



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 5.1 Working in harsh conditions
- 5.5 Working in the home
- 8.12 Living in and around Australian homes
- 9.2 Bringing up children
- 9.4 Forming families and partnerships
- 9.5 Growing old

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 101 Immigration, emigration and refugees
- 106 Workers
- 107 Settlements
- 306 Domestic activities
- 602 Early settlers
- 605 Famous and infamous people

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Bell Cottage (ruin) is important to the people of Rockingham for its aesthetic character. The cottage is built of locally sourced materials that have, over many years of exposure to weather, acquired earthy tones which harmonise with the natural environment. Many people find the Georgian elegance of the cottage and its simple vernacular construction appealing. In its ruined state the cottage has a rustic and somewhat mysterious quality, making it an attractive subject for artist's renderings. (Criterion 1.1)

Located in an open field along Mandurah Road, *Bell Cottage (ruin)* has come to be a well-known landmark for travellers passing through East Rockingham. Both the apparent age of the structure and its unusually dilapidated state, draw travellers' attention to the place. (Criterion 1.3)

The place also has considerable significance as an important component of an extensive area, containing cultural and natural heritage sites. (Criterion 1.4)

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

11. 2. HISTORIC VALUE

Bell Cottage (ruin) has historic value, as the place was one of the earliest land grants in the Rockingham region, and the cottage and barn ruins on the property are among the region's oldest built structures. The original spatial and functional characteristics of the place have largely been retained, providing important evidence of the area's development. (Criterion 2.1)

Bell Cottage (ruin) is important for its close association with James and Jane Bell whose lives have been significant within the history of the region, and to some extent the state. Jane Bell (nee Green) came to Western Australia as an orphan sponsored by the Children's Friend Society [sic]. She came to the public's attention after murdering her child, which was conceived after her rape by the person in whose care she had been entrusted. Her case was one that drew considerable interest in the young colony, and which resulted in her brief incarceration on Rottnest Island. She was the first European woman to be sent to Rottnest in consequence of a criminal conviction. (Criteria 2.2 & 2.3)

The Bell family, and James Bell in particular, are recognized for their pioneering work in the Rockingham region. James built the region's first school, and was the 'alert' witness who raised the alarm during the now famous Fenian escape from Fremantle gaol. Family members feature prominently in the establishment of Rockingham's earliest commercial enterprises and civic developments. (Criterion 2.3)

11. 3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Bell Cottage (ruin) has value as a research site for cultural heritage. The site contains substantial evidence of material culture, including both building fabric and archaeological material that could usefully inform the study of European settlement in Western Australia. Because the property was established in the 1850s, and the cottage has not been inhabited since the 1930s, the objects of material culture found on the site have the potential to provide information relating to domestic life during an early period of settlement of which relatively few sites have survived. The amount of available historical documentation relating to the place further enhances its value to the historical archaeologist and architectural historian. In Western Australia there has been limited physical investigation of this place type. (Criterion 3.1)

The place also has some interest from a cultural-geological point of view: the stone employed in the construction of the cottage is a vuggy lacustrine limestone which, apart from the Cockburn Sound region, is not usually quarried for building purposes. *Bell Cottage (ruin)* is one of the oldest surviving buildings constructed of this stone type. (Criterion 3.1)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Bell Cottage (ruin) is valued by long term residents of Rockingham and descendents of the Bell family for its social and historical associations. The cottage is the most tangible connection for the descendants of the family and the residents of Rockingham with these pioneers. Local residents, particularly those connected with Rockingham Historical Society, have fought for the preservation of *Bell Cottage (ruin)* and a number of other historic cottages in the area since the early 1970s. The length and intensity of this battle may in

itself be interpreted as a cultural phenomenon of considerable social significance. (Criterion 4.1)

Bell Cottage (ruin) is among a number of significant sites in East Rockingham which provide the district with a sense of history and permanence. The importance of these places is heightened by the impending development which is likely to alter substantially the character of the district. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

The East Rockingham area, of which *Bell Cottage (ruin)* is a crucial part, is rare as an almost intact collection of colonial buildings and recognisable sites of early settlements. Few districts, particularly within such close range of Perth, are able to boast of a comparable cultural environment. (Criterion 5.1)

The archaeological potential of the site presents a rare opportunity for research into aspects of cultural heritage. (Criterion 5.1)

