

# BALLARAT PROCESSIONAL DRAGON



Head Ballarat Processional Dragon - Australian Centre for Goldrush Collections



Head front view Ballarat Processional Dragon  
Australian Centre for Goldrush Collections



Scales Ballarat Processional Dragon



Flaming pearl and teaser



Lion head Australian Centre for Goldrush Collections

## Location

SOVEREIGN HILL BRADSHAW STREET GOLDEN POINT, BALLARAT CITY

## Municipality

BALLARAT CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2457

## VHR Registration

February 27, 2025

## Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 16, 2025

## What is significant?

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is a late Qing dynasty (1644-1911) Chinese processional dragon, housed at Sovereign Hill in Ballarat. Dating from 1897, surviving elements of the dragon include the head, horns, tail and parts of the body being fabric scales. The dragon is accompanied by the pearl and teaser, and by a lion head, which are important ceremonial objects closely associated with the dragon's function.

## How is it significant?

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

### Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

## Why is it significant?

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is historically significant as the oldest surviving Chinese processional dragon in Victoria and Australia, as well as one of the oldest surviving examples in the world. The dragon, which was manufactured in southern China, was purchased by Ballarat's Chinese community in 1897. He was paraded at important civic occasions, such as Ballarat's celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and was displayed during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to the city in 1901. In Victoria, processional dragons were associated with Chinese communities' involvement in fundraising efforts for charitable causes, and the Ballarat Processional Dragon was paraded as part of numerous fundraising events in Ballarat and elsewhere. He continued to be paraded until the 1960s. The Ballarat Processional Dragon is a testament to the importance of Chinese migration to Victoria, and the ongoing participation of the Chinese community in Victoria's civic life, particularly in fundraising for charitable causes. The Ballarat Processional Dragon is an important demonstration of the continuation and adaptation of Chinese cultural practices within Victoria.

(Criterion A)

The Ballarat Processional Dragon is significant as a rare surviving example of a late Qing dynasty Chinese processional dragon. Dragons are constructed of delicate and often organic materials. They are fragile and subject to damage and deterioration and unlikely to survive any length of time. Additionally, it is a traditional practice to destroy processional dragons once they have reached the end of their useful life. It is highly uncommon for a processional dragon of such an age to survive.

(Criterion B)

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

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

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

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

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

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

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

## Guidelines

1. Where there is an inconsistency between permit exemptions specific to the registered place or object ('specific exemptions') established in accordance with either section 49(3) or section 92(3) of the Act and general exemptions established in accordance with section 92(1) of the Act specific exemptions will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
2. In specific exemptions, words have the same meaning as in the Act, unless otherwise indicated. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and the Act, the Act will prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.
3. Nothing in specific exemptions obviates the responsibility of a proponent to obtain the consent of the owner of the registered place or object, or if the registered place or object is situated on Crown Land the land manager as defined in the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, prior to undertaking works or activities in accordance with specific exemptions.
4. If a Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 is required for works covered by specific exemptions, specific exemptions will apply only if the Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been approved prior to works or activities commencing. Where there is an inconsistency between specific exemptions and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the relevant works and activities, Heritage Victoria must be contacted for advice on the appropriate approval pathway.
5. Specific exemptions do not constitute approvals, authorisations or exemptions under any other legislation, Local Government, State Government or Commonwealth Government requirements, including but not limited to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth). Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to obtain relevant planning, building or environmental approvals from the responsible authority where applicable.

6. Care should be taken when working with heritage buildings and objects, as historic fabric may contain dangerous and poisonous materials (for example lead paint and asbestos). Appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn at all times. If you are unsure, seek advice from a qualified heritage architect, heritage consultant or local Council heritage advisor.
7. The presence of unsafe materials (for example asbestos, lead paint etc) at a registered place or object does not automatically exempt remedial works or activities in accordance with this category. Approvals under Part 5 of the Heritage Act 2017 must be obtained to undertake works or activities that are not expressly exempted by the below specific exemptions.
8. All works should be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place or object. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.

## Conditions

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

## Exempt works and activities

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

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

## Theme

8. Building community life

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Construction dates      | 1897,  |
| Heritage Act Categories | Registered object,   |
| Other Names             | LOONG, DRAGON, CHINESE DRAGON, BALLARAT CHINESE DRAGON, BALLARAT DRAGON, |
| Hermes Number           | 212483   |
| Property Number         |  |

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## History

### Chinese immigration and settlement

From 1851, Victoria gained an international reputation as a rich goldfield, and there was an influx of immigrants from China, Europe, North America and elsewhere. In the late 1850s, Chinese people comprised 20% of the adult male population of Victoria. In the goldmining centre of Ballarat, Chinese people comprised about 25% of the population and an extensive Chinese camp was located at Golden Point. Although some Chinese people departed the colony after working the goldfields, many others stayed on to become part of communities in Ballarat and elsewhere. Periods of restrictive immigration legislation through the second half of the nineteenth century aimed to limit Chinese immigration, but it was not until the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 that Chinese immigration was significantly curtailed. With the gradual dismantling of the Immigration Restriction Act in the latter decades of the twentieth century, immigration from China to Victoria again increased.

### Charity and parade tradition

The provision of health and welfare services in the colony of Victoria often relied upon benevolent organisations rather than the government. Communities raised funds for these causes through several means, including fairs and carnivals in which parades were often a feature. From the 1860s, these events were a regular part of community life. Victoria's Chinese communities were prominent participants in these charitable activities. As Pauline Rule has noted, 'it was the Chinese, more than any other community of non-British immigrants, who established a generous tradition of assisting the charitable causes of the white settler society'.

From at least the mid-1860s, Chinese communities are recorded as playing a major role in processions attached to fundraising in places like Ararat, Castlemaine and Ballarat. Chinese participants would often form a ceremonial procession, wearing elaborate costumes and carrying associated regalia, such as banners. The Chinese contingent at the 1874 Beechworth Carnival included at least 200 people. In 1886, some 400-500 Chinese people from across Victoria paraded through Melbourne in efforts to raise money for the Women's Hospital. This reflected both the size of the Chinese population in Victoria at the time and the enthusiasm of the community to play a role in civic life and fundraising for charitable causes. It is also a result of considerable organisational skill and financial investment. The participation of Chinese communities in these activities 'became an essential aspect of their successful fundraising'.

### Processional dragons

In Chinese culture and tradition, the dragon is an impressive supernatural animal and an important symbol. They are powerful beings and a potent symbol of wisdom and good fortune and have historically been closely associated with imperial authority. Processional dragons (which are all male) were designed to participate in important cultural events and have long been used across China, and particularly in southern China, as part of important occasions such as Lunar New Year. The dragons are woken and enlivened by carriers as part of a

dragon dance. The pearl and teaser are essential to undertaking the dragon dance and the dragon is accompanied by lions, which provide protection. The examples of processional dragons exported to Australia and elsewhere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were produced in specialised factories in places like Guangzhou and Foshan in southern China. The dragons were often created as part of a suite of objects which included other processional items, such as banners, and richly patterned costumes for participants. Processional dragons and their associated cultural traditions have spread across the world as part of successive eras of Chinese migration.

## **Processional dragons in Victoria**

In Victoria, Chinese participants in fairs, carnivals and parades drew on various cultural and religious traditions. It was not until the 1890s that processional dragons were known to be incorporated into these displays. There was a concentrated period of activity around processional dragons in Victoria in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Victoria's first Chinese processional dragon, (which no longer survives) was imported from southern China and used in the Easter parade in Bendigo between 1892 and 1898. The second dragon (the subject of this report) was imported by Ballarat's Chinese community and arrived in 1897. The Bendigo community imported two further dragons in 1900 and 1901. The second, also known as Loong (VHR H2120), still survives and is included in the VHR. The Melbourne-based Chinese community received its first dragon in time for the celebration of the opening of the Federal Parliament in Melbourne in May 1901. This dragon also survives and is held by the See Yup Society at the See Yup Temple in South Melbourne. The dragon parade tradition became closely associated with the 'efforts of the Chinese-Australian community to engage with Australian civic life'. Processional dragon practices in Victoria were particularly distinctive in the way they did not just reflect traditional Chinese cultural practices but were integrated into very Australian aspects of community life.

Being imported in the same period and participating in the same events, all three late Qing dynasty processional dragons can be considered closely related. Leigh McKinnon, researcher at the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo, has dubbed them 'brother dragons'. Dragons and their associated assemblages were enormously expensive and represented a major investment by Chinese communities. The purchase of a dragon was a major achievement. As such, they were often shared and moved around the State for various events. Participation of the colourful Chinese dragons became an increasingly popular element of local celebrations and charitable activities. Victoria is somewhat unusual in Australia and internationally in the degree to which it embraced dragon procession traditions. Dragon parades appear to have gradually replaced the ceremonial processions of earlier decades.

## **Ballarat's processional dragon**

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

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

The Ballarat dragon was paraded in community celebrations such as Ballarat's Begonia Festival from the 1930s

until the 1960s, after which he passed to the ownership of the Ballarat Historical Society. Changes made to the dragon in the mid-twentieth century are indicative of the community's efforts to keep him in good repair and maintain cultural traditions. He is now housed and cared for at Sovereign Hill as part of the Australian Centre for Gold Rush Collections. The Ballarat Processional Dragon is the oldest surviving processional dragon in Australia and one of the oldest surviving examples in the world. The pearl and teaser are one of only two known surviving sets in Australia dating from the era, the other being associated with Bendigo's Loong and included in the VHR as part of that registration. The lion head, likely imported along with the dragon, is thought to be the oldest surviving lion head in Australia. It is particularly valuable in that it includes a maker's mark which sheds light on the design and creation of these items in the late nineteenth century.

## Selected bibliography

Couchman, Sophie and Leigh McKinnon., 'The surprisingly Australian history of Chinese dragon parades', The Conversation, .

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Rule, Pauline., 'Chinese Engagement with the Australian Colonial Charity Model', in John Fitzgerald and Hon-ming Yip (eds), Chinese Diaspora Charity and the Cantonese Pacific, 1850-1949, Hong Kong University Press, 2020.

Serle, Geoffrey., The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861, University of Melbourne Press, 1963, p. 320; BDGS, <https://www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/research-2/chinese>.

## Consultation and interviews

The Executive Director thanks the following organisations and people for sharing their knowledge about the Ballarat Processional Dragon and providing input during the preparation of this assessment:

- Staff from the Australian Centre for Goldrush Collections at Sovereign Hill
- The Chinese Australian Cultural Society Ballarat
- The Ballarat Historical Society
- Leigh McKinnon
- Dr Sophie Couchman.

## Extent of Registration

### Heritage Act 2017

#### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including an object in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2457

Category: Registered Object

Object: Ballarat Processional Dragon

Location: Sovereign Hill, Bradshaw Street, Golden Point

Municipality: Ballarat City

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

Dated 27 February 2025

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

*[Government Gazette G 9 27 February 2025 p 305]*

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*