



# Virtually There – Digital Excursions with the National Trust

**The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) has developed digital resources that allow students to remotely access significant historical sites and provide them with exciting and valuable educational experiences.**

*Michelle Kiag, National Trust of Australia (Victoria)*

The experience of walking into a historic building, sizing up its proportions, absorbing the atmosphere and interpreting the character of a place is one that is hard to replicate. The physical act of standing in a space and imagining the lives of those who have ventured before provides visitors with a window to the past. It is experiences such as these that the National Trust wants to share with school students – be it the grandeur of the mansion and gardens at Rippon Lea Estate, the despair felt at the Old Melbourne Gaol or the perseverance of pioneers at the McCrae Homestead.

Unfortunately, there are many obstacles that stand in the way of school visits to historic sites, such as red tape, transport costs, travel distance and a crowded curriculum to name a few. Where visits to historic sites are not an option for schools, the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) have developed digital education resources to make the Trust's significant properties accessible to students.

The digital resources provide an opportunity for students to connect with historic properties – bringing the past to the students' present. It allows

students not only to enjoy the visual experience of seeing a place but also to share the stories and the ideals that come with learning about heritage places and the past. The digital platform offers students the opportunity to foster appreciation for those who have come before, develop a respect for our heritage and potentially cultivate an interest that may one day grow into a desire to advocate for the future of our heritage sites and their history.

## **Bringing History to Students' Fingertips**

According to the 1897 entry in the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'digital' referred to something pertaining to your digits:

... for most of its history, *digital* was a relatively unimportant term – it wasn't until the early to mid-twentieth century that the word became more significant and widespread.<sup>1</sup>

In education, a digital resource is anything which can be stored in a digital format and adopted or adapted for use in learning. The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) in recent years has developed a broad collection of digital resources in a variety

of digital formats, including voice narration, images, videos and, more recently, virtual reality technology and 3D scan technology. These learning resources provide access to information, stories and imagery at students' fingertips.

The benefits for teachers of these digital resources, when used effectively, are:

- accessible any time and place
- assist in teacher development
- reduce costs
- reduce preparation time
- provide access to factually accurate information and technically robust applications
- culturally relevant and provide opportunities to experience real-world simulations
- can be adapted to meet classroom curriculum requirements.

The benefits for students of these digital resources, when used effectively, are as follows:

- provide an engaging and stimulating platform
- help to develop learner autonomy, problem-solving skills, research skills and organisational and teamwork skills
- offer unrestricted time and space for thought, provocation and reflection
- provide access to open-ended activities that offer achievable attainment levels for all learners.

The digital resources are designed so that they not only supplement the experience of a visit to one of our properties, but they are also purposeful in complementing a visit. Our resources are designed to align with the Victorian Curriculum and best of all they are free and easily accessible online through the 'Learn' section on the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) website.<sup>2</sup> Our education program includes supporting student activities and teacher resources where appropriate, which help to make learning more purposeful. These activities are designed to be easily adapted and utilised as a primary resource and as part of the classroom program.

If you want students to explore the Polly Woodside, for example, but can't make it aboard, then the 'Virtually There' 3D resource will allow you to explore the different chambers of the ship and learn about life at sea.<sup>3</sup> Should you feel students could benefit from some cell time (not that of the phone variety), a virtual tour of the Old Melbourne Gaol might keep them connected.

If you want students to take a closer look at the decor in the bedroom of the children who lived in the pioneer homestead at McCrae or discover how Governor La Trobe spent his down time, they can do so through our 'Heritage at Your Touch' resource.<sup>4</sup> Students don't need to be arrested to enter and explore a courtroom, the '3D Interactive Courtroom' will give them an insight into the roles and functions of a trial.<sup>5</sup> A more detailed synopsis of the digital resources currently available is provided below.

### **Heritage at Your Touch (Developed in Partnership with HTAV)**

The digital resource Heritage at Your Touch, as the title suggests, brings the heritage of a property to users at the touch of a mouse.<sup>6</sup> This virtual 3D experience introduces students to two of the oldest homes owned by the National Trust, the McCrae Homestead (1845) and La Trobe's Cottage (1843). Both of these virtual experiences include the opportunity to look around the entire span of rooms, learn more about specific items with a click of the mouse and view video clips of the characters that provide further context and personalise the experience.

George McCrae, one of the McCrae family siblings, gallantly welcomes you to explore his home, the 1845 McCrae pioneer homestead. Inside, students can observe Georgiana McCrae, a talented artist and illegitimate daughter of the Duke of Gordon, in her sanctum as she reflects on her former life in Scotland. In the kitchen, the maid Jane creates an insight into her various duties for the family.

The tour of La Trobe's Cottage begins with a greeting from their esteemed friend Lonsdale, who is calling after the health of Mrs Sophie La Trobe. Sophie La Trobe modestly talks to

PREVIOUS PAGE: Rippon Lea Estate.  
(Photograph by Michael Bailey, used under CC BY-SA 2.0)

- 1 Richard Holden, 'Digital,' Oxford English Dictionary, <http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/word-stories/digital/>.
- 2 See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic/>.
- 3 See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/virtually-there/>.
- 4 See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/heritage-at-your-touch-2/>.
- 5 See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/3d-interactive-court-room/>.
- 6 See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/heritage-at-your-touch-2/>.