Bell Cottage (ruin) is, furthermore, one of the more evocative and memorable ruins in the near vicinity of Perth. The apparently undisturbed state of the place is unusual and has made it a particularly fascinating subject for contemplation. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Bell Cottage (ruin) is a good example of a cottage built in the colonial vernacular tradition with influences of Georgian architecture, the predominant architectural style at the time. The fact that the building appears to have survived without 20th century modifications makes it a particularly authentic example. (Criterion 6.1)

The documented lives of James and Jane Bell, which involved an advancement from humble beginnings to a situation of land ownership, business success and respectability. The Woodbine property, and particularly the cottage, is part of the documentation of this family. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The cottage is in a dilapidated condition. The greater part of the building's masonry is still standing, though some of it is in poor condition and threatening to collapse. The roof over most of the building has collapsed consequent to being weakened by termite infestation, and much of the fallen material is no longer extant. Some window and door frames are still extant and in fair condition, and traces of interior finishes remain in the more sheltered parts of the building.

The barn is a ruin, and of the original fabric only a small part of its wall remain standing. A quantity of fallen timber and corrugated iron litter the site.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The significant values identified for the cottage are related to its landmark qualities, its role in representing the area's early settlement, its compositional and textual qualities (partly related to its ruinous state), and its scientific value as a research site for cultural heritage. Without intervention most of these values cannot be sustained, as the building fabric is deteriorating rapidly and

land in the area is in the process of being developed for industrial purposes. Some of the values may be retained if the building were to be preserved, although the partial development of the site is almost inevitable and would detract from the aesthetic and historic values. A full restoration of the cottage could also detract from the aesthetic value of the place (its textual and compositional qualities as a ruin), but the degree to which this would impact on the place, would depend on the extent to which the restoration was carried out.

In terms of restoration, there is sufficient building fabric remaining to restore accurately the cottage to an earlier, complete state. In the case of the cottage much of the existing fabric is in a deteriorated condition and the process of restoration would necessarily involve the partial removal of damaged original fabric, compromising the place's authenticity. Some of the processes which were used in building the place, including the masonry work and the methods of cutting the timber, are no longer current, and could only be replicated with difficulty.

The barn has deteriorated to the point where restoration would in fact involve reconstruction of most of the fabric. At present there is insufficient evidence available to ensure that reconstruction work of this kind would be true to the original form of the building, particularly in relation to the interior.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The place has an exceptional degree of authenticity. No significant alterations have been made to the buildings since circa 1936, and most of the extant built fabric would appear to date from the building's original construction. The archaeological value of the site is greatly enhanced by the place's early and definite period of habitation (c.1855 - c.1936), and some areas, such as the sub-floor areas of the cottage, potentially contain undisturbed archaeological deposits dating to the period c.1868 to c.1936.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Attached are key sections of the Supporting Evidence prepared by Palassis Architects, 'Woodbine (also known as Bell Cottage): Conservation Plan', for the City of Rockingham, November 1999.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the Documentary Evidence refer to Palassis Architects, 'Woodbine (also known as Bell Cottage): Conservation Plan', prepared for the City of Rockingham, November 1999.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

For a discussion of the Physical Evidence refer to Palassis Architects, 'Woodbine (also known as Bell Cottage): Conservation Plan', prepared for the City of Rockingham, November 1999.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

For a discussion of the Comparative Information refer to Palassis Architects, 'Woodbine (also known as Bell Cottage): Conservation Plan', prepared for the City of Rockingham, November 1999.

13.4 REFERENCES

Palassis Architects, 'Woodbine (also known as Bell Cottage): Conservation Plan', prepared for the City of Rockingham, November 1999.

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Several issues relating to the development of the site remain unanswered, but may be resolved by undertaking further research in the following areas:

historical research to confirm the early property transactions between James Bell and H. Mead (Location 64) and W. Curtis (Location 42), and to determine the date when Location 64 was surveyed. It may be found that there is a case for arguing that the Bells' first cottage actually stood on this piece of land. Archaeological investigation may provide more conclusively whether this was the case;

archaeological investigation to determine the precise location of cultural features, such as the privy, which are no longer extant;

archaeological investigation to ascertain whether there has been a cottage on Location 44, and where the cottage was located;

historical research into the 20th century history of the place to determine the likely duration of habitation in the cottage after it had been purchased by Joe Stokes (1937);

analysis of the colours and type of pigment used in the cottage to determine the original and subsequent colour schemes.