to the Borrower the collection of cast iron Objects known as the National Trust Graeme Robertson Collection of Cast Iron; the actual Objects to be included in this loan are those currently stored at the Trust's Maribyrnong store, as inspected by representatives of the Borrower and as documented in the catalogue provided to the Borrower in 2001.*

*The loan does not include the cast iron and bluestone garden structure, originally from the Melbourne Royal Botanic Garden, and currently located in the grounds of Werribee Open Range Zoo, as this item has been deaccessioned from the collection of the National Trust and will be donated outright to the City of Greater Bendigo.<sup>50</sup>*

## What came to Bendigo: a forensic analysis

A comparison of the 2001 Catalogue with the 2018 Audit and 2022 Database shows 542 objects in the shed – 396 catalogued and 146 uncatalogued – with another 130 missing. In total the audit recorded 1,334 pieces (fragments and complete objects, and multiple pieces of complete objects,)

	Category of object	Catalogued	Uncatalogued	Total
In Kennington Shed	Ornamental architecture	230	41	271
	Public realm	13	105	271
	Domestic	135		
	Commercial	18		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>542</b>
Catalogued objects NOT in Kennington Shed	Where are they according to the 2022 Database?	How many objects?	How many are ornamental architectural cast iron?	
	CoGB	30	5	
	Elsewhere	19	7	
	Missing	8	Unknown	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>12</b>	

## Objects that correlate with the Outward Loan Agreement

*The actual Objects to be included in this loan are those currently stored at the Trust's Maribyrnong store, as inspected by representatives of the Borrower and as documented in the catalogue provided to the Borrower in 2001.<sup>51</sup>*

YES	Catalogued	30	Missing during Audit but the Database indicates location is CoGB
	Catalogued	396	Objects in Kennington Shed
	<b>Total</b>	<b>426</b>	
NO	Uncatalogued objects	146	However, the 41 ornamental cast iron objects ought to be matched against the 2022 Database and the NTAV Files to be sure of their status.
	Catalogued	19	Missing during Audit but located elsewhere

<sup>50</sup> 'Outward Loan Agreement' made between the Trust and the Borrower, signed and dated 24 August 2001

<sup>51</sup> 'Outward Loan Agreement' made between the Trust and the Borrower, signed and dated 24 August 2001

		Does not include the catalogue numbers (81) missing from the Database + Audit + Catalogue, which may have been set aside for backfilling
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	

The second paragraph of the Agreement's 'objects for loan' clause relates to the cast iron conservatory, which was part of the CIC

*The loan [from NTAV to CoGB] does not include the cast iron and bluestone garden structure, originally from the Melbourne Royal Botanic Garden, and currently located in the grounds of Werribee Open Range Zoo, as this item has been deaccessioned from the collection of the National Trust and will be donated outright to the City of Greater Bendigo.<sup>52</sup>*

Recent research by Professor Miles Lewis into the glass house conservatory, otherwise known as the aviary, suggests 'it seems likely that a surviving iron conservatory of the 1850s, even as modified, is a rarity in world terms'.<sup>53</sup> The conservatory is not included in this significance assessment because it has already been donated outright to the City of Greater Bendigo. However, it is worth remembering the conservatory was acquired into the CIC in the same manner as all the other items and speaks to the quality and breadth of the objects collected by Robertson and others.

### City of Greater Bendigo becomes custodian of the CIC

On 29 August 2001 the *Bendigo Advertiser* announced 'First pieces of cast iron collection arrive in Bendigo',<sup>54</sup> and on 21 September 2001 the NTAV's Manager of Collections wrote to Melbourne Museum's Building and Property Services to return the storage key and confirm they had 'completed the removal of all remaining National Trust property' that day.<sup>55</sup>

The CIC went first to storage units at Cleaves Removals in Eaglehawk before being relocated to Council storage at Kennington Shed, 128 Reservoir Road, Strathdale, where it is stored today. The Cast Iron Conservatory, gifted outright to the CoGB, remained at Werribee Zoo until 2005 when it was taken to Bendigo and stored at the Adam Street Depot where it also remains today.<sup>56</sup>

By 2013 the CoGB had discovered just how difficult this collection was to manage and they began to explore options for dealing with it, including returning the collection. If the NTAV were to agree to taking back the collection prior to the expiry of the loan they expected the CoGB to provide a full and current inventory, to pay for all relocation and transport costs, and pay for alternative storage for the remaining life of the loan.<sup>57</sup> Little progress was made apart from a visit by NTAV to view the CIC in Kennington Shed in December 2016.

In 2018 a CoGB Heritage Assets Audit was undertaken. This is the Audit used in this Significance Assessment. The following year the CoGB assured the NTAV they wished to 'work towards a resolution' and provided them with a copy of the Audit.

In December 2020 a Heritage Collections Officer role was created for a contract period of 3 years to work towards fulfilling the 2015 CoGB Council resolution to return the CIC, while a new Executive Manager

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Pers. Com. Professor Miles Lewis, email dated 10 May 2022. 'The conservatory was built in 1858 as the Palm House in what was then known as the Botanical Garden, Melbourne. It seems overwhelmingly probable that it was from Britain, where iron conservatories developed rapidly in the decade beginning with the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was completed and was being stocked with plants in December 1858; it is shown on a map of 1865, detail below, and in photographs of 1868. When the building was re-erected in the Melbourne Zoo it was truncated by the removal of an upper band of fenestration, and the hipped roof was eliminated. Although comparative data is unavailable it seems likely that a surviving iron conservatory of the 1850s, even as modified, is a rarity in world terms.'

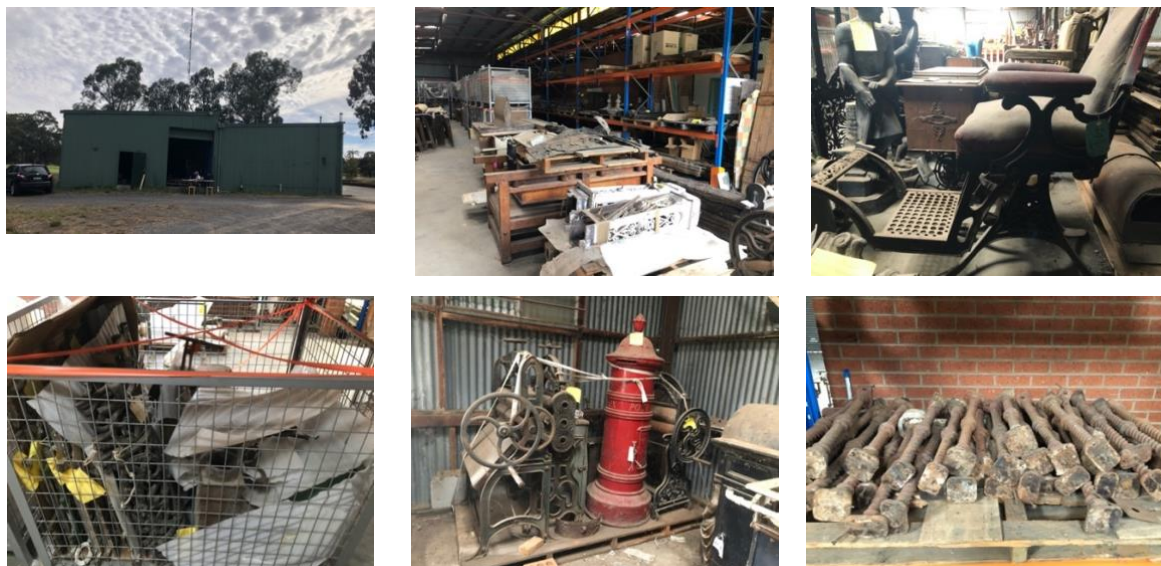
<sup>54</sup> 'First pieces of cast iron collection arrive in Bendigo', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 29 August 2001, p.6

<sup>55</sup> Correspondence, Manager of Collections to Building and Property Services, Melbourne Museum, 21 September 2001. The phrase 'all remaining National Trust property' maybe answers the question of why the 146 uncatalogued objects are in Kennington Shed.

<sup>56</sup> Extract from CoGB Council Minutes, 26 August 2015, in NTAV CIC folder 5

<sup>57</sup> Letter from NTAV to CoGB, November 16, 2015 in NTAV CIC Folder 5

Collections & Cultural Projects had been appointed at the NATV. With fresh minds new to the collection, discussions began between the two parties in 2021, leading to this Significance Assessment and greater collaboration between the CoGB and the NATV.



*Images taken during the first visit to Kennington Shed in March 2022.*

*(Above) The shed from outside; a long view of the shed showing palletted, basketed and shelved objects; CI-243 barber's chair; a basket with many ornamental architectural objects including CI-124 4 matching curved balustrades acquired pre 1978, so possibly by Dr Robertson.*



*(Left) The last two images show object CI-254 Hall Stand as it was when still at NATV, maybe in the REB Basement, and as it is today. The top and some of the side pieces of ornament have broken off.*

### Cast Iron Collection Documentation – State Library of Victoria collection

A search on the SLV catalogue for “From estate of Edward Graeme Robertson” produced 77 results. These include books, some of which are authored or co-authored by him, catalogues or pattern books from Australia and around the world, and 3,792 photographs, 305 slides and 47 transparencies. This collection is recorded as being accessioned in 2001 but Robertson’s son remembers ‘the gift was made after the death of my sister, Joan, in 1998’. He also commented that the choice to donate this collection to the SLV, rather than the NATV, was based on ‘the needs of access for research and for preservation’.<sup>58</sup>

Mark Strizic’s stamp is on many photographs but Robertson’s son is certain Strizic’s involvement was only in the processing not the photography itself, which was his father’s work.<sup>59</sup> Mutual colleagues and friends – part

<sup>58</sup> Pers.com. Denis Robertson, emails dated 10 May 2022 and 12 May 2022

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

of the Graeme Robertson 'circle' – led to Robertson working with Strizic to ensure the photographs in his books were professionally processed and published.

The SLV holdings are an important collection research archive of photographs, pattern catalogues, and publications that today might be considered a related collection – part of the 'distributed' CIC. Robertson himself intended his collection 'form an historical and study basis' and include the

*photostates (sic) of all the Australian designs registered for copyright purposes (that) have been made; the National Trust Desk Diary for 1975 prepared by the Women's Committee'; and his publications:*

- *Victorian Heritage, first published in 1960 and now reproduced in a soft cover form*
- *Sydney Lace*
- *Ornamental Cast Iron in Melbourne*
- *Early Houses of Northern Tasmania (with Edith N. Craig)*
- *Early Buildings of Southern Tasmania*
- *Adelaide Lace*
- *Carlton. No 1 of the Trust's Inner Suburban Series*
- *Parkville. No 2 with Joan Robertson to be published in April 1975*
- *East Melbourne, No 3 and South Melbourne, No 4 'are in preparation'*
- *Cast Iron Architectural Ornamentation showing the usage of decorative cast iron in many cities of the world personally photographed, over the years, with historical introductions, by E.G. Robertson and Joan Robertson, is also reaching the final stage of preparation.*<sup>60</sup>

There is an important forensic research project to be undertaken to match the images with the 2001 Catalogue and the books, and to understand their provenance and interpretation possibilities. As an example, the images below came from boxes 1 – 4 for his first book *Victorian Heritage*.

---

<sup>60</sup> Memo, Robertson to the NTAV Council, 'The Cast Iron Museum Committee of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), 7 April 1975. Full publication details of the list of books can be found in the bibliography of this report

## Thematic and interpretive framework

Thinking about this collection using a historic thematic framework enables us to understand how well it supports the history it reflects – that of cast iron to create ornamental architecture. This can support interpretation and exhibition projects as well as accessioning and deaccessioning plans.

Established frameworks include the *Australian Historic Themes Framework* (Australian Heritage Commission, 2001), and the *Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes* (Heritage Council of Victoria, 2010).

The themes below speak to the significant component of the CIC – the ornamental architectural cast iron objects.

A 'distributed OACIC column shows how the objects and research archive can work together. These themes can be considered the first step in teasing out interpretation opportunities.

Themes reflected in the OACIC	Distributed OACIC SLV + NTAV archive
<b>Australian Historic Themes Framework (Australian Heritage Commission, 2001)</b>	
Theme 3: Developing local, regional, and national economies	Catalogues
3.13 Developing an Australian manufacturing capacity	Books
3.14 Developing an Australian engineering and construction industry	
3.14 Building to suit Australian conditions	
Theme 4: Building settlements, towns, and cities	Photographs
4.1 Making suburbs, city centres and capital cities	Books
4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns, and cities	
Theme 7: Governing Victorians	Photographs and books as part of the advocacy campaign
7.6 Conserving heritage	NTAV CIC Archive
Theme 8: Developing Australia's cultural life	Books
8.10 Designing and building fine buildings	Catalogues
8.10 Advancing knowledge in cast and wrought iron technology	Photographs
8.12 / 8.13 / 8.14 Living in Australian homes / cities and suburbs / country and rural settlements	
<b>Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes (Heritage Council of Victoria, 2010)</b>	
Theme 2: Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes	Photographs
2.3 Adapting to diverse environments by building balconies to mitigate the heat	Books
Theme 5: Building Victoria's industries and workforce	Catalogues
5.2 Developing a manufacturing capacity	Books
5.4 Exhibiting Victoria's innovation and products	Photographs

Theme 6: Building towns, cities, and the garden state 6.2 Creating Melbourne 6.4 Making regional centres	Photographs Books
Theme 7: Governing Victorians 7.5 Protecting Victoria's heritage	Photographs and books as part of the advocacy campaign NTAV CIC Archive
Theme 8: Building community life 8.4 Forming community organisations 8.5 Preserving traditions and commemorating a form of decorative architecture	NTAV CIC Archive
Theme 9: Shaping cultural and creative life 9.3 Achieving distinction in the arts – the rescue and advocacy of ornamental architecture 9.5 Advancing knowledge	Books

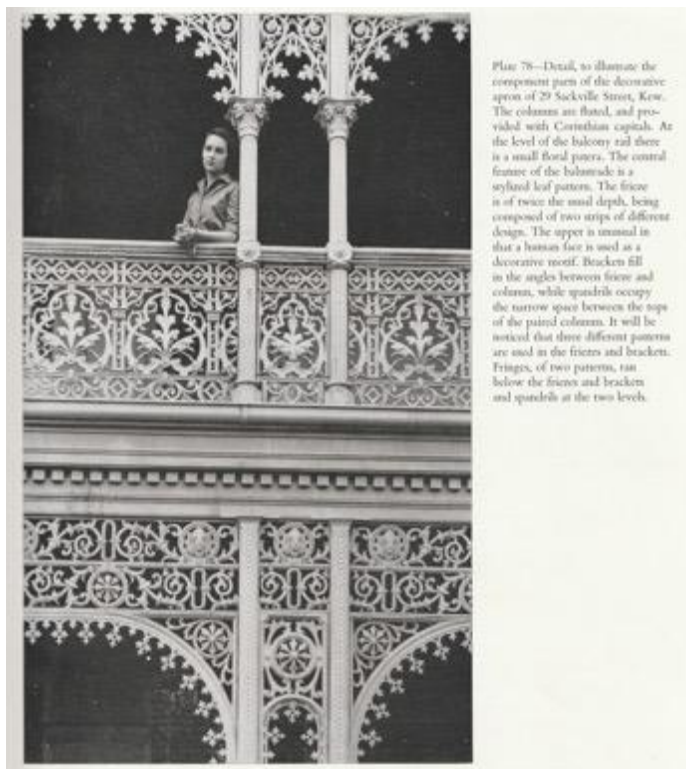


## Focus and Scope of the Cast Iron Collection

The focus of the collection is cast iron ornamental architecture. Its purpose is to 'draw attention to the unique importance of cast iron architectural ornamentation still remaining in Melbourne [in the 1950s] in the hope of fostering its preservation and retarding the spate of destruction which was occurring'.<sup>61</sup>

This quote relates to Robertson's photographic, research and advocacy work into the cast iron 'still remaining', but also to the objects, beginning with his personal donated collection rescued from 'the spate of destruction'.

The objects grew in number and quickly began to include non-architectural items. Of the 526 catalogued objects in the Audit, 230 are architectural, 166 could be described as belonging to the categories of public realm, domestic or commercial objects. The 130 objects missing from the audit and for which there is a description fall within one or other of these categories too.



*Extract from Victorian Heritage, plate 78.*

*Joan Robertson on a balcony of a building in Melbourne illustrating 'the component parts of the decorative apron of 29 Sackville Street, Kew.'*

*These include columns, balustrade with a stylized leaf pattern; a frieze consisting of two strips each with different design; brackets; spandrels between the tops of the paired columns; and fringes, again of two patterns.*

<sup>61</sup> Robertson, G, 'The Cast Iron Museum Committee of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Issued with Agenda for Council Meeting 7 April 1975








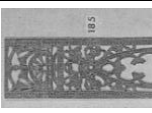

## Contents of the Collection

The 'Collection' in this section refers to all the objects with a CI-number identified in the 2001 Catalogue and the 2018 COGB Audit and included in the first tab of the 'Catalogue for SA\_August 2022\_HAW' with this Report. It includes domestic, commercial, and public realm objects as well as cast iron ornamental architectural objects.




**Ornamental architecture** – made to be attached to the exterior or interior of any building (residence, commercial, public, etc).

*Cast iron was added to verandahs of single-storey houses, providing a cheap means of decoration, while on two-story houses it blossomed forth in a decorative "apron", which was often ornate but always pleasing. This was comprised of balustrades, columns with capitals, friezes, and brackets. A fringe was often added below the frieze and bracket ... Complete ironwork "aprons", less frequent in other Australian cities, are what constitute Melbourne's architectural distinction.<sup>62</sup>*

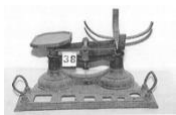







There are **230** objects, nearly half of the catalogue, that are ornamental architecture and most of these have no provenance.

CI-126		Illustrated in <i>Victorian Heritage</i> , plate 60(b) Design registered by J.Cochrane & G.C. Scott, Victoria No address but one of the objects requested for deaccession and transfer to Museum Victoria 04.03.1998
CI-127		Illustrated in <i>Victorian Heritage</i> , plate 64 #11 & <i>Cast Iron Decoration – A world survey</i> , plate 360 'A recently preserved large corner house' in Paddington, Sydney No 11 in the catalogue of William Stephen's Excelsior Foundry in Melbourne (see p.7 this report)
CI-145		Illustrated in <i>Victorian Heritage</i> , p.76 'A pattern of such delicacy as to justify the term lace-work, decorates a terrace of similar houses in Storey Street, Parkville' No 591 in A.C. Harley and Company 'Sun' Foundry of Adelaide (see p.7 this report)
CI-153		Illustrated in <i>Victorian Heritage</i> , plate 128 Corner of Robe Street and Neptune Lane, St Kilda
CI-164		No provenance information in catalogue
CI-185		No provenance information in catalogue
CI-233		One overall casting (hollow). Associated with Lowther Hall, Essendon. Donated to the Trust by Mervyn Clark in 1982 See also CI-234-236




<sup>62</sup> Robertson, *Decorative cast iron in Australia*, p.133

CI-246		Rainheads (three in number, all matching) No provenance information in the catalogue
CI-250		Lamp bracket No provenance information in the catalogue
CI-274 & CI-275		Window guard No provenance information in the catalogue




**Commercial** – made to be used in a trade or professional context. Examples include industrial-scale mangles, lawn rollers (which may be for domestic or commercial use), a dentist's and a barber's chair. While there are only **18** objects that clearly fall into this category many other objects may be for commercial use but they're not identified as such and have no provenance information.

CI-038		Scales – 'two pedestal scales mounted on a tray base with a pair of carrying handles'. Lacks tray and weights No provenance information in the catalogue
CI-044		Sign – 'The Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Co Ltd' No other provenance information in the catalogue There is also a 'Royal Insurance Company Limited' sign in the collection
CI-059		Boot sewing machine Maker – Jones & Co, England
CI-090		Patent plate – 'R. Coleman, PATENTEE' 'Bought at an antique shop in Bendigo' No other provenance information in the catalogue
CI-118		Shoe lasts (set of three) No provenance information in the catalogue
CI-212		Grate and mantelpiece, early 20 <sup>th</sup> century Removed from the Gasometer Hotel, 484 Smith Street, Collingwood
CI-217		Dentist chair No provenance information in the catalogue
CI-223		String holder No provenance information in the catalogue

**Domestic** – made to be used inside a home or residence or domestic garden, as part of day-to-day life. Examples include mangles, sewing machines, hall stands, fire grates, and small-scale garden furniture and statuary. Some of these types of items could also be public realm or commercial so only those that are clearly domestic are included here. There are approximately **135** items that clearly fit into the 'domestic' category.

Ci-254		Hall stand, made in France
CI-202		Mangle, donated in 1977 by Miss Cooper of 11 Bayview Road, Hawthorn
CI-426		Sewing machine, made by J. Grieve, Melbourne

**Public Realm** – used in public spaces and available for public use. Examples include hitching posts, water fountains, lampposts, etc. There are only **13** items that clearly fit into the ‘public realm’ category.

CI-213		Lamp, standard, made and purchased in France on behalf of Trust
CI-025		Post, probably made England or Australia but purchased at Aingers c1976
CI-89		‘English Royal coat of arms’

## Role in the Community

As much as this collection was lovingly brought together by multiple experts and with great aspirations for its capacity to excite the public's interest, it has had no role to speak of in the community. It has remained in storage in Kennington Shed since 2001, dormant and largely unknown beyond the small circle of collection and architectural heritage experts who were already acquainted with it.

It is very difficult for an object or collection that is largely unknown and remains invisible to the public to have a role in the community. Without a role in the community those responsible for the collection, whether the whole CIC or the significant OACIC, will find it very difficult to attract interest, funding, or other resources of any kind to support, maintain or interpret it.

## Comparative Analysis

Research into collections of architectural cast- or wrought- iron, or documentation and archives about them, pointed to sites in Australia, the UK, the USA and Europe, each of them quite different in focus. Project limitations have meant this analysis is desktop research only, using catalogue and website information rather than consultation and collection visits.

Full descriptions of what was found can be read in Appendix 2 but the collections included:

Australia	Victorian Collections; Museums Victoria, Melbourne; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; W.R. Johnston Collection, East Melbourne; NTAV Portable Iron Houses, South Melbourne; Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, Sydney Living Museum; Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney
Britain	Victoria & Albert Museum, London. A search for cast iron collections in Sheffield and Birmingham did not result in anything of relevance
America	Lodge Cast Iron Museum, South Pittsburgh, Tennessee; Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham Alabama; The Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design
France	Eco muse des mines de fer, Lorraine; Musee Carnavalet, Paris

## Conclusion to comparative analysis

Nowhere in the world does there appear to be a collection of ornamental cast iron architectural objects as extensive as the OACIC that forms part of the CIC.

The collections that come close in depth and breadth appear to be the Caroline Simpson Library in Sydney and the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, although both express the history of ornamental cast iron through documentation – trade catalogues in Sydney and photographs in Paris – rather than through the objects. Both indicate an interpretive and research benefit in retaining the documentation of cast iron ornamental architecture.



*Baluster, Gift of Terence Lane, in memory of Dr E. Graeme Robertson, 1976*

*National Gallery of Victoria Collection*

## Application of Significance 2.0 criteria

### Primary Criteria.

These evaluate the type(s) of significance. The collection must fulfill one of these primary criteria to be considered significant.

### Historical significance

*(A collection must demonstrate associations with people, events, historical processes, places or themes; it may reflect a particular way of life; important industries; urban, municipal and social developments; or the passions and concerns of the people associated with the collection.)*

Cast Iron Collection (CIC) - The CIC was established by Dr Robertson, his own purchases and subsequent donations formed the genesis of the collection and inspired the Trust to continue collecting so that today the CIC includes 526 catalogued objects. The CIC would not exist without Dr Robertson and its association with the man is clear and strong – in one sense this collection is as much about the man, his passion, and his circle of influence as it is about the objects he championed.

The genesis of the CIC was a collection of ornamental architectural cast iron objects. This remained its focus although the CIC includes many examples of domestic, commercial, and public realm objects manufactured from cast iron.

Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) – The work undertaken by Dr Graeme Robertson to educate the public about ornamental architectural cast iron and to advocate for its recognition and preservation was enormous. It led to him becoming internationally recognised and highly respected in architectural circles around the world. He wrote popular books on the subject – his first, *Victorian Heritage*, went to reprint the year it was published – and highlighted the history and significance of the ornamental era in Melbourne. Outside his professional role, the circle of friends and acquaintances he gathered and influenced were instrumental in sourcing objects, advising on photography, undertaking conservation and preservation activities, and pursuing the goal of establishing a cast iron museum of Melbourne. The OACIC has historical significance for its association with Dr Robertson.

The OACIC has a strong association with a unique architectural period in the history of Melbourne, around Australia, and elsewhere in the world. That is, a period in which a surge in the population in Melbourne coincided with technological development in the manufacturing of decorative iron so that it could be cast rather than wrought, making it considerably cheaper to manufacture and so decidedly more available. The building boom of the 1870s and 1880s enabled speculative developers to build rows of houses in the closely packed inner suburbs and in rapidly growing regional towns such as Ballarat and Bendigo. Architecturally speaking this ornamental era was closely linked with the 'Marvellous Melbourne' era when ornamental architectural cast iron featured so prominently that in his 1977 publication *Cast iron decoration. A world survey*, Robertson claimed that 'Melbourne has more architectural ironwork than any other city in the world.'<sup>63</sup> The OACIC has historical significance for its association with this 19<sup>th</sup> century love affair with ornamental architecture in cities around the world, and particularly with this important period in Melbourne's history as it became a mature, settled and well established city in the decades following the first gold rush.

### Aesthetic significance

*(Where a collection can demonstrate craftsmanship, a particular style, design or technical excellence, innovation, beauty or quality of execution.)*

---

<sup>63</sup> E.G. Robertson & J Robertson, *Cast iron decoration. A world survey*, p.49

Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) – Victoria had many more foundries and registered many more designs for ornamental architectural cast iron than any other state in Australia during the last four decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although provenance to date suggests none of the objects were made in a Bendigo foundry, there are pieces in this collection that were cast in leading foundries in Melbourne – the William Stephen’s Excelsior Foundry – and the ‘Sun’ Foundry of A.C. Harley & Co at Adelaide, that excelled at their work taking out many patents and registered designs.

While ornamental cast iron went out of popularity in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and never returned, it is today considered a hallmark of streetscapes across inner Melbourne and some regional areas. This is explained by Robertson in *Victorian Heritage*

*The craftsman’s ability to make a delicate pattern from iron contributes to the wonder of his work ... a frieze of cast iron has no function, yet it adds greatly to the charm of the house. Cast iron decoration lies somewhere between the craftsman’s individual work and the ornamentation of the machine age. Like the products of the machine age, cheap, repetitive production was easy, yet the initial mould for casting was the work of a craftsman who expressed in his patterns the tastes and interests of his day.*<sup>64</sup>

Its charm was likewise apparent to contemporary Victorians living in a 19<sup>th</sup> century rapidly industrializing world because it blended modern mechanization with heritage craft and made it possible for everyone to enjoy ornamental cast iron on their houses. Those that loved ornamental cast iron did so often for its extravagance, or because they ‘celebrated the machine and its reproductive powers as a revelatory wonder ... as art’s democratizing agent that could be no more condemned than the printing press, which did the same for literature centuries earlier.’<sup>65</sup>

### **Scientific or Research significance**

*(There must be a well-documented context and collecting history with firm provenance, such that it allows researchers to verify or reinvestigate data or develop new research questions.)*

Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) – While most of the objects have very limited or no provenance at all, the development of the collection is now well understood. There is tremendous capacity for design, architectural, and social history research and interpretation in this collection if it could be related to the SLV image collection and the books that Robertson published. This would make it possible to develop at least a partial map of Robertson’s travels around inner Melbourne with his camera and would not only improve the level of provenance but also offer scope for studying the collection as a design archive. Ensuring a close link between the objects and the ‘dispersed’ collection at the State Library would go a long way to giving it research significance it otherwise could never have.

### **Social or Spiritual significance**

*(Applicable if the collection is held in community esteem or can demonstrate community affection, structures, beliefs or cohesion. It is a contemporary value so there is no social or spiritual significance if its community bond is not evident or active in the present. In this case collections may still have historical significance.)*

There is no social or spiritual significance in this collection.

### **Comparative Criteria.**

These modify the primary criteria to evaluate the degree of significance. Fulfilling any or all comparative criteria, but not any primary criteria, does not make it significant.

---

<sup>64</sup> E. G. Robertson, *Victorian Heritage*, p.149

<sup>65</sup> Paul Dobraszcyk, ‘Rage against the machine: Victorian cast iron and its critics’, [gdcinteriors.com](http://gdcinteriors.com), accessed 22 May 2022

## Provenance

*(This refers to a documented chain of ownership, recorded use and origin.)*

Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) – There is little known provenance held by this collection today, however, research within the NTAV CIC Archive and the State Library of Victoria's 'Estate of Graeme Robertson' collection – connecting objects with records – may enhance understanding of their provenance.

## Rarity and Representativeness

*(This relates to the quality of the collection in relation to similar collections and asks if it is a poor, typical or good collection. A collection may be rare if it is unusual or a particularly fine example, or extremely well documented, or has other distinguishing qualities.)*

Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) – Based on the comparative research conducted for this Assessment the OACIC is unique at a national level. With more research it is quite possible this collection would also have historical and aesthetic significance at an international level.

## Condition, Intactness, and Integrity

*(If a collection is unusually broad, or includes original, or complete set of primary documents, and is well cared for, this could enhance its significance.)*

**Observations** The NTAV CIC Archive shows that over the lifetime of the CIC there have been documented incidents of damage, much concern over storage conditions, a damning conservation study, and an ongoing acknowledgement of the need for emergency conservation work on some items.

Some condition reporting was done as part of the 1999 Rationalisation plan. Since then, the condition of the collection has continued to worsen. Some objects show clear signs of water and other damage when records show this damage did not exist in 2001.

During this assessment inspection of 110 CIC objects suggested their condition varied considerably.

**Risks** The shed is not 100% sealed from the weather and the roofing has holes in it, which has probably caused corrosion of objects lying directly under the roof holes. The shed is not totally secure because the key is used by several people working across Council departments. It would be difficult to know if anything has been removed, but unlikely given the cumbersome nature of the objects.

The paper tags attached to each CIC object have the CIC-# and are held on by elastic bands, which over time have been disintegrating resulting in a loss of information through disassociation from the object.

The positioning, size and weight of many pieces make it difficult to confirm their intactness, and while stored in this manner their condition and intactness will continue to deteriorate.

## Interpretive Capacity

*(This refers to the collection's ability to demonstrate historical themes, processes, people or events. It will not have interpretive potential if it has no relationship with its context, or capacity to illuminate aspects of the relevant history. Interpretive potential differs from historical significance as it relates to the value the collection has to the curator or manager to create interpretive or informative displays.)*

The interpretive capacity of this collection is enhanced if provenance could be gathered for the objects, and if they could be connected to the SLV photograph collection and the books. The thematic and interpretive framework on pp. 24-25 provides a guide to the range of stories that could be told by using well researched objects or groups of objects in this collection.

## Statement of Significance

### What is significant?

The Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection (OACIC) consisting of 260 catalogued items.

### How is it significant?

The Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection is historically and aesthetically significant at a national level.

### Why is it significant?

The collection is significant for its associations with Victorian-era architecture in Melbourne and other parts of Australia; with the post-1850s gold rush period in Victoria and particularly the 1880s period described as 'Marvellous Melbourne'; and with Dr Graeme Robertson, acknowledged in his day as the leading world expert of cast iron ornamental architecture.

This collection speaks to the post-1850s gold rush years when the skill and artistry of cast iron work, as opposed to that of wrought iron work, became an integral and pervasive part of the design and construction of so many buildings – it was evident everywhere in off-the-plan relatively cheap homes to privately commissioned grand homes, and in public parks, streetscapes, and institutional and grand public buildings. It is a time capsule of a trade, a craft, and a style of architecture that lasted approximately fifty years in Victoria, coming to an almost abrupt end at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Begun and driven by effectively one man the collection is a homage to this period of Victoria's and Australia's history. The collection that Robertson founded and posthumously inspired is a testament to his dedicated, passionate research, which also led him to be 'the face' of the cast iron verandah campaign waged by the NTAV in the late 1950s. He was Melbourne's greatest advocate and promoter of ornamental architectural cast iron and his research into the topic produced nearly a dozen books, thousands of photographs, and the beginnings of a detailed and intricate knowledge of cast iron production in Australia. It is a depth and breadth of knowledge that did not exist beforehand and has since been built upon by several architectural historians in Australia and overseas. These understandings of ornamental architectural cast iron are expressed in a tangible format in the collection.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ornamental architectural cast iron was both loved and hated in Australia and elsewhere for its aesthetic qualities, which at extreme ends of the love-hate spectrum represented either the dominance of the machine over art or the wonder of true craftsmanship able to be reproduced for all to enjoy. In Melbourne's post-WW2 years considerable urban regeneration and demolition of buildings led Robertson to sit firmly on the 'love' end of the spectrum. He advocated for the preservation of architectural cast iron structures in Melbourne and the development of the collection, for which the aesthetic significance is best described by Robertson himself:

*the craftsman's ability to make a delicate pattern from iron contributes to the wonder of his work ... a frieze of cast iron has no function, yet it adds greatly to the charm of the house. Cast iron decoration lies somewhere between the craftsman's individual work and the ornamentation of the machine age. Like the products of the machine age, cheap, repetitive production was easy, yet the initial mould was the work of a craftsman who expressed in his patterns the tastes and interests of his day.*<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> E. G. Robertson, Victorian Heritage, p.149



## Recommendations

**GOAL: To convert the ornamental architectural cast iron collection from a liability to an asset.**

The brief requested **two key Recommendations**:

- A. 'regarding future use and interpretation potential'
- B. 'for management and preservation activities'

**Four Actions** underpin the goal and the key recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the original purpose of the collection and physically separate the OACIC objects from other objects
2. Develop an OACIC collection management plan that also addresses the balance of the CIC
3. Connect the physical OACIC with the intellectual legacy of Dr Robertson's research
4. Enable and encourage public engagement to attract projects, partnerships, and sponsorships

**Program at a glance:** Three stages with nine tasks:

Stages	Tasks
S.1 Collection Management Part 1	1.1 Physically separate the OACIC from the CIC and non-cast iron objects & locate in safe storage with an enabling workspace 1.2 Write Collection Policies for both & return non-OACIC objects to NTAV
S.2 Transform a liability into an asset	2.1 Conservation & Preservation Needs Assessment & Treatment Plan 2.2 Forensic provenance research and update catalogue 2.3 Professional stills photography of all OACIC objects
S.3 Collection Management Part 2	3.1 Develop OACIC website 3.2 Deaccessioning 3.3 Feasibility & Interpretation Action Plan (after website is live) 3.4 Conservation work (from 2.1 recommendations)

**Timing for:** Recommendations A + B above, and the four **A**ctions 1 – 4 above (final 2 columns)

S	Tasks		Timing Some fulltime, others parttime		R	A
S.1	1.1	Separate the OACIC from the CIC	6 months	Simultaneously (over 6 months)	B	1
	1.2	Write Collection Policies for both	2 months			2
Review progress & plan next Stage				1 month		
S.2	2.1	Conservation & PNA & Treatment Plan	6 months	Simultaneously (over 6 months)	A & B	2
	2.2	Research & update catalogue	6 months			3
	2.3	Professional photography	6 months			3
Review progress & plan next stage				1 month		
S.3	3.1	Develop OACIC website	4 months	Simultaneously (over 24 months)	A & B	4
	3.2	Deaccessioning	12 months			2
	3.3	Feasibility & Interpretation Action Plan	6 months			4
	3.4	Conservation work	24 months			2
Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection transformed from a liability into a community asset				38 months (3 years 2 months)		

## Recommendations in detail

Please note that none of these stages and tasks can take place while Kennington Shed remains dirty, leaks, and is not secure enough. Either the shed needs structural work to prevent leaks, rodents, etc and is fitted out for storage and working in (see Tools under task 1.1 and 1.2), or another shed needs to be found and fitted out for storage and working in and the collection moved to there.

### Stage One: Collection Management Part 1

<b>Task 1.1</b>	<p><b>Physically separate the OACIC from the CIC and non-cast iron objects &amp; locate in safe storage with an enabling workspace</b></p> <p>Using the 'Catalogue for SA_August 2022_HAW' spreadsheet and the illustrated 'Cast Iron Collection National Trust of Victoria' Catalogue, identify the OACIC objects and set them aside in a designated OACIC-exclusive zone.</p> <p>Review catalogue numbering to ensure the numbering system is apt to the collection: where an object is made up of many pieces, a core number plus sub numbers should be used to indicate the relationships</p> <p>Apply and record any numbering changes</p> <p>Wipe each item clean and store safely (ie tissue paper or archival box or on shelf)</p>
<b>Task 1.2</b>	<p><b>Return to the NTAV within a 12-month period objects identified as being outside the OCIAC collection</b></p> <p><b>Rename</b> the OACIC in a manner that clearly identifies its focus but, as and when required, enables acknowledgement of the OACIC's founder and custodians. For example:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Graeme Robertson</i>  <b>Ornamental Architectural Cast Iron Collection</b>  <i>A project of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and the City of Greater Bendigo</i></p> <p>Write an <b>OACIC Collection Policy</b> noting it is a 'closed' collection</p> <p>Write a <b>CIC Collection Policy</b> noting it is a 'closed' collection</p>
<b>Tools:</b>	<p>A safe and secure workspace with industrial strength steel shelving, standing and hanging spaces, and work benches</p> <p>Forklift and driver</p> <p>Project Officer / Collection Manager</p>
<b>Timing:</b>	<p>Six months</p>
<b>Outcome</b>	<p><b>Clearly identifiable OACIC and CIC</b></p> <p><b>CIC returned to NTAV</b></p> <p><b>OACIC in appropriate storage and workspace in Bendigo able to be inspected and handled as needed by conservators, photographers, historians, collection managers, architects and other potentially interested parties</b></p> <p><b>Collection Policies for both collections</b></p> <p><b>An updated catalogue numbering system for the CIOAC that reflects the intricacies of the collection objects and preserves their integrity</b></p>

## Stage Two: Transforming the OCIAC collection from a liability to an asset

<b>Task 2.1:</b>	<b>Conservation &amp; preservation needs assessment and treatment plan</b>
	Assess the condition of the OACIC and determine its ongoing needs
	Commission a specialist metals conservator to provide a Conservation and Preservation Assessment with a treatment plan. This will include recommendations and costings for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>preventive conservation and storage for the CIC</li> <li>treatments for stabilization and restorative conservation of OACIC objects</li> </ul>
	Tools: Specialist metals conservator / team of conservators
Timing:	Within 7 months from completion of Stage 1
<b>Task 2.2:</b>	<b>Forensic provenance research and update catalogue</b>
	Commission an experienced researcher to reconstruct provenance for as many OACIC objects as possible
	Update Catalogue
	Tools: Project Officer Historian / Researcher
Timing:	Within 7 months from completion of Stage 1
<b>Task 2.3</b>	<b>Professional stills photography of all OACIC objects</b>
	Every object in its entirety and every piece, from multiple angles
	Ensure all makers' marks and other possible identifications are clearly readable
	Tools: Project Officer Photographer Forklift and driver
Timing:	Within 7 months from completion of Stage 1
<b>Outcome:</b>	<p><b>A clear understanding of best-practice storage and preservation of the OACIC with cost implications and action plan</b></p> <p><b>Advice on preventive conservation and storage for CIC already returned to NTAV</b></p> <p><b>Enhanced provenance and research significance ready for public engagement and attraction of projects, partnerships, and sponsorships</b></p> <p><b>Collection of professional photographs of every object and piece in the OACIC ready for website and attraction of projects, partnerships, and sponsorships</b></p>

### Stage Three: Collection management Part 2

<b>Task 3.1:</b>	<p><b>Develop an OACIC website</b></p> <p>The website is the first public activity that will entice a broad community to engage with the collection in several ways and invite financial support and partnerships. To this end it ought to be a visual and story-telling feast and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional photography of objects (achieved in Task 2.3)</li> <li>• updated history of collection suitable for public appreciation and for professional understanding of its significance</li> <li>• a series of posts / short stories / vignettes based on the historical research to highlight the most aesthetic, historically interesting, or curious objects</li> <li>• a User's Forum page for people to post about their work with the objects or with ornamental architectural cast iron in general, including the work undertaken throughout this program to enhance and make it accessible and research friendly</li> <li>• an Expression of Interest page to 1) invite project proposals from architects, restorers, artists, animators, digital artists, designers, historians, park and garden managers, and others in Australia and overseas, and 2) invite sponsorship and partnership opportunities.</li> </ul>
	<p>Tools:</p> <p>Project Officer Website team of in-house, consultants, or a mix that at the least includes a historian, collection expert, interpretation expert, web designer</p>
	<p>Timing:</p> <p>Within 5 months of the research and photography in Stage 2 being completed</p>
<b>Task 3.2:</b>	<p><b>Deaccessioning</b></p> <p>Using the Resource Documents and the Collection Policy written in Stage 1, develop <b>and</b> undertake a deaccession plan for each of the OACIC and the CIC</p>
Tools:	Project Officer
Timing:	Within 13 months of both Tasks 2.1 and 2.2 being completed
<b>Task 3.3:</b>	<p><b>Undertake a Feasibility Study &amp; Interpretation Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the website as far as possible and monitor engagement and interest</li> <li>• Commission a cultural heritage interpretation consultant to consider the needs and plans of both custodians insofar as the OACIC is concerned, as well as the potential interests in and uses for it that a broader community of architects, restorers, artists, animators, digital artists, designers, historians, park and garden managers, and others might have. This community might be an international one</li> </ul> <p>The brief for this piece of work ought to request key and staged recommendations, and where possible potential costings.</p> <p>Undertake to commit to those key recommendations able to be achieved sooner rather than later</p>
	<p>Tools:</p> <p>Project Officer External heritage interpretation consultant and maybe others The website will be a primary resource for this task enabling the consultant to gauge interested parties and potential use of objects, and to workshop interpretation opportunities. Once completed a Feasibility Study &amp; Interpretation Plan will enable the website to offer a range of focused projects and target the more likely sponsors and partners</p>
	<p>Timing:</p> <p>Within 7 months of the website going live</p>

<b>Task 3.4:</b>	<p><b>Undertake the recommendations made in the Conservation and Preservation Assessment (Task 2.1)</b></p> <p>Begin undertaking preventative conservation for the CIC</p> <p>Begin undertaking preventative conservation, stabilization treatments, and restorative conservation for the OACIC</p> <p>Review and update the 2022 Significance Assessment considering the integrity and condition and the new provenance of the collection and whether it now calls for an adjusted level of significance to be applied</p>
<b>Tools:</b>	<p>Project Officer</p> <p>Specialist metals conservator / team of conservators</p> <p>Historian / Collections expert for updated Significance Assessment</p>
<b>Timing:</b>	Within 24 months of Conservation and Preservation Assessment
<b>Outcome:</b>	<p><b>A fully documented OACIC collection able to be shared and promoted world wide to inspire and attract projects, partnerships and sponsorships</b></p> <p><b>Confidence in the integrity of the OACIC collection and that it has reached best practice in terms of conservation and management</b></p>

## References

### Methodological guides

Russell, Roslyn and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0. A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections*. Canberra: Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2009.