RIGHT: La Trobe's Cottage.  
(National Trust of Australia)



us from her boudoir as she selects the best tonic to ease her ailment. Governor La Trobe provides an insight into how he relaxes in his home environment and their daughter Nellie entertains herself with games and toys from the time.

The Heritage at Your Touch program offers:

- a game environment using real spaces, video characters and artefacts
- over 150 PDF files containing information, images and questions about the families and their artefacts
- six real characters, such as Governor La Trobe and George Gordon McCrae
- an education kit, which includes inquiry questions.

### Virtual Tours

As part of our virtual tours, students can explore some of Victoria's most intriguing historic sites as if they were in a video game.<sup>7</sup> This application lets students explore sites as though they were walking around them from room to room or place to place. The Polly Woodside and the Old Melbourne Gaol can be explored using new 3D technology that is as close an experience to actually visiting these sites as students can have without having to leave their classroom. The virtual tour experience is enhanced

when using a virtual reality headset. Once the virtual goggles are on, the user is immersed in the virtual surrounds, allowing students to navigate their way around the properties as though they were there.

The Polly Woodside is a fine example of a merchant fleet sailing vessel from the late nineteenth century. Students can explore all three levels of the ship, including a fascinating insight into the Captain's quarters. To make the experience even more interactive, a virtual scavenger hunt activity is provided, which guides students to find items and places of interest while exploring the virtual Polly Woodside.

During the virtual tour of the Old Melbourne Gaol, students can explore the nineteenth-century prison across three levels and spend time inside the gaol cells. The gaol cells include stories told in the text panels on the walls about the many felons and convicts who spent time there, including bushranger Ned Kelly.

This virtual tour application includes:

- new scanned 3D technology
- VR Samsung compatibility
- activities designed to enhance the learning experience
- relevant supporting resources.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/virtually-there/>.





### Working Life

In the Working Life series of videos, students can compare the working lives of various occupations over 120 years.<sup>8</sup> These videos contrast the experiences of occupations in the past at Rippon Lea with present-day people in comparable occupations who convey stories about their working lives.

The resource also includes online activity resources and sixteen videos comparing the following occupations from the past and present:

- the gardener and head of horticulture at Rippon Lea
- the governess and the school teacher
- the groom and the barn manager
- the housekeeper and the current house manager
- the cook and the local fish-shop trader
- the coachman and the chauffeur.

### 3D Interactive Courtroom

While text and diagrams can help explain the different roles of a courtroom trial, a more engaging and memorable learning opportunity can be provided through the education resource '3D Interactive Courtroom.'<sup>9</sup> This experience provides a virtual insight into a courtroom and the roles and functions of the key players in a trial. Students can watch the characters come to life as they give them an insight into their role, scan around the room for a complete view of the courtroom or click to learn about the function of each role.

### Narrative Galleries

How was the Old Melbourne Gaol run? Who was sent there? Why was it built? These questions are thoroughly explored through the Narrative Galleries online resource.<sup>10</sup> This collection highlights how the Old Melbourne Gaol represented nineteenth-century ideas of using punishment as a way of reforming prisoners. The resource provides students with narrated text and accompanying historical images, presenting factual information in an engaging format.

The narrative galleries resources include:

- things to think about – a series of thought-provoking questions designed for Grades 5 and 6, Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to VCE
- a selection of recommended digital tools to assist in demonstrating discoveries made through exploring the resource.

### History in Place

While the National Trust appreciates the value of providing digital education resources for students and teachers, we also see great value in students developing their own digital experiences. Hence, our History in Place program was created.<sup>11</sup> The program encourages students from primary school levels to visit a local heritage site and produce their own documentary video about a subject that inspires them. Examples of previously completed documentaries can be found on our website from students who filmed while visiting National Trust sites, including Endeavour Fern Gully, Mulberry Hill, Gulf Station and the Portable Iron Houses in South Melbourne.

ABOVE: Image of the 3D Interactive Courtroom. (National Trust of Australia)

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/working-life-at-rippon-lea/>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/3d-interactive-court-room/>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/why-was-the-gaol-built/>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/history-in-place/>.

**Conclusion**

Providing exciting and valuable educational experiences to students is something the National Trust prides itself on as stories of the past are important and relevant to the future. The social and cultural needs of human beings haven't changed for all the technology that is around us and we would always encourage the real experience of visiting a site as a companion to our digital experiences. Providing digital experiences allows

the National Trust to achieve a greater reach. We endeavour to continue to develop digital education experiences that celebrate the wealth of information, the uniqueness of our sites and the richness of our stories to engage, empower and connect with future generations.

Have a wander through our digital resources at [www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic](http://www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic).