



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.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Prisoner of War Hut is significant as it was lived in by Italian prisoners of war incarcerated in Australia during World War Two and is part of a wider network of prisoner of war and internment sites. (Criterion 2.2)

Prisoner of War Hut is significant for its associations with Australia's part in World War Two and illustrates some of the effect war had on the agricultural regions of the country. (Criterion 2.2)

Prisoner of War Hut is a physical reminder of the three and a half thousand Italian prisoners of war incarcerated in Western Australia during World War Two, particularly those employed on farms in the Wheatbelt and South West. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Prisoner of War Hut has social significance in demonstrating a way of life associated with war, and the cultural interaction between Australian farming communities and Italian prisoners of war. (Criterion 4.1)

* 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.

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Prisoner of War Hut is one of a few known remaining huts built for the accommodation of Italian prisoners of war working on Western Australian farms during World War Two. Two other examples have been identified at Cadoux and Lake Gulson; the hut at Bruce Rock is the only intact example. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Prisoner of War Hut is representative of the type of simple accommodation provided for prisoners of war employed on Western Australian farms during World War Two. (Criterion 6.1)

Prisoner of War Hut is representative of the prisoner of war system in WA during World War Two, where Italian POWs were required to labour farms to supplement the shortage of farm workers. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

Prisoner of War Hut is in a fair condition.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Prisoner of War Hut has not been used as a dwelling since the POW rural workers occupied the area in the 1940s. Despite functioning as a storeroom since then the place has retained a moderate degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The original fabric of *Prisoner of War Hut* is intact. The place has a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Architect. Additional evidence has been compiled by HCWA staff.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Prisoner of War Hut is located on Locke's farm, Location 15290, on Wogarl Rd, West Bruce Rock, 255 kilometres east of Perth in the wheatbelt region.

During World War Two, Western Australia operated military run camps for both internees, civilians whose birth place or political affiliations were deemed to endanger national security, and prisoners of war, enemy soldiers captures on the battle field.¹ Between 1939 and 1946, Western Command established an internment camp for German, Japanese and Italian aliens at Harvey and a prisoner of war camp for German and Italian POWs at nearby Marrinup. Hostels for Italian POWs employed on various Army and Western Australian Government projects were also established at Karrakatta, Bunbury, Jarrahdale and Northcliffe. In addition to the hostels, 26 Control Centres were established in the Wheatbelt and South West for Italian POWs employed on local farms.² While the experiences of the internees and the POWs were quite different, the treatment of both groups was covered by the Geneva Convention.

Early in World War Two, farmers and their sons were 'manpowered' to stay at home and work on their farms, producing goods essential to the War effort. However, as the War progressed and more men were needed in the armed forces this restriction was lifted. Some farmers with particular skills were manpowered for different homefront duties, while others joined the overseas forces for active service. A shortage of farm labour in Western Australia resulted.

Following the declaration of war on the British Empire by Mussolini in June 1940, Australian troops in North Africa prepared for combat with Italian forces. The two armies met at Bardia in Lybia on 3 January 1941, and two days later, the first Italian prisoners of war were taken. Over forty thousand Italian soldiers were captured at Bardia and on 22 January, Tobruk fell to Australian forces, increasing the number of POWs under British High Command. Other bases were captured by the Allied troops, and the first German POWs were taken on 24 March 1941.

After capture and forced marches through North Africa, the POWs were shipped to camps in India, Egypt and Palestine. As more and more POWs arrived at the camps, many arising from the Greek and Crete campaigns during April 1941, conditions became strained. With the growing shortage

¹ Bosworth, Michal, 'Internment', in Jenny Gregory (ed), *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1996, p. 201.

² *ibid.*, p. 203.

of farm labour in Australia, Allied authorities agreed to send POWs to Australia to help alleviate the problem.³

On 1 August 1941, orders were issued for 1,000 German POWs to be transferred to Suez for transportation to Australia. This represented the first draft of a proposed 75,000 POWs to be sent to Australia. The first group arrived in Sydney on board the *Queen Elizabeth* on 23 August, before being transferred to a purpose built camp in Victoria (POW Camp No. 12).⁴ By mid-1942, about the same time as the civilian internees held at Harvey were being transferred to South Australia, the Australian authorities determined to cease the transportation of German POWs. The maximum number of German POWs held in Australia was 1,637; however, Italian POWs continued to arrive from the Middle East and India until January 1945.⁵

Despite the policy of ceasing the transportation of German POWs, the first POWs in Western Australia were, in fact, German nationals. On 18 November 1941, the *HSK Kormoran*, a German raider operating in the Indian Ocean, was sunk under Australian fire off the north-west coast of Western Australia. Three hundred and fifteen survivors were captured from the *Kormoran* at sea or were taken prisoner after landing at Kalbarri. They were transferred to Fremantle, arriving on 21 November, before being sent on to Victoria.⁶

Early in 1943, Western Australia requested assistance from the Federal Government to provide workers for the rural areas, and to ease the shortage of firewood for domestic and industrial use in the Perth metropolitan area. Cheap POW labour was seen as the solution to both problems. To cope with the imminent increase of POWs, Army Headquarters in Melbourne directed HQ Western Command to take responsibility for the administration of the prisoners in Western Australia.⁷ By this time, there were already a small number of Italian POWs in Perth who had arrived in mid-1942 to provide a cheap labour pool for the Australian Army. They were employed to do menial tasks and were accommodated at the No. 8 POW Labour Detachment at Karrakatta Army Base.⁸

The first Italian POWs arrived from Victoria in June 1943, and were sent to the old mill town of Marrinup, 4 km west of Dwellingup, and were ordered to build their own camp. Once completed, Marrinup Camp was known as No. 16 Prisoner of War Camp and became the administrative centre for all prisoner of war activities in Western Australia. On 21 November 1943, 200 German POWs arrived at Marrinup and were accommodated in their own compound, under strict security. They were employed in collecting firewood, and in June the following year, another

³ Bunbury, Bill, *Rabbits and Spaghetti: Captives and Comrades - Australians, Italians and the War 1939-1945*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995, p. 52; Polis, Ernest, *Study and Survey of POW Facilities in Western Australia*, National Estates Grants Program, 1996, p. 8.

⁴ Polis, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ *ibid.*

100 German POWs arrived to help keep up with demand.⁹ The Italian POWs who had built the camp were either moved out to farms or were accommodated in their own compound at Marrinup.

Despite Italy surrendering and joining the Allied forces in September 1943, all Italian POWs held by the Allies were still technically the enemy, and were treated as such. Nevertheless, the Italian surrender did provide complications for the Marrinup administration, with the prisoners splitting between the Royalist and Fascist factions. Another compound had to be built at Marrinup to separate the two groups.¹⁰

The Italian compounds at Marrinup held prisoners who were awaiting transferral to rural areas of Western Australia to provide farm labour where required. The prisoners worked on farms to assist the war effort and to help cut down the costs of keeping prisoners. In some areas, Italian POWs were instrumental in helping to develop new agricultural districts. Marrinup also held POWs returning from rural areas for disciplinary reasons, unsuitability for farm work, redeployment or medical reasons. The German POWs were not considered appropriate for working amongst Western Australian families, due to the widely held belief that they all held strong Nazi views and they were kept under tight security at all times.¹¹

The POW labour scheme was so successful that all available POWs were quickly allocated to farms short of labourers. As word spread throughout the South West, where the first POWs were sent, requests outnumbered prisoners. Control centres, which were directly administered from Marrinup and modelled on those already operating in the eastern states, provided local administration and supervision of all POWs working on farms in Western Australia.¹² By May 1945, at which time there were over 3,500 Italian POWs in Western Australia, 26 Control Centres had been established throughout the northern and central Wheatbelt and the South West, where the majority of the POWs were employed. In addition, two work camps for special projects were established at Jarrahdale and Northcliffe.¹³

The centres were established within a 50 mile radius of each other and were located on railway lines for ease of transport where possible. The Army generally took over a vacant building in each town in order to establish headquarters and an administration centre for each region.¹⁴ Each one was manned by a captain, a private and an interpreter, with very little security. The POWs wore a 'lurid burgundy' uniform so they would stand out and make escape difficult. In addition, the 'bush' was deemed security enough.¹⁵

Some of the Control Centres provided accommodation facilities, and the POWs were transferred to farms for day work, returning to the Centre each

9 *ibid.*

10 *ibid.*, pp. 12, 19.

11 Bosworth, *op. cit.*, p. 203; Bunbury, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

12 Polis, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

13 *ibid.*, p. 67.

14 *ibid.*

15 Bunbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-78.

night. Others were accommodated on the farms on which they worked. *Prisoner of War Hut* is typical of the sort of accommodation provided for POW farm workers during World War Two. The housing was often built by the POW himself.¹⁶ The POWs who worked on the farms were not supposed to associate with one another, but the Locke family often hosted a meal attended by POWs from surrounding farms. Peter Locke was only three or four years old, but he remembers the two POWs who worked at their farm, at separate times. They were named Valentino and Giovanni.¹⁷

The situation on the Locke farm was not unusual. The POWs were made welcome by most of the farmers they worked for, and often became part of the family during their stay, eating meals with them, playing with the children and going into town at weekends. The general feeling among the farmers was that if they treated the Italian POWs as equal human beings, someone, somewhere, might do the same for an Australian soldier in a similar situation. Not everyone felt the same way, however. Some people were against treating the POWs reasonably because 'they were killing our boys over there.'¹⁸

The interaction between the farming families and the Italian POWs was reciprocal. They exchanged language and recipes, and both learnt to tolerate the other's ideologies, if not to agree with them. The farmer paid the army for the POWs work, and the army paid the POW. A mobile army canteen would call at the farms for the POWs to buy razor blades and other essentials, as they were discouraged from going into town.¹⁹

The Italian POWs who worked on the Locke farm were probably under the control of the No. 12 POW Control Centre at Narembeen. This Centre opened 19 April 1944, with 100 POWs. Three weeks later the number was increased when another 50 POWs were transferred from No. 11 POW Control Centre at Kellerberrin. Another POW Control Centre, No. 10, located to the west of Bruce Rock at Quairading, also opened in April 1944. This Centre managed 125 POW farm workers.²⁰

In May 1946, twelve months after the end of the war in Europe, Western Command began to close down the Prisoner of War Camps and Control Centres. The German POWs were sent back to Victoria in August 1946; their repatriation was completed by February 1947. Italian POWs were transferred to Northam Army Camp for repatriation to Italy, with the first group repatriated to Naples in September 1946.²¹ Both Control Centres at Narembeen and Quairading were closed on 30 May 1946, when all POWs were transferred to Northam. Since that time, *Prisoner of War Hut* has been used as a storeroom by the Locke family.

In comparison, the experiences of internees in Western Australia was quite different to those of the POWs. At the outbreak of war with Germany in 1939, German civilians in Western Australia were captured by

16 Polis, op cit, p. 100.

17 Peter Locke, information provided to Laura Gray, Memo HCWA file 10652.

18 Bunbury, op. cit., pp. 54-78.

19 ibid.

20 Polis, op cit, pp. 100, 106.

21 ibid., pp. 9.

local police forces, handed over to the Department of the Army and lodged in Fremantle Prison until they were either released or transferred to the Eastern States.²² A permanent internment camp was not built in Western Australia until Italy entered the war the following year.

Following the fall of France in June 1940, Italians Australia-wide were rounded up and interned, regardless of how long they had been in Australia, or indeed whether they had become citizens in the meantime. The Italians threatened national security, it was believed, and had to be kept under close surveillance. The rate of internment was much higher in Western Australia and Queensland than elsewhere, due primarily to their long, unguarded coastlines which presented ample opportunity for contact.²³ Many internees in Western Australia were initially sent to Rottnest Island, previously a gaol for Aboriginals, or to Fremantle Prison. After the establishment of Harvey internment camp in 1940, all were sent there. In April 1942, following the bombing of Darwin and the increased threat of invasion to Western Australia, the internees were relocated to Loveday in South Australia, with no warning and in great secrecy.²⁴

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Prisoner of War Hut is a one-room structure with verandah, constructed of asbestos and iron. The place is situated on a farm in the Bruce Rock district, and was built to house an Italian prisoner of war, allocated to farm work, between 1944 and 1946.