State of Victoria and Heritage Council of Victoria, *Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes*. Melbourne: Heritage Council of Victoria, 2010.

Australian Heritage Commission, *Australian Historic Themes. A framework for use in heritage assessment and management*. Canberra, 2001

### Published material

Apperly et al, *A pictorial guide to identifying Australian architecture*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson Publishers, 2011

Greater Bendigo Heritage Collection Policy, 20/03/2019

Lewis, Miles 8.07 Metals: Ornamental Cast Iron: 2014, from Australian Building Survey, p.4, and available on [mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html](http://mileslewis.net/research-database/index.html) p.9

Robertson, E. Graeme, *Victorian Heritage: ornamental cast iron in architecture*, Melbourne, Gergian House, 1960

Robertson, E. Graeme, *Ornamental Cast Iron In Melbourne*, Melbourne, Gerogian House, 1967

Robertson, E. Graeme, compiled by Joan Robertson, *Decorative Cast Iron in Australia*, Ringwood, Viking O'Neil, 1990

Robertson, E. Graeme and Joan Robertson, *Cast Iron Decoration: a world survey*, London, Thames & Hudson 1977

### Unpublished material

National Trust Victoria Cast Iron Collection Archive Files 1 – 5

NTAV Cast Iron Collection Full Database report 8 March 2022

Cast Iron Collection, National Trust of Victoria Catalogue

City of Greater Bendigo 'CIC\_Bendigo Timeline post 2013'

History At Work, Significance Assessment Q&A

### Internet websites

Australian Dictionary of Biography

Heritage Council of Victoria

Wikipedia

TROVE

### Personal communications

Professor Miles Lewis

Denis Robertson

## Appendix 1:

### Summary Timeline of the Genesis and Development of the CIC Collection

Date	Event
1950s	Robertson is concerned by the destruction of so much of Melbourne's 19 <sup>th</sup> century cast iron ornamental architecture and begins photographing and collecting examples NTAV begin a campaign to save Melbourne's ornamental cast iron after concerns were raised of the destruction of verandahs
1956	NTAV established with Robertson as a founding member
1960	January – publication of Robertson's first book <i>Victorian Heritage</i> Robertson joins the NTAV Council
1964	Lecture by Robertson to inaugurate the Central Victorian Branch of the NTAV. A news article on the talk said he 'is considered a world authority on cast and wrought iron'
1967	Robertson's appreciation of <i>the Polly Woodside</i> and its wrought iron hull led to the Trust acquiring it in 1967 for a mere one cent for restoration and preservation
1969	Robertson chairs new Cast Iron Museum Committee (or CIC Committee)
1975	Collecting continues but storage and conservation is a major problem. Objects stored at Illawarra, Ripponlea, State Public Works Department, Werribee Zoo. Objects are being donated, and purchased by the Trust, many from overseas, usually France. National Trust Desk Diary published using Robertson's photographs December – Robertson resigns from the NTAV due to sickness
1980s	Collection continues to grow
1998	Museum Victoria need the CIC removed from the Royal Exhibition Buildings basement April – internal memo describes many conservation and storage challenges May – a rationalisation plan is begun in anticipation of having to start paying rent to Museum Victoria on 1 January 1999 for their storage in Maribyrnong, NTAV committees agree that Robertson's 'contribution and pioneering work must be made and given full acknowledgment' whatever decisions are made about the collection
2000	June – the CIC is declared a 'closed' collection by NTAV Council October 10 - 'Wanted: new home for cast-off cast iron' article in the <i>The Age</i>
2001	CIC moves to Bendigo on a 50-year loan Cast Iron Conservatory moves to Bendigo as an outright donation or gift
2015	CoGB Council resolve to return the CIC to the NTAV
2018	Audit undertaken of the CIC
2020	Heritage Collections Officer role created to work towards fulfilling the CoGB Council resolution to return the CIC
2022	Significance Assessment undertaken of the CIC

## Appendix 2: Comparative Analysis

### Australia

Victorian Collections – online access to collections dispersed across Victoria

The search term ‘cast iron’ pointed to 814 items, mostly domestic such as kettles, meat mincer, grates etc, and commercial objects such as shoe lasts, a sheep shears grinder, embossing presses, wheels, and weights etc. There are also 18 photographs of cast iron in the Ballarat Heritage Series, and one at the Ballarat Mechanics Institute Collection.<sup>67</sup>

The search term ‘cast iron verandah’ pointed to 116 items, mostly photographs from scrapbooks and the like from different collections.

There is a photograph at the Federation University Australia Historical Collection of a cast iron spiral staircase in St Peter’s Anglican Church, Ballarat. The photograph was taken in 1967 by Geoff Biddington but there is no information about the staircase except that it leads to the choir loft. The same staircase was photographed by Clare Gervasoni in 2015, but with no further information.

Museums Victoria, Melbourne

The search term ‘cast iron + object’ pointed to 1607 entries categorised as History & Technology, mostly across the collection areas of ‘working life & trades’, ‘home & community’, ‘public life & institutions’.

A number of the pieces from the Whelan the Wrecker collection, donated in 1992 by Myles Whelan, come closest to the architectural content of the CIC, and they are classified variously as ‘building & construction’, ‘architectural fittings’; there is a single entry for ‘ornamental ironwork’. The only piece of ornamental cast iron from a building is from the Federal Coffee Palace.<sup>68</sup>

The search term ‘cast iron + public life & institutions’ pointed to 435 entries including electric lamp fittings, a bolt and a broken section of finial from the Royal Exhibition Buildings<sup>69</sup>, a hand-operated mangle c.1880 and a treadle Singer sewing machine from mental health hospitals in Victoria.<sup>70</sup>

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The search term ‘cast + iron’ pointed to 838 objects with ‘cast iron’ in their catalogue description. Most of these are decorative and fine arts objects from around the world. But examples that would fall under the four categories of decorative architecture, public realm, commercial and domestic include a hall chair, a side table, betal nut cutters, a doorstop, a table lamp, a statue of Balzac, a chess set, maquettes for the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral in London, and a frieze manufactured in Sydney c.1884. There is one entry that has strong bearing on the content of the CIC. Item 20723, a baluster manufactured c.1887 by J.Cochrane & G. Scott, Melbourne, was donated by Terence Lane in honour of Graeme Robertson in 1976.<sup>71</sup>

W R Johnston Collection, East Melbourne

Prominent 20th century antiques dealer, collector, and property investor William Robert Johnston assembled a collection of more than 1,500 objects of English Georgian, Regency, and Louis XV period furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objets d’art*. Now regarded as one of the best collections of its kind in Australasia, since late 1990 much of it can be seen at Fairhall Exhibition-House in East Melbourne.

---

<sup>67</sup> <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/61b983a84600248bfda124f6>

<sup>68</sup> <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/269497>, accessed 13 April 2022

<sup>69</sup> <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/712693>, accessed 13 April 2022

<sup>70</sup> <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/256746>, accessed 13 April 2022

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/20723/> accessed 20 April 2022



Some 100 pieces are described as either 'cast' or 'wrought' iron: eg garden bench, garden table fire grate, garden seat, fire back, pub tables, carriage gates, urn, fire basket, sugar cutter, hitching post column, door stop, as well as books on the subject.

<https://johnstoncollection.org/>

National Trust of Australia (VIC), Portable Iron Houses, South Melbourne

Three houses in Coventry Street South Melbourne are among the last nineteenth-century prefabricated iron buildings in the world. They date from the 1850s, when they provided an efficient housing solution to the many migrants who had been living in tents on the goldfields but were moving to towns.

Buildings such as these sold in a 'kit'; they were ordered from a catalogue, and sent to Australia from Britain with instructions for reassembly.

By the mid 1850s there were close to 100 such portable buildings in South Melbourne. Patterson House is on its original site. Abercrombie House and Bellhouse were moved from North Melbourne and Fitzroy to Coventry Street to the current sites from North Melbourne and Fitzroy. The houses are furnished according to the era, and Interpretation is provided by The Trust in the form of guided visits.

The Portable Iron Houses have been included as an example of the National Trust Australia (Victoria)'s commitment to architectural heritage.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/portable-iron-houses/>

Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection, Sydney Living Museums (SLM)

The collection focuses on the history of house and garden design and exists primarily to support the work of the SLMs to interpret and manage places of cultural significance in NSW. It includes a range of formats - architectural pattern books, architectural fragments, wall and floor coverings, manufacturers' trade catalogues and sample books, garden ornaments, internal fittings, soft furnishings and trimmings, personal papers and manuscripts, pictures, photographs, books, periodicals and oral histories.

<https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/research-collections/library>

In some 2016 correspondence from the Caroline Simpson Library after the NTAV/CoGB wrote to 'gauge the interest of the Caroline Simpson Library in the collection', the Library explained they 'have a small collection of architectural remnant material and fittings and furnishings for the home, but most of it is not cast iron. We are, however, interested in cast and wrought iron material and have in our collection many 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century trade catalogues from cast iron manufacturers.'<sup>72</sup>

Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney

The search term 'cast iron' yielded 899 objects, mostly domestic and commercial, including a garden chair, fire surround, fireplace, verandah columns, portable sewing machine, and 122 'architectural panels' mostly stamped metal ceiling panels and cornices.<sup>73</sup>

United Kingdom<sup>74</sup>

Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A)

This is the 'home of the national collection of architecture'. Desktop research suggests that the 'architecture' exhibition occupies barely more than one room although there are some 557 'cast iron' entries across the collection including architectural panels, stove plate, fireback, balcony railing and balcony panel, armchair, a

---

<sup>72</sup> Email from Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection to CoGB/NTV, 11 February 2016, NTV CIC archive

<sup>73</sup> <https://collection.maas.museum/search?q=cast%20iron> accessed 13 April 2022

<sup>74</sup> Ironbridge Gorge was suggested but it is a world heritage site, of 10 museums, experiential, and exhibition focussed rather than a museum collection. It isn't possible to search the collection online.

section of a fender, and sculptures, as well as photographs of elements such as door knockers, many of them taken by the documentary photographer Eugene Atget in Paris.<sup>75</sup> The museum's 'ironwork' collection includes over 45,000 items of decorative metalwork, silver and jewellery.

[https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=%22cast%20iron%22&page=1&page\\_size=15](https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=%22cast%20iron%22&page=1&page_size=15)

A search for cast iron collections in Sheffield and Birmingham did not result in anything of importance.

### United States of America

Lodge Cast Iron Museum, South Pittsburgh, Tennessee

This is private museum being developed by Lodge Cast Iron, manufacturers of cast iron cookware since 1896.<sup>76</sup> It is expected to open in summer 2022 and 'will offer visitors from across America a destination to immerse themselves in the history and behind-the-scenes making of some of the most beloved cast iron products, cast iron cooking and the robust culture that surrounds it.' It plans to offer three exhibitions: 'How it's made' will be a recreation of the foundry experience; 'Lodge History & Legacy' will highlight the history of the organisation; and 'Cast Iron Culture' will 'spotlight the diverse uses of cast iron from the campfire to the kitchen'. The company has developed a relationship with the Southern Foodways Alliance and will include a special focus on Southern food and cooks.

<https://www.lodgecastiron.com/story/lodge-building-all-new-museum-destination-open-2022>

Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham Alabama

Desktop research indicates this museum has an important 19<sup>th</sup> century European decorative cast iron collection that includes cast iron plaques, and stove grates from foundries in Germany, Austria and Bohemia. It is one of the largest in the world and the only one of its kind in the USA.

<https://www.artsbma.org/guide/stop/624/>

The Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture of Architecture and Design

This is a private museum of architecture and design dedicated to all areas of the discipline of design: architecture, industrial and product design, graphics, landscape architecture, and urban planning. The Museum's mission is the advancement of public education about the value of Good Design - from the 'spoon to the city' - and how design can positively impact the human environment. There is no mention of collection or permanent exhibitions.

### France

Eco musée des mines de fer, Lorraine

This is an experiential museum where you can visit an underground iron mine, and see three exhibitions about mining in Lorraine.

<https://www.musee-minesdefer-lorraine.com/english>

Musée Carnavalet, Paris

Currently being redeveloped, this is the museum of the history of Paris. An online collection search using 'fer forgé' - 'cast iron' – pointed to 307 entries across 'Paris Musées', then triaged to provide entries for those at Carnavalet: 19<sup>th</sup> century staircase, window balcony, lithographs, drawings and photographs of or featuring such elements and extending to shop fronts, door grilles, building entrances and gates.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O298428/section-of-a-fender-sketch-model-stevens-alfred-george/>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.lodgecastiron.com/story/lodge-building-all-new-museum-destination-open-2022> accessed 20 April 2022

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.carnavalet.paris.fr/collections/explorer-les-collections> accessed 20 April 2022

<https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/recherche?keywords=fer%20forge&page=1>

### Other resources

The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH)

This is the world organisation for industrial heritage, promoting cooperation in preserving, conserving, investigating, documenting, researching, interpreting, and educating about industrial heritage. Members may be specialists from a range of heritage and history disciplines with an interest in 'the material remains of industry'.

TICCIH is recognised by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

British Cast Iron Research Association

The BCIRA was formed in 1923 but merged with the British Steel Casting Research Association to become Castings Technology International Ltd in 1996. Today it can be found in the Open Library site providing a specialist reference list for technical research publications, so it is more of a technical research library than it is a collection of cast iron.

[https://openlibrary.org/authors/OL1993626A/British Cast Iron Research Association](https://openlibrary.org/authors/OL1993626A/British_Cast_Iron_Research_Association).