Prisoner of War Hut is situated approximately 100 metres south of the original Locke homestead. The place is only metres from the fenced paddocks to the south and stock yards to the west on the wheat and sheep property. The place comprises one room and a verandah.

As indicated on the site plan, the curtilage is recommended to follow the surrounding fence lines to the west, south and east which, together with a northern boundary, form a rectangular area of approximately 400 square metres.

Prisoner of War Hut is a rural vernacular construction typical of the period. The materials used in the construction were usually found around the farm, left over from other buildings or removed from outbuildings. It was difficult to acquire new building materials during the war years. Usually the property owner had the place built specifically for the POW. No other intact examples of the type are known to remain in the wheatbelt region.

The structure is timber framed on timber stumps. The walls are clad with flat asbestos sheets in vertical format with asbestos battens over the joins. The skillion roof is clad with corrugated iron and slopes from the high side on the west to the low side on the east at the verandah. The roof has no overhang. The floor level is only 150mm from ground level at the rear

²² Major General J. Whitelaw, General Officer in Command, Western Command, as quoted in Bosworth, *ibid.*, p. 201.

²³ Bunbury, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 36.

west, and the ground slopes away to the front making the verandah some 300mm from the ground along the eastern frontage of the place.

The interior walls are clad with flat asbestos sheets in vertical format with exposed asbestos battens over the joins. The ceiling is lined on the rake with asbestos sheets and battens. The south wall has a fireplace with a jarrah mantelpiece. A set of two timber framed casement windows open onto the verandah on the east side. The remains of the original curtains still hang in place. A ledge and brace door opens into the room.

The floors are timber throughout and there are no obvious signs of any termite activity, past or present. The timber stumps have subsided on the north west corner, and the floor in the hut similarly has subsided in that corner. The iron clad chimney no longer has a stack, and has pulled away from the wall.

The north end of the verandah has been enclosed around the corner to form a sheltered area, clad externally only, with vertical asbestos sheets. This space served as a bathroom area and does not have a door. There is no evidence of any water or plumbing connections to the place. *Prisoner of War Hut* was connected to the homestead's 32 volt electrical system, and lighting and electrical fittings are still evident in the place. A separate toilet, since demolished, was located 20 metres away.

There is no obvious sign of water penetration into the place. The roof is intact and seems to be sound. Several external sheets of asbestos are missing from the west wall, and other sheets are broken.

Prisoner of War Hut is in a fair condition. The place has a moderate degree of integrity and a high degree of authenticity.

There is very little information available on comparative structures in the Wheatbelt and South West. Two other POW huts have been identified in the municipal inventories completed to date, at Cadoux and Lake Gulson. POW farm accommodation structures were not surveyed in Ernest Polis' 1996 study of POW facilities in Western Australia.

The POW Hut at Cadoux is constructed of brick cement and was built in 1944.²⁵ The POW Hut located on Millington's Farm, Lake Gulson (near Lake Grace), a one-roomed structure, is in poor condition with the roof missing. The sapling frame and some cladding remains, as does the chimney made from flattened kerosene tins.²⁶ *Prisoner of War Hut*, Bruce Rock, is the most intact example of the three.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

Parallels between the POW system and the ticket of leave system employed in Western Australia during the convict era could provide avenues for

²⁵ Gray, L, 'Shire of Wongan-Ballidu Municipal Inventory', Perth, 1998. Place No. 88.

²⁶ Gray, L, 'Shire of Lake Grace Municipal Inventory', Perth, 1998. Place No. 5 - listed as part of the Millington Farm Group and recommended for consideration for Register of Heritage Places.

further research. Under both systems, prison labour was used to assist in the development of primary industry and to provide public works